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Title: Opposition to Islam as Opposition to Religion

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1/7/2008--On Saturday, January 5, I attended a conference at which Michael W. McConnell, Federal Judge on the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, suggested that appeals to Muslims to be "moderate" reflect a view of religion as inherently irrational and violent. Such a view is a criticism—a deep criticism—of all religion, not just of a radical and violent form of Islam. On Sunday, in the New York Times Book Review, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the courageous woman who was subject to death threats in the Netherlands over her outspoken criticism of Islam, confirmed Judge McConnell's insight. Ali criticized "the enemies of reason within the West" who are enfeebling the struggle against radical Islam. Those enemies are, she said, "religion and the Romantic movement." The way to prevail over radical Islam is through Enlightenment reason and individualism. Perhaps it is unfair to criticize Hirsi Ali. She has apparently never seen healthy religion. But she is repeating a widespread secular charge—all religion is irrationally prone to violence. This is the message also of Mark Lilla, for example, in his book, *The Stillborn God*. The call to atheism, however, as a way to engage Muslims, is an absurd suggestion. It makes much more sense for religious believers to confront religious violence because they have credibility with any community of faith. Hirsi Ali's comments also remind us of the inherent conflict between capitalism and religion. It is no accident that she is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Despite the description of the Republican Party alliance between market conservatives and religious conservatives as "fusion," Hirsi Ali reminds us that capitalism is premised on an individualism and a materialism that are alien to Judaism and Christianity, indeed to all religion. This is the inherent tension that Mike Huckabee is, perhaps unintentionally, laying bare.