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The Rev. Welton Gaddy, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Interfaith Alliance, gave a lecture titled "Religion and Democracy: Separation of Church and State Issues" on Monday night in Meacham Auditorium.

## **Speaker: freedom in jeopardy**

### ***Rev. Welton Gaddy says faith-based initiatives put religious freedom, democracy in danger***

by Cassie Clark  
April 17, 2006

The Rev. Welton Gaddy shared his concerns with students Monday that religious freedom in the United States is in danger, and the growing Christian influence in today's government is creating dangerous circumstances for the American religious minority.

"Religious freedom is in trouble, and if religious freedom is in trouble, then religion itself and democracy itself is also in trouble," Gaddy said.

Gaddy, president of the Interfaith Alliance based in Washington, D.C., and one of the nation's most recognized progressive Baptists, urged an audience of students and community members to understand the importance of maintaining religious pluralism in the United States.

He warned that religious political leaders, pervasive fear tactics and faith-based initiatives by the U.S. government are putting religious liberty in jeopardy.

"Religious freedom is still an experiment," Gaddy said. "Religious freedom is never a done deal."

Gaddy said part of the reason religious liberty is in trouble in the United States is because many Americans are not educated on basic American history. He said the first Americans came to this land to escape religious persecution.

"People are willing to jeopardize this liberty for much narrower purposes," he said. "Many people see religious freedom as a threat."

Several students attending the event at Meacham Auditorium agreed with Gaddy's point of view.

Paige Patterson, letters junior, said she agrees religion has recently become too much of an influence for political campaigns.

"It seems like they go on religion more, especially because of 9/11," Patterson said.

Patterson also expressed concern over the influence of Christianity in the U.S. government.

"I don't think it can be a good thing to have any one religion in government," she said.

Melissa Elbert, University College freshman, said she agrees with the concern of religion in government, but that the speaker's concerns were exaggerated.

"I think it is (a problem) slightly, but not as much as he says it is," she said.

The speech was part of the Renaissance Project, a collaborative effort among students, faculty and staff to encourage campus-wide discussions through speakers, classes, symposia and impromptu gatherings, according to the group's Web site.

Gaddy is a renowned Baptist pastor from Louisiana. He has authored more than 20 books and has made appearances on CNN, NBC and National Public Radio.

The OU Religious Studies Club played an active role in recruiting Gaddy to speak on campus. Cole Stephenson, club president, said Gaddy is a highly sought-after speaker.

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