



"President or Preacher?"
Elaine Pagels and Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy
on the President's Irresponsible Use
of Religious Language

Audio News Conference
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Operator: Good morning, and welcome to the President or Preacher George W. Bush's Use of Religious Language conference call. This call is being recorded.

At this time for opening comments and introductions I would like to turn the call over to Reverend C. Welton Gaddy, President of the Interfaith Alliance Foundation and Pastor for Preaching and Worship at North Minister Baptist Church in (Monroe), Louisiana. Reverend Gaddy please go ahead.

C. Welton Gaddy: Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us. For those of you who may not be familiar with the Interfaith Alliance we're a national faith based grass roots organization that works at the nexus of religion and politics. Our membership consists of over 160,000 people drawn from over 65 faith traditions.

I speak to you today out of a concern for President Bush's misuse of religious language. Though I respect the influential role of faith in the President's life, I have grave concerns about how he

incorporates the vocabulary of that faith in the Presidential addresses that significantly impact both the domestic and foreign policies of this nation.

The President of the United States is the political leader of the nation, not the religious leader. Just as religion should not be a test for any political candidate for public office, religion should not be a tool of any political leader in a public office. In no way should the President of the United States politicize religion or by the use of religious language from one particular religious tradition alienate citizens from other traditions or no tradition.

How dare any politician, including the President, even implicitly to suggest that God is a kind of mascot for the nation. Affirmation of a particular faith tradition must never be made a litmus test for measuring patriotism.

The presence of inappropriate religious language in the President's remarks reflects the President's fuzzy vision regarding the constitutionally mandated relationship between the institutions of religion and government. His language fails to communicate appreciation for the vast religious pluralism in this land.

The President uses really this language to cloak and at times to outright promote public policy proposals. At times I wonder if the masked religious references in the President's speeches are appeals for support from the religious (right).

Just yesterday in his address to the National Religious Broadcasters convention President Bush made several statements that I find deeply disturbing. I will site only two. First the President said, "I welcome faith to help solve the nation's deepest problems". Whose faith Mr. President? Which faith? Only yours.

In a second statement President Bush linked an imminent American attack on Iraq to his understanding of Christian morality saying that this attack would be quote, "in the highest moral traditions of our country". How can he say that when for four centuries Christians refused to serve in the military?

President Bush often reminds me of a first year seminary student who after one course in theology thinks his particular view of faith answers all of life's most complex problems. As a Baptist minister for over 40 years I hold sacred the beliefs and moral principals inherent in my faith, yet as a Christian I can tell you the President does not always speak for me, nor can he claim to speak for all Christians in America. Christians like all other people of faith are incredibly diverse in their thoughts and political ideas.

The President of this nation has a constitutional responsibility to promote the common good and defend religious liberty. It is not remotely within the realm of his executive duties to voice and advance particular sectarian priorities. Just as religious leaders must refrain from trying to dictate the political beliefs of their congregants, political leaders must disdain the misguided illusion that they speak as prophets of God's will.

I'm very please to introduce to you Dr. Elaine Pagels of Princeton University.

Elaine Pagels: Thank you very much. I am very much in agreement with what Reverend Gaddy has said and so I'll just make a brief statement.

When the language of good and evil is used in the way that it's used politically it sounds to me, as it does to Reverend Gaddy that this is not political discourse. This is actually the language of religious zealots, whether they be Christian or Muslim. It's the language of children's stories.

And what happens when he speaks about the axis of evil, of course, I mean we can see what he's actually doing is placing those who disagree with him, I mean on, you know, in the realm of evil, placing himself at the head of the axis of good, and suggesting that anyone who disagrees with his policies is somehow morally deficient.

This strikes me as a betrayal of the American vision, of a society that is not essentially Christian but is a pluralistic society with respect for religious (differences) and for religious, for those who choose not to be religious.

So with that I'm sure we'll move into the discussion. Thank you.

Operator: Thank you Dr. Pagels. At this time, anyone wishing to ask a question may do so by pressing star one on your telephone keypad. We would like to remind everyone asking a question to please eliminate any background noise from your immediate area. Once again if you would like to ask a question at this time, please press star one on your telephone keypad now. And we'll pause to assemble our roster.

Again, please press star one to ask a question, and we'll pause to assemble the roster.

Our first question will come from Paul Vitello from Newsday.

Paul Vitello: Yes, President Bush has referred several times to his having found religion during a crisis in his life in his 40s. And my question is whether it's your perception that he sees himself as specially chosen to at this moment in history to lead his nation, and whether you see his sense of his own leadership as being a fundamentally religious sense?

C. Welton Gaddy: This is Welton Gaddy. I think if you listen to President Bush from the beginning of his presidency and compare that to what he's saying now you see a growing sense of awareness that he is in fact a divinely chosen leader for this particular moment in history.

It's almost as if he discovered the power of religion late in life and now he thinks the nation needs to discover the power of religion, when in fact this nation has appreciated the role of religion in its life since its inception.

President Bush does not make the proper distinction, in my opinion, between his role as political leader and his role as religious leader. And as recently as yesterday, he sat by and listened approvingly to himself being described as God's chosen man for this hour in our nation.

Elaine Pagels: I may add to that that this nation and its leaders wisely attempted – as religious as many were -- to protect the citizens against being co-opted by religious zealotry in precisely this way.

Paul Vitello: Thanks.

Operator: And our next question will come from Darlene Superville from the Associated Press.

Darlene Superville: Hi. I was wondering if either or both of you could comment on how President Bush's, you know, use of religious language in his public remarks compares to, you know, what other Presidents before him have done?

C. Welton Gaddy: Dr. Pagels?

Elaine Pagels: Well it seems to me that of course, religious language has always been invoked by, or often been invoked by our Presidents. And some of course like Jimmy Carter had strong religious beliefs, probably not so different I would think from Mr. Bush's. But he made a

conscious effort, as we know to separate those from his policy-making statements and his rhetoric that involved political decisions.

C. Welton Gaddy: I think it's interesting that in relation to President Carter that the public and the press specifically pushed him to talk more about religion because there was not an understanding of the role that religion played in his life. That is significant because President Carter was a profoundly religious person coming out of much the same tradition as President Bush, but he did not choose to speak about the particulars of his religion.

Most references to religion in our nation's history have been generalizations. President Bush is being very specific and is using the language of one particular religious tradition via vi the others.

Darlene Superville: Thank you.

Operator: Moving on to Vincent Carroll with the Rocky Mountain News.

Vincent Carroll: Hello. Yes, my question is, is it -- Professor Pagels is it? Is it your feeling that it's just the fact that we are in 2003 that makes it -- and the contemporary environment is so pluralistic that makes it inappropriate to refer to religious imagery and good and evil? Or is it always wrong? Because it occurs to me certainly that the abolition movement and the movements, most of the movements involving, you know, women's rights, defense of Indians, abolition of the slave trade, those were all led, sustained, and energized by people of profound faith, almost exclusively in this country and Britain, Christian who did speak in terms of good and evil. And there have been many movements since. Martin Luther King repeatedly for example in the civil right's movement invoked religious imagery.

Is it the fact that it's a President doing it, or is it just that you object to any kind of invocation of references to good and evil?

Elaine Pagels: Actually I wrote a book on this subject, and I have no objection to this language whatsoever. I think the language of good and evil is an essential language that we use to interpret events. When we see violent destruction of thousands of people as we did on September 11th it comes naturally to us to say this is an evil act. And as you say there are many social movements in this country that have, that religious people have participated in that sense.

I have not previously seen a President use this kind of language as a way to shut down political discourse. That is what is dangerous about it, as I see it, is first of all, yes, we do need the language of good and evil to talk about what certain events mean. But to use it to characterize whole blocks of people, groups of countries, shuts down political discourse. It suggests we're not dealing with human beings on one side and human beings on the other side who need to negotiate and work out very difficult conflict. It suggests that we're in a drama -- like I think of Lord of the Rings, a children's story almost -- where the forces of good are battling against the forces of evil and the only end of that story can be the annihilation of one side the victory of the other. Now we see that being applied to a resolution involving war in this country.

Vincent Carroll: OK, just to quickly follow up then, you don't object to the use of good and evil in describing events or acts of violence or reprehensible incidence, it's the generalization in application to countries and to whole peoples that you object to, is that correct?

Elaine Pagels: Exactly. I think we have to use it when speaking of specific acts, particularly violent destruction of people who are not themselves, you know, participating in such destruction. I mean I think we need that moral language; however when it's used to characterize, as you said, whole blocks and nations then it becomes distorting and very potentially destructive.

Many people think of religious language of course as unifying, and many people have used it that way, and many Presidents have used it that way. But it can also be enormously divisive. Radical and militant Muslims can use it that way as well, and we have seen that.

The trouble with this kind of language, as I see it, is that it's very powerful. In a way it bypasses the brain. It goes straight to the gut. And I cannot imagine any language more powerful to justify acts of violence.

Yesterday, I heard Mr. Bush say that in the interest of peace, in effect, we're going to war.

Vincent Carroll: Thank you.

Operator: Moving on to Martha Allen with the Star Tribune.

Martha Allen: Hi. I was reading a fascinating book recently by (Bob Jewit) and (John Lawrence) who make the argument that religious language is in fact very important, and that we look to our national leaders to give us that kind of good versus evil, we're going to go on the great crusade now.

Haven't we always looked to our leaders to tell us what is right and what is wrong?

C. Welton Gaddy: I think, I think that is an assumption that I don't agree with. I think we have looked to the political leaders in our nation to give us a sense of direction as to how to engage major political problems both in the United States and in the world. We have not ever assumed that political leaders would define morality for the nation no more than we have assumed from any particular religious tradition that a majority vote would be somehow synonymous with moral good.

Female: Yes.

C. Welton Gaddy: What we have, what we have seen -- and I'm going to take you back a little bit on the prior discussion with Dr. Pagels -- **what we've seen happen is our democracy, I think, is being crippled in its ability to practice healthy debate because of escalating every issue to a kind of transcendent religious moral substantive subject. When you do that you shut down the debate that makes democracy work, honest debate where there is an exchange of ideas and people refine their thinking and together our differences of opinion help us discover a better way.**

When everything is absolutized debate stops because the moment there is a difference of opinion it's not just another idea, it's an expression of evil.

Elaine Pagels: That's what troubles me as well: that this language and the way it is played out means that we're not discussing, for example, in Congress, how should the United States respond to a particular and perceived and very real threat, but rather, you know, who is on which side in a completely non-negotiable argument the way it is cast by the President.

He's in effect setting up America as Christian country, characterizing it as such, and even in the interest of this country alone if we only looked at that, from my own research which has taken me in the middle east a great deal, I find it's very worrisome that he's setting up this country as in effect a target for Muslim militants instead of as a magnet for all people all over the world to live together in a pluralistic society.

The Muslim leaders I know want to be part of a society in which pluralism is not only possible but respected, they can be Muslims and Americans and not a society suffocated by religious ideology. They know enough about that.

Martha Allen: Let me follow up with just one quick question. Nine eleven was compared of course to Pearl Harbor a lot, and we have to be realistic that this was the first time that foreign nationals had come onto this soil and killed civilians just since then.

I'm -- correct me if I'm wrong, but I think during the Second World War there was a whole lot of religious talk and not a whole lot of honest debate, right? I mean isn't he in some ways, you know, going back to the way we were 60 years ago?

C. Welton Gaddy: I think there has always been in our nation a kind of civil religion.

Female: Right.

C. Welton Gaddy: A religion that (prized) the nation and advanced its causes.

Female: Right.

C. Welton Gaddy: The distinction that I see in the language in President Bush's statements and the kind of historic civil religion is that **President Bush is drawing from a very particular faith tradition, Evangelical Christianity, and is using that language to advance policies and to make arguments for the support of his various initiatives.**

That language, whether used in a statement to comfort the nation or to challenge the nation or to guide the nation, leaves out whole segments of the nation who don't understand its meaning and who don't identify with or in many instances even agree with its substance.

Martha Allen: OK, thank you.

C. Welton Gaddy: OK.

Operator: John Dart with the Christian Century Magazine has our next question.

John Dart: Thank you. President Bush has taken pains to distinguish Islam itself as a peaceful religion for the majority of Muslims and helping the Muslims that live in this country in that regard, and yet the use of religious language in association with the war on terrorism or the looming war with Iraq and so forth, I'm wondering if you think that he is in danger of, without saying it, conducting a holy war? My wife asked me what's, isn't that term appropriate for the people of, who are the seen dangers abroad and the most ambitious of the leaders of this country? Are we in fact in a holy war?

Elaine Pagels: We all remember that early in this process Mr. Bush spoke perhaps inadvertently about a crusade and about calling his plan infinite justice, which the Americans were presumably going to deliver. He was of course cautioned not to do that and became much more appropriate in the way he spoke about the variety of Muslims in this country.

But my own work on the history of Christianity and the history of Islam and the way that this language has developed in both traditions has caused me concern even during the last gulf war that both in Christian tradition and in Muslim tradition there is a potential for this kind of radical and totally polarized vision to prevail among some people. And it concerns me whether he intends it or not I think he could set us up to be perceived in that way by Muslims and by some Christians, by some Muslims and by some Christians. I want to be careful about that.

C. Welton Gaddy: You know there's radical inconsistency, as you would expect in the way the President uses religious language. You are, you are correct that at least the implications of his terminology lead to a conclusion about holy war. But go back to his speech to the Republican National Convention and he talked a lot about the importance of grace, which is another concept in

Christian theology. He said I've seen grace because I have felt it and forgiveness because I have needed it. When I listen to that statement and put that alongside some of the somewhat pejorative statements about the axis of evil I begin to wonder what's the connection between the prevalence of grace in his thought and the prevalence of retaliation.

Now the inconsistency I said is predictable. It is predictable because this man is in a political office and ought to be talking to the nation and to the world as an informed political leader. When he steps out of that role and starts playing theologian he is in over his head and he sounds inconsistent.

Operator: Anything else Mr. Dart?

John Dart: That's fine. Thank you.

Operator: We'll now hear from Howard Goodman with Sun Sentinel.

Howard Goodman: Well that last question was pretty much what I was going to add, but I was wondering also what specific ways you've seen recently? It sounds as though you two are saying that his language seems to be pushing us toward war, and I wondered what specific examples have most concerned you.

C. Welton Gaddy: I mentioned one of them, which is as recent as yesterday when before the Religious Broadcaster's Convention, the President said that an American attack on Iraq would be in the highest moral traditions of this nation. Also a few days ago at the National Prayer Breakfast here in Washington he said -- and this is the quote -- "events aren't moved by blind change and chance. Behind all of life and all of history there is a dedication and purpose set by the hand of a just and faithful God". Now clearly the implication of that statement is from an American

perspective. But what if you internationalize it in application? What does that say about the rights and responsibilities of people in nations with whom we disagree?

Elaine Pagels: When I have been studying the language of good and evil and how it's used socially and politically I've observed that **it's much easier for people to take difficult or even violent action if they believe they are right. So the sense of having the moral high ground can often justify horrendous acts.** Certainly we saw that on September 11th. To me it's quite inconceivable that the men who drove planes into those buildings could have done so unless they believed they were fighting against an enemy who was evil against whom there, you know, with whom no negotiation was possible, and for whom the only possible end was annihilation even at the cost of their own lives.

And, you know, I certainly am not equating Mr. Bush with that kind of act, but I'm saying that taking steps toward war at this point when the question is: is it war? Or is it going to be some kind of other process with other nations that deals with the concerns of all the nations of the world? **It is much easier to do, and it's much easier to sell -- to put it bluntly -- if one claims to have the only moral high ground.**

C. Welton Gaddy: But that's why, Dr. Pagels, I said what I did about the escalation of political issues and importance by absolutizing them out of moral theory. If you've got people in the nation who disagree...

Elaine Pagels: Yes.

C. Welton Gaddy: ... with a public policy or have questions about it, and as the leader of the nation you tell them this is not just a political issue, this is an issue of morality. And in the case of the address yesterday **this is a case of Christian morality. That's like the trump card. It's very difficult for someone who has questions or differences of opinion then to speak because**

you're no longer disagreeing in the tradition of honest political debate. Now you're opposing evil. Or you're opposing good, good that ought to triumph over evil.

Elaine Pagels: Exactly and as you have said there are many Christians and many non-Christians in this country who have different points of view, and would likely express them but are -- I think this language is an attempt to silence all such people.

Howard Goodman: Thanks.

Operator: And as a reminder if you'd like to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the digit one. And our next question will come from Robin Blumner with Saint Petersburg Times.

Robin Blumner: Yes, Reverend Gaddy, you are really the first faith leader that I've heard express concern about the manner in which President Bush speaks. I was wondering whether there is a constituency within the faith community that will be speaking out more and more concerned about the President's Evangelical Christianity and the way he seems to want to ram it down the throats of the electorate.

C. Welton Gaddy: There's a large constituency within the religious community in this nation that appreciates religious liberty and knows how important it is to defend any kind of encroachment on that principal. I hope that constituency will begin to speak because I know some people who don't think **the presence of religious language in the President's addresses** is all that big a deal. From the perspective of the religious community it **is a terribly big deal. It is about the integrity of religious language and its ability to continue to communicate with power within the faith community once it has been usurped by political strategy. It is an illegitimate form of political strategy. It has social impact that sets in motion thoughts and even policies that erode if not attempt to change completely our historic commitment to religious liberty.**

It is time for the faith community to speak, but when the faith community speaks you're not going to hear one message. You're not going to hear just one voice because the faith community in this nation is wonderfully diverse and from people who share equal levels of devotion to God you will hear different understandings of international problems and of national public policy. That's why no one, not even the President of the United States, can stand and say this is the Christian point of view. There are many Christian points of view.

Robin Blumner: Do you think those voices are going to be louder because they've been very quiet up to this point?

C. Welton Gaddy: I think that our nation is very frightened, and no one wants to see a duplication of what happened around 9/11. I know many people who have serious disagreements with the President's use of religious language who oppose what the President is proposing regarding a strategy for dealing with Iraq, and they are staying quiet because they want so badly for this nation to be united in a way that protects our security.

My own point of view is silence will not do that. We have to speak. We have to say the President cannot get away with immersing political initiatives in religious language. The end of that constitutionally can be even worse than the silence.

Elaine Pagels: I agree and it strikes me, as I said, the language of good and evil is necessary when we're talking about specific acts. Seems to me that the genuine and appropriate moral outrage that people all over the world felt about that terrorist act on September 11th, is now being turned and channeled, or I think the President is attempting to do so, toward a very different strategic question and a very important question about a first strike against Iraq. He's making it sound as though these are inseparable, which of course many people honestly believe they are not.

Robin Blumner: Thank you.

Operator: And we'll now hear from Stephanie Salter with the San Francisco Chronicle.

Stephanie Salter: Hi. Good morning.

C. Welton Gaddy: Good morning.

Stephanie Salter: I guess I have a question for Dr. Pagels and for Reverend Gaddy separately. Dr.

Pagels I know you were careful a few minutes ago to say that you're not equating anything that Mr. Bush is doing with the extremists behind 9/11, but I wonder if you could at least draw a few parallels between Christian extremism and Muslim extremism and that I mean you may not do that, but I've certainly heard here in my area of the country people saying tell me what is the difference between what appears to be Bush's increasing view of things in black and white and his apparent willingness to sacrifice innocent people in other countries and the difference between that and the mindset behind 9/11?

Elaine Pagels: Good question. By the way I'm not suggesting that, you know, I don't mean to suggest that military measures should not be taken against, you know, Iraq and the weapons arsenal there. That's a very important kind of question that is placed before all decision makers today. But what I saw when I was working on the language, you know, the language and the politics of these traditions, at that time Yugoslavia was breaking apart and Cyrus Vance whom I knew and many of us know was a devout Christian was distressed with his attempt to make peace in that part of the world. And as the nationalism of that country broke up people began to identify in the ancient ways. I am a Muslim. I am a Christian. I am a Jew. I am a Catholic. And Vance went to the Roman Catholic Croatian Bishops. He went to the Serbian Orthodox Bishops, and he went to the Muslim leaders and said I need your help in trying to find alternatives to civil war.

And as a result of that effort he wrote a piece called They Call Each Other Devils because he said those Christian groups and the Muslim groups simply responded to him by saying you don't understand. Those people did this. Those people are evil. Those people are devils. We cannot negotiate with them. And it was clear at that point that if we come to a globalized perspective that places Muslims against Christians, we could be in a very dangerous situation because both of those traditions have elements that can respond in very similar extreme ways.

Stephanie Salter: Can you, can you just, I mean just two or three examples of that? I mean worst-case scenario when you think about us against them?

Elaine Pagels: Both of course, understand the people of God contending against evil forces and I think that is an important model too, it's an important way of understanding the world when we're dealing with particular structures. As someone just said, Martin Luther King used it when he was talking about apartheid. Christians and Muslims have always seen themselves fighting on the side of God and of the side of right and justice against evil. And I have no quarrel with that. The problem is when they begin to identify our group as God's people and identify the other group as Satan's people, and then, as Reverend Gaddy said, the conflict is cast as non-negotiable and one can only annihilate the evil side. And that's what in fact we're hearing right now. So when I hear political discourse degenerate into this kind of polemic I find I'm very dismayed and concerned.

Stephanie Salter: OK, thank you. And if I may just, and Reverend Gaddy I'd love for you to, if you could, expand a little bit on your opening remark about, which I thought was wonderfully astute about how the President reminds you of a first year seminary student who's taken a course, and if it's possible to sort of walk us through a little bit what happens when you take that course that gives you that false aha, now I get it all, I understand?

C. Welton Gaddy: What happens is that you get a minimal introduction to a sweep of theological thought that reaches back for centuries and expands in all kinds of directions. But you get an introduction

to a few basic concepts. And there is the "aha", these are important. This is powerful material. It can change a personal life. It has implications for social national life. And then you run out and you begin addressing specific problems with that minimal understanding of those principals.

And almost immediately people begin to ask you questions that you didn't think about. You begin to see complexities of application that are not consistent with each other, but that are in conflict with each other. It leads you to make judgments about life that when you get through making them are not seemingly in accord with where you thought the principal ought to take you. And so you discover it's very arrogant to talk in absolutes about theological issues. The key virtue is humility, and at the same time I am affirming one principal I always have to be questioning it, and asking what does it mean here and here?

So you have to keep growing. And by the time, if seminary education takes, by the time you get to graduation it's not that you understand how much you know it's you understand how much you don't know. And that you need to spend the rest of your life trying to find out.

Elaine Pagels: May I add to that excellent statement that when we look at the effect of doing so, that is the effect of polarizing discourse into absolutes, what it does of course is immediately intensify conflict and make it worse. As soon as Mr. Bush spoke of Iraqis and Koreans as being on the side of evil there was a response from Iraqis saying but we're not evil, you are. That is they adopted and reflected the same language, and this week I've heard Koreans say they were shocked by this kind of language. And the first response after shock is to respond by saying no you are the evil one, and then the discourse degenerates. It is, as Revered Gaddy says, no longer political and civil discourse.

Stephanie Salter: Thank you both very much.

Operator: Bill McKenzie with Dallas Morning News has the next question.

Bill McKenzie: Yes, hasn't Bush met though with a lot of Muslim leaders, and hasn't he been pretty consistent in saying that what he's talking about is a war against terrorism and Saddam Hussein, not against Iraqis themselves or a particular faith?

C. Welton Gaddy: I think the distinction has been made between attacking Iraq and going after Saddam Hussein, but there's also other material. I mean I am appalled and I know the Muslim community is appalled at the detentions that are going on by the immigration service. What if after the Oklahoma City bombing the administration had said we're going to go into Christian churches and register them and find out who in these churches might be a potential bomber of a federal building?

Also the Muslim community is wrestling with what the destabilization of the whole region, of what destabilization of the whole region might take place because of an attack on Iraq.

I listened, a week ago I was in Davos, Switzerland for the World Economic Forum and I listened to 10 exiled Iraqi leaders talk about what needed to happen in Iraq. Every one of them said that he, and they were all he's, that he wanted Saddam Hussein gone, that the man was in fact immoral in his actions and needed to be removed. But every one of them also said there is a way to do that without a bombing mission on Iraq and a war that worsens the condition of life for Iraqis.

And one of them in an amazing statement said, I would even be, though this person had lost family and friends to Saddam's meanness, this person said I would be willing even to grant him amnesty if we could get him out of the country.

Now there you have different approaches to the same problem that are equally moral in terms of how best to help people that obviously need help. So I think the Muslim community has been

grateful for the rhetoric and for some of the private meetings. But I think the Muslim community is very disturbed about some of the social policies that have accompanied this and is disturbed about what may happen as a result of an attack on Iraq.

Elaine Pagels: May I add to that that I certainly hope that anything we might have said and I think Reverend Gaddy has been very clear that this doesn't come out of any sort of liberal illusions about Mr. Hussein and the viciousness of his regime. It's a question of tactics. But tactics is not what the President's discussing. And that's what he has been refusing to discuss.

Bill McKenzie: OK, thank you.

Operator: As a final reminder if you'd like to ask a question, please press star one. We'll now hear from Nancy Haught with the Oregonian.

Nancy Haught: Thank you. My question has to do with is President Bush choosing when he uses this language and when he doesn't? Some people objected to his language after the shuttle disaster because he called on the creator and asked for prayer. Are you pretty much limiting your remarks to his talk about the attack on Iraq, or do you see him doing this in other circles too?

C. Welton Gaddy: Personally I see him doing it in other circles as well. If you will take a look at the way, for example, he talks about the importance of the faith based initiative and the whole revamping of the government in the terms, in terms of the way it will handle social services, you will hear a lot of religious language there. You heard even in the State of the Union Address, as he talked about faith based initiative, relating that to specific doctrines in Catholicism in referencing the old Christian gospel hymn about there's power, power, power in the blood of the lamb. You will see it in his talk about welfare reform, and on and on it goes.

I think it is, I think it is becoming a matter of style rather than just an exception to that.

Elaine Pagels: I would agree, and personally I find using it in times of national mourning not distressing, but he has also used it in addition to the concerns already mentioned for so many issues coming before the courts in this country. It's not this one policy issue, as important as this one is. It's the fact I think (resurping) political discourse. And when I say political discourse I'm thinking about the framers of this country who did, who knew how dangerous it is to allow rulers to claim Gods on their side, and therefore built into our nation the many, the many structures that allow for interchange and checks upon one another.

Nancy Haught: Thank you.

Operator: And we'll now hear from Cary McMullen with the Ledger.

Cary McMullen: Thank you. A question for Reverend Gaddy. I'd like to read a quote actually from another American President who basically was characterizing war as a divine punishment for a nation's wrongs, and it goes, "if God wills that war continue until all the wealth piled by the bondmen's 250 years of unrequited (prell) shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword as was said 3000 years ago, still, so still it must be said the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous all together." And of course that was Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address. And earlier he had quoted the gospel in that speech.

Is there really such an inconsistency between that statement and President Bush's invocation let's say of divine providence?

C. Welton Gaddy: If you remember Lincoln went on to say that the crucial question for him was not whether God was on his side, but whether he was on God's side. And I think there is a distinction

between that spirit and the quote in the State of the Union address that our calling, our calling as a nation is that of a blessed country.

I prefer strongly that political leaders draw from their personal faith in their lives, and then speak to the nation and to the world politically. I do not look to the Chief Executive in the White House to do theologizing for me, and I think it's dangerous when they do it for the nation.

Cary McMullen: So you would object to Lincoln's misuse of this language?

C. Welton Gaddy: Lincoln was expressing a religious conviction. I would, I can't separate that from the question that Lincoln was asked about whether or not God was on our side and he said -- and this is, this is the virtue of humility that I talked about a while ago. You may make that declaration, but in the final analysis humility takes a person to say I'm not really as concerned as to whether or not God is on our side as whether or not we are on God's side. And I think that means that in all of our absolutism we have to ask is there a possibility I could be wrong? Is there a possibility there's a better way? And we don't need to use language or engage in action that shuts down those questions.

Cary McMullen: Dr. Pagels, do you have a comment on the use of Lincoln's speech?

Elaine Pagels: I completely agree with what was said.

Cary McMullen: OK, thank you.

Operator: Again if you'd like to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the digit one. And we'll pause to ensure that our audience has an opportunity to ask all their questions.

OK and at this time there are no further questions. Dr. Gaddy or Dr. Pagels, would you like to make closing comments?

Elaine Pagels: I think I've said what I had to say.

C. Welton Gaddy: I think that I just want to offer the reminder that our conversation about religious language is not a conversation that is inconsequential because in the President's religious language you find sources and directions for policies that literally will affect every person in this nation and perhaps every person in this world.

Elaine Pagels: I guess I would simply say that, like Welton Gaddy, I identify myself as a Christian and with this language, and at the same time treasure in this country its tradition of openness to people of every faith and people of none. And the conviction that our political discourse is done with respect between all of them and not foreclosed in this absolutist way.

Operator: Thank you. And on behalf of Dr. Gaddy and Dr. Pagels, I would like to thank you all for your participation. This call has been recorded and a playback will be available after 2:00 PM eastern time today, and it will run through Friday February 14th at midnight. You may access it by dialing 888-203-1112 and entering the pass code 342866.

Reporters who want to arrange interviews or receive additional materials should contact (Thaler Pekar) at Douglas Gould and Company at 914-833-7093. Again that number is 914-833-7093. Again that number is 914-833-7093.

More information on Dr. Pagels, Reverend Gaddy, and the religion and culture initiative may be found at <http://www.religionandpluralism.org/>.

This now concludes the President or Preacher audio news conference.

END