

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE LIFE  
AND PRESIDENCY OF GEORGE W. BUSH**

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## ABSTRACT

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President Bush has openly discussed his personal religious faith in a variety of settings from small meetings with religious leaders to public interviews in the national media. Many supporters and critics alike have speculated as to the degree of influence his personal religious faith has had on his presidency. This paper examines a variety of sources, to include the President's own public statements, in an attempt both to identify the components of his faith and to determine the role his faith plays in his life and his presidency. Specific areas of President Bush's policies which are presented as having some degree of correlation to his faith are the National Security Strategy, faith-based social programs, foreign policy, and the War on Terrorism. A comparison is made of Bush's religious comments with that of other presidents to evaluate whether his "God talk" is unique or the norm for the person holding our nation's highest office.



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## THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND PRESIDENCY OF GEORGE W. BUSH

President George W. Bush talks a lot about God and many people are not sure what to make of it. Speaking to the rescued Pennsylvania coal miners and their families President Bush said, "A lot prayed for your safety, a lot prayed for your families. A lot pled to an almighty God that you were rescued. And thank God the prayers were answered."<sup>1</sup> At an award ceremony to honor scientists and engineers he stated, "I congratulate you for your hard work. I urge you not to stop, to keep using your God-given talents and your God-given genius to make the world better for all of us."<sup>2</sup> While addressing displaced families in Arizona he included in his remarks, "I do believe there is a gracious and almighty God that's looking out after the people who've been affected."<sup>3</sup> In his 2003 State of the Union speech, the President concluded with,

Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity. We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not know -- we do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life, and all of history.<sup>4</sup>

Bill Keller of *The New York Times* stated that the most persistent question he hears about President Bush both at home and abroad is this, "Is President Bush a religious zealot, or does he just pander to that crowd?"<sup>5</sup> To answer either question in the affirmative can be construed as an attempt to cast a negative light on Bush. Examining, however, the question's underlying premise as to the nature and appropriate role of the personal faith of the individual who holds the most powerful political office in the world is merited.

President Bush to some degree is being defined by his faith. Consider this comment from David Frum of *USA Today*,

Different presidents have different answers. Some, such as Ronald Reagan and Woodrow Wilson, were known for their ability to think ideologically as presidents. Others, such as Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, were nearly pure pragmatists. George W. Bush belongs to a very different third category: He's a leader who thinks in terms of morality and faith.<sup>6</sup>

Admittedly, the President is very open about the practice and importance of his faith. In a televised interview with Brit Hume when asked about his faith and prayer, Bush responded, "I pray daily, and I pray in all kinds of places. I mean, I pray in bed, I pray in the Oval Office. I pray a lot. And just different -- as the spirit moves me. And faith is an integral part of my life."<sup>7</sup> Clearly, President Bush is open and vocal about his personal faith, and many don't know what to make of it. If his personal faith is indeed an integral part of his life, then the nation should understand what the tenets of his faith are, how he integrates his faith into his life, and most

importantly, what influence his faith has on his decisions as the President.

This paper will examine the background of President Bush's faith to establish its genuineness and to identify the tenets of what he believes. It will consider the role the President's personal faith plays in his policy making, to include the National Security Strategy, domestic faith-based initiatives, foreign policy, and the Global War on Terrorism. It will take a brief look at what segments of the international community think about his faith and why this is important. In final analysis, it will compare President Bush's "God talk" with that of other presidents to determine the degree he has, or has not, vacillated from the historical precedents set by his predecessors.

## **BACKGROUND OF PRESIDENT BUSH'S FAITH**

### **DOES BUSH WALK HIS TALK?**

The first question to examine is, "Is Bush's faith real?" Bush grew up going to church. "He attended Episcopal and Presbyterian churches until he married and through his wife's influence became a Methodist."<sup>8</sup> His religious affiliation into his adult years was more of an expression of participating in a socially accepted activity than a commitment to a lifestyle that grew from a personal devotion to God. It wasn't until the summer of 1985 that Bush began to earnestly examine his personal faith in God. During a vacation of the Bush family at Kennebunkport, Maine, the Reverend Billy Graham was invited to join the Bushes for the weekend. Bush later wrote of those few days,

Reverend Graham planted a mustard seed in my soul, a seed that grew over the next year. I had always been a religious person, had regularly attended church, even taught Sunday school and served as an altar boy. But that weekend my faith took on new meaning. It was the beginning of a new walk where I would recommit my heart to Jesus Christ. I was humbled to hear that God sent His Son to die for a sinner like me.<sup>9</sup>

He must have shared something of this experience with his family because sometime later he overheard his mother, Barbara, talking to someone on the phone. "I've got some exciting news," she said. "George has been born again."<sup>10</sup>

Others have attested to the fact that a genuine transformation occurred in Bush's life. Reverend James Robison, who is a friend of Bush, described the change in Bush in the following manner:

I visited with him one day and realized that this man had an encounter with God that was so profound. He said a year or two ago that had he not had this encounter with God, he'd be sitting in a bar in Texas. But as a result of an encounter with God, he's in the White House....The man was changed totally,

miraculously, and supernaturally. He has never tried to market "his faith," he has never been ashamed of it, and never denied it. But it has transformed every area of his life, causing people who've been around him forever to notice not only what happened but what continues to happen.<sup>11</sup>

Bishop Keith Butler, pastor of the 18,000 member Word of Faith International Christian Center in Southfield, Michigan sat with Bush at a luncheon in Austin involving both business leaders and clergymen. Bishop Butler asked presidential candidate Bush if he was born again and Bush replied in the affirmative. Bishop Butler pressed the question by asking Bush how he knew he was born again and Bush answered by quoting a verse from the Bible, Romans 10:9, and stating to Butler, "I've been changed inside. My life has been transformed. Jesus is my Lord."<sup>12</sup>

Politicians have been known to say what they think voters want to hear, but Bush has backed up his confession of inner transformation with the evidence of outward lifestyle transformation. The most frequently noted change was his discontinuance of the abuse of alcohol, which he attributes to the help he received from God.<sup>13</sup>

Though it is difficult to determine what is in the heart of another, from President Bush's own personal testimony of his religious conversion, the confirmation from religious leaders and his dramatic change in lifestyle, there is strong evidence to support the position that Bush's faith is genuine.

#### THE TENETS OF HIS FAITH

If President Bush's faith is genuine, the natural question to follow is, "What does he believe?" It is to state the obvious to label Bush a Christian. The term "Christian" can, however, cover a broad spectrum of beliefs with the common thread being some recognition of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Most of the men who have held the highest office in the United States have described themselves as Christian. Certainly it is possible to consider oneself a Christian and believe that religion should play no role in politics and secular society. On the other hand, one could describe himself as Christian and believe that everything, including government, must be guided by Christian principles and directed by God. Where Bush falls on this spectrum would be an indicator as to how his faith influences his policies and decisions. Since humans do not come equipped with a religious barometer indicating the condition of their heart, we have to listen to an individual's words and observe his actions to determine his degree of religiosity.

President Bush's public "God talk" reflects a genuine belief in God. Though his adherence to Christianity is not in question, his public faith statements are not uniquely Christian. For example, he has stated he believes in a God that has a design for the world and a purpose for

the people who fill it. In his inaugural address he stated, "It is God who fills time and eternity with His purpose."<sup>14</sup> In a commencement speech at Yale in 2001, Frum reports that Bush told the graduates, "When I left here, I didn't have much in the way of a life plan. I knew some people who thought they did. But it turned out that we were all in for ups and downs, most of them unexpected. Life takes its own turns, makes its own demands, writes its own story. And along the way, we start to realize we are not the author."<sup>15</sup> When the 9-11 attack rocked the United States, Bush, in part, defined the event through the lens of his belief in the God of providential design. He stated in a speech in reference to the events of September 11, "... we are assured that history is of moral design... God's purposes are often defied, but never defeated."<sup>16</sup> He made possibly the clearest public expression of this aspect of his faith in his remarks at the 51st Annual Prayer Breakfast in Washington where he stated, "We can also be confident in the ways of Providence, even when they are far from our understanding. Events aren't moved by blind change and chance. Behind all of life and all of history, there's a dedication and purpose, set by the hand of a just and faithful God. And that hope will never be shaken."<sup>17</sup> These statements reflect a faith in the God who is engaged in the affairs of this world, but this belief is not restricted to the Christian faith.

Another aspect of Bush's faith that is revealed in his public statements is the belief that God can bring good from bad events. It is easy to understand from the President's personal dramatic life change, which he attributes to an encounter with God, that he would believe God can change bad things for the good. And Bush's faith in God's ability to change things for the good doesn't apply only to individuals, for he extends this aspect of his faith to the nation as well. This comes through in a radio address after September 11 when he stated, "And we're thankful to God, who turned suffering into strength, and grief into grace."<sup>18</sup> Again, these comments, though rooted in faith, are not uniquely Christian and could have come from someone who has no faith in Jesus Christ.

President Bush's public statements about "good and evil" have brought him some criticism, especially in regard to his use of the phrase "axis of evil." It appears he used this phrase in an attempt to frame in a moral context the actions of those who conduct and support terrorist acts. The religious concepts of good and evil are found in the tenets of most all religions. The President's use of the terms can be viewed as a man of morality and faith speaking to people of faith to rise up and assume their moral responsibility to oppose evil.

One aspect of his faith that is generally accepted by all faith groups is his belief that true faith is expressed in reaching out to help one's fellow man. He expressed his views of faith in action at the 2002 National Prayer Breakfast when he stated, "Faith shows us the way to self-

giving, to love our neighbor as we would want to be loved ourselves. In service to others, we find deep human fulfillment. And as acts of service are multiplied, our nation becomes a more welcoming place for the weak, and a better place for those who suffer and grieve."<sup>19</sup>

From the President's public comments, his faith appears to contain aspects that are shared by a wide spectrum of religions. He should not be accused of using his office to publicly elevate his Christian beliefs above those of other faiths. Therefore, the conclusion one can draw from the criticism about Bush's religious language is not that it is overtly Christian, but that it reflects his deeply religious nature and his genuine faith in God who he sees as having a role in both the human condition and world affairs.

#### **THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PRESIDENT BUSH'S POLICY MAKING**

Most accept President Bush's faith as genuine. The key question is, "How does the President's faith influence his political policies and decisions?" He started many pondering this question when "on his very first day in office, he called for a day of prayer and cut federal spending on abortion."<sup>20</sup> In an interview with Brit Hume, Bush explained, "Well, I -- first of all, I would never justify -- I would never use God to promote foreign policy decisions."<sup>21</sup> It is not clear exactly what the President meant by this statement. It is clear that he views international conditions from a theological perspective. For example, Woodward relates the following statements Bush made on the oppressive conditions in Iraq and North Korea:

"There is a human condition that we must worry about in times of war. There is a value system that cannot be compromised—God-given values. These aren't United States-created values. There are values of freedom and the human condition and mothers loving their children. What's very important as we articulate foreign policy through our diplomacy and military action, is that it never look like we are creating—we are the author of these values"...It leads to a larger question of your view about God. And the lesson, he said, was, "We're all God's children."<sup>22</sup>

It would be possible, based on statements like the above, to make the argument that if Bush doesn't use God to promote foreign policy, that his faith in God does at least influence his perspective of foreign policy. In the context of the secular nation state, that the President would bring the "God perspective" into foreign affairs is inconceivable to many. It appears, however, that the faith of President Bush envisions a God that transcends the authority of the nation state. While this concept is viewed as completely inappropriate and even dangerous by the post-modern secularist, it is a perspective that he shares with many Americans who support the phraseology of our nation's pledge of allegiance and do in fact consider the United States as "one nation under God."

## POLICY PROCESS VS PRODUCT

Many are not sure exactly how Bush's faith factors into his policy making. Bill Keller wrote in the New York Times,

How his faith influences policy is harder to tell. People who know Mr. Bush say his religion tells you more about the way he makes certain decisions than about the outcome. One adviser, who does not share the president's religious views, said: "Once you see something as belonging in the moral realm, you have a strong desire to act in such a way that you can live with your conscience." Even people who know Mr. Bush are not always sure how much issues are shaped by his conscience and how much by the political calculation that this White House has refined to high science.<sup>23</sup>

There are the very visible influences that President Bush has brought to his administration. For example, "in no previous administration has the White House hosted so many weekly Bible studies and prayer meetings, and never have religious leaders been more gratefully welcomed."<sup>24</sup> Also, there are the highly reported acts of sharing Scripture with the prime minister of England, discussing the cross with the President of Russia, and kneeling in prayer with the President of Macedonia.<sup>25</sup> However aides continue to maintain that "the President's quiet but fervent Christian faith gives him strength but does not dictate policy."<sup>26</sup>

It is hard to evaluate the policies of the President with a litmus test of his personal faith, but it is less difficult to notice that even if his faith doesn't influence his policy it certainly impacts him as a person. Keller observes,

It is perhaps the most important effect of Mr. Bush's religion that, for better or for worse, it imparts a profound self-confidence once he has decided on a course of action. This has been most conspicuous since Sept. 11 in the way he has talked about his mission to make the world safe for democracy. Some listeners take it as presumptuous, messianic, even blasphemous. John Green of the University of Akron, a scholar of religion in politics, sees it as a perfectly ordinary way for a religious man to understand a task history has presented him.<sup>27</sup>

Though the President does not use God to promote his policies, his profound faith serves at a minimum to provide him with both a moral framework for his assessments and a confidence that following Godly principles will lead to right decisions.

## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

There are indicators that Bush's faith has influenced his administration's policies to some degree. One example is the inclusion of religious freedom for people everywhere and in every society in the National Security Strategy. Carnes points out that the President's emphasis on religious freedom is the first time that a President's national security statement has so explicitly mentioned the defense of religious liberty.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that though the document

supports religious freedom, it doesn't elevate Bush's faith over another. The President believes nations should not repress the individual's right to worship and practice their individually chosen religion. Whether the emphasis on one's freedom to worship can be linked to Bush's faith is questionable. The United States has held to this value from its inception. On the other hand, one can not view this emphasis as an attempt by Bush to Christianize the world. Even in his own country he has openly supported the religious practices of those outside the Christian faith. One very visible act was his appearance at an Islamic center within a week of the September 11 terrorist attacks where he called Islam a religion of peace.<sup>29</sup> Mansfield points out as well that "much to the consternation of some conservative Christians, he is attempting to engage mosques and synagogues as well as churches."<sup>30</sup> One can easily argue that Bush's personal faith gives him a strong appreciation for religious freedom. His support of all religions, however, is more an indicator that he believes religious practice is one of the basic freedoms upon which the United States was founded and not an attempt to propagate his own personal beliefs.

#### FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS

The most obvious link between the President's faith and domestic policy is his initiative for using federal money to support faith-based social programs. No doubt a catalyst for this initiative was Bush's personal victory over alcohol addiction. The President is convinced that faith-based programs are sometimes more effective than government supported programs in helping people change their lives for the better.

Bush's federal policy to support faith-based social programs is rooted in the work he did in Texas. As governor, he narrowed the divide between church and state through several first time programs to include using private and religious charities to deliver welfare services, permitting a state prison unit to be operated by a ministry, and funding religious and private groups to provide welfare for unwed teens. And he established the policies of the programs to allow the faith-based organizations to maintain their religious distinctives.<sup>31</sup>

When Bush announced he wanted to make the faith-based initiative a part of his national policy, the cry of foul reverberated around the nation from those who believe in an absolute separation of church and state. The President, on the other hand, seems to be looking at the results of successful programs for the good of the American people. His policy doesn't support only programs that are based solely in his personal religious beliefs. His purpose appears to be focused on the results of the programs and not the faith foundations of the program. From his own experience he can conceive the good that could be accomplished through these programs

if they were expanded with federal money, which a "faith phobic" person could not risk regardless of the potential for positive results.

#### FOREIGN POLICY AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM

President Bush's statements concerning the basis for the Global War on Terrorism indicate that he views the world through the lens of his personal faith. In his speech to a joint session of Congress after the terrorist attacks, Bush made clear what this fight is all about: "Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them."<sup>32</sup> He doesn't go so far as to say the United States is fighting for God, or that God is fighting for the United States. He does, however, clearly communicate that God does not condone acts of terrorism with the implication that the United States will not either. According to Frum, Bush wanted to use the term "axis of evil" and not his staff's suggested phrase, "axis of hatred," because this theological move would do much to cut off any discussion of whether America might need to reconsider its behavior in the world.<sup>33</sup>

President Bush does see the United States playing a God-given role in the affairs of the world. As stated earlier, in his 2003 State of the Union Address he proclaimed, "The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity." America, however, has a special role to play in the drama of redemption, since "our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world of justice."<sup>34</sup> When speaking of the United States' specific role in regard to the Global War on Terrorism, Woodward relates the following statements from Bush, "We are here in the middle hour of our grief, but our responsibility to history is already clear: To answer their attacks and rid the world of evil." Woodward interpreted this as the President casting his mission and that of the country in the grand vision of God's master plan.<sup>35</sup>

To make any statements in the context of going to war that may contain a reference to God must be viewed with close scrutiny. If the President had said that the Global War on Terrorism was a religious war, it would have been totally inappropriate. To use religion as a call to arms is a deceptive technique used by the terrorists themselves. On the other hand, to make the decision to go to war on a moral and just basis, which is established in religious principles, has been accepted grounds of justification for war by nation states. Bush's justification for the Global War on Terrorism appears to be based on the latter.

Obviously, Bush made a critical faux pas when he referred to the war on terrorism as a "crusade." The inappropriate term for the context of war with Islamic extremists could not sincerely be interpreted as the call to a religious war. But it certainly gave his enemies fuel for

their information warfare by conjuring up images of aggression and inhumane atrocities, in years gone by, performed in the name of religion.

#### **FOREIGN LEADERS VIEWS OF BUSH'S FAITH**

While the President's references to his faith and religion in general may trouble some Americans, the response from the international community appears to be even more critical. Heneghan wrote,

The religious overtones in President Bush's speeches increasingly grate on many ears in Europe, where leaders invoking God in times of war are widely suspect of misusing faith for political purposes. Media commentators, especially in northern European countries with Protestant heritages, have branded Bush's evangelical views as Christian fundamentalism, with some even comparing them to the Islamic fundamentalism of Osama bin Laden.<sup>36</sup>

Comparing the way Bush's faith influences his actions to that of Bin Laden certainly casts the President in a negative light. This may be an exaggeration from those who simply oppose his policy. However, even those who don't question the sincerity of his faith, often question the way he expresses it in the political arena. Cardinal Karl Lehman, head of the German Bishops' Conference, stated, "I believe George Bush's religious views are genuine, but this careless way of using religious language is not acceptable anymore in today's world."<sup>37</sup> In Sweden, invoking God in politics is so unusual that parliamentarian Hans Lindqvist told Reuters: "I've never seen anything like this before."<sup>38</sup> Even the President's closest ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, seems to be uncomfortable with Bush's religious statements. Frum reported, "On a program broadcast on February 2nd, the BBC's political editor, Andrew Marr, explained how British Prime Minister Tony Blair 'hates' being asked about Bush's faith: He knows how damaging it is, and he knows that a lot of people out there regard the Bush crusade as, in some respect, a fundamentalist religious one, and that terrifies him."<sup>39</sup>

While the accuracy of world perception of Bush's faith should be a matter of concern for the Bush administration, the impact of the above stated perceptions can be damaging for our entire nation as well. A genuine misunderstanding, or well founded disdain, of President's Bush's "God talk" by the international community could certainly be used as a basis to discount and discredit the validity of actions he takes. And certainly such discredit doesn't reflect merely on Mr. Bush the man, but also on Mr. Bush the President, and the nation he leads. No doubt a word of caution is in order – both to Mr. Bush to better appreciate how his words and actions can be interpreted and misconstrued in the world, and to the world at large to be more receptive to his message and less critical of the vehicle of faith language that often carries it. At a minimum, President Bush's attempts to do what he sees as morally right, based on God-given

rights to all mankind and not merely United States' national interests, need not be viewed *ipso facto* as the acts of a religious fanatic.

#### **BUSH'S EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH COMPARED TO PRIOR PRESIDENTS**

In fairly evaluating President Bush's religious language to judge whether or not he has taken it too far, one must look at history and compare his "God talk" with that of former presidents. From George Washington on, the office of the presidency has mingled religion with politics. Mansfield points out,

"The fact is that George W. Bush is not unique as a president because he speaks openly of religion. All American presidents have done so, and it has become part of our national lore. In the first century and a half of our history, most Americans were religious and understood their lives and their country in religious terms. By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, religion had declined as an influence in the United States, but presidents still spoke religiously of the nation as a nod to a Christian memory and as an attempt to baptize the American culture of their day."<sup>40</sup>

There are those who postulate that the religious references from presidents are more a declaration of what scholars like Robert Bellah and Sidney Mead have termed "civil religion" than an expression of personal faith.<sup>41</sup> Mansfield states that Americans have come to expect a degree of God talk from a president regardless of the religious life he lives. A good example was John F. Kennedy who quoted more Scripture than any president before him.<sup>42</sup>

Fineman points out, "Every president invokes God and asks his blessing. Every president promises, though not always in so many words, to lead according to moral principles rooted in Biblical tradition."<sup>43</sup> Mansfield sheds additional light on the issue when he writes,

Not knowing our history makes Bush's faith seem out of place. Consider the president's statement about his sense of calling: "As it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this service, I'll hope that my undertaking is designed to answer some good purpose...I'll rely, therefore, confidently on Providence, which has preserved and been bountiful to me." These are the kind of sentiments Bush often expresses in his speeches. But the words are not his. They were written by George Washington of his own first steps into leadership over two centuries ago."<sup>44</sup>

Undoubtedly, some early presidents invoked the name of God in the public arena. In fact, President Bush recited these words of President Jefferson in his 2001 National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving speech, "The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are of God?"<sup>45</sup>

When compared to a more recent president, Dionne establishes that Bush's God talk is not unique. To make his point he wrote,

There he goes again. Here's our president, the president of our land of religious liberty, going out there and making his point by citing Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians. "Ephesians says we should speak the truth with our neighbors for we are members one of another," the president said. "I believe that. I think that is the single most important political insight, or social insight, in the Bible. And I think it is what should drive us as we behave together." Then he got to the compassionate God-talk. "Is my destiny caught up in yours?" he asked. "Are we part of the same family of God? It's not enough to say we are all equal in the eyes of God. We are all also connected in the eyes of God." And the crowd applauded. Does it bother you that our president talks that way? If it does, consider this: The speech I just quoted was not given by President Bush. It was given at Washington's Metropolitan Baptist Church in December 1997 by a president named William Jefferson Clinton.<sup>46</sup>

Dionne continued his observation by stating, "Lord knows, I don't have a problem with criticizing George W. Bush. But can we please stop pretending that Bush's regular invocations of the Almighty make him some sort of strange religious fanatic? In how he speaks of God, Bush is much more typically presidential than he is painted, especially by our friends abroad."<sup>47</sup>

Dionne raises a valid point. Is it possible that many of the attacks on the faith of the President are just used as targets of opportunity for those who simply want to criticize Bush and diminish his effectiveness? Take for example the outcry against Bush for the Christian prayers offered at his inauguration. Within hours of the event, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times* all ran derogatory articles about the prayers. The strongest assault came from the article in *The Los Angeles Times* where Alan M. Dershowitz, a professor at Harvard Law School, in reference to the prayers charged, "The first act by the new administration was in defiance of our Constitution."<sup>48</sup> Others, who though not as bold to charge the President with a violation of the Constitution, raised an outcry at how the Christian prayers were a great offense to other faith groups in America. However, those who believe the President's ceremony was not in keeping with established precedent need to consider the observation of Michael J. Jordan of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. He wrote:

For those Jews taken aback by the invocation of "Jesus the Christ" and "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" at President Bush's inauguration, rest assured: This was nothing new. According to the Anti-Defamation League -- which has fielded a number of inquiries since Saturday's inauguration festivities at its New York headquarters and regional offices -- Jesus has been referred to in each inauguration of the past 60 years.<sup>49</sup>

Undoubtedly, whenever a president brings religion into the public life of the nation, some will be offended. Any president is wise to exercise discretion in how he speaks of his faith;

nevertheless, he still retains the right to exercise his religious freedom, which is a foundational value of the United States. On the other hand, the actions and words of any public official, especially the President, are considered fair game in the political arena. Though the appropriateness of a president's expressions of faith tends to be validated in the voting booth, arguments against such expressions which are based on principle should obviously be taken more seriously than criticism that springs from political attack.

The view that Bush's statements on religion are not out of place for the President of the United States is presented by Lampman who wrote, "The infusion of religious conviction into presidential speeches warms many hearts." She continues in her article to quote Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, who said, "Bush is simply using the language of American civil religion. George Bush is standing squarely in a tradition as old as the country. Lincoln's Second Inaugural address is like a sermon. The Declaration of Independence says we are endowed by our Creator with rights and appeals to God for the success of the Revolutionary cause."<sup>50</sup>

Is there some aspect of Bush's faith that he brings to the office of the presidency that is not in keeping with his predecessors? Mansfield proposes the following idea. He writes,

What distinguishes the presidency of George W. Bush thus far is not just the openness with which he has discussed his personal conversion and spiritual life, nor simply the intensity of his public statements about faith. Rather, he is set apart both by the fact that he seems to genuinely believe privately what he says publicly about religion—when Americans are more used to religious insincerity from their leaders—and by the fact that he seeks to integrate faith with public policy at the most practical level.<sup>51</sup>

In the final analysis, what sticks in the craw of so many Bush critics is not the fact that he uses so much language deeply steeped in religion as it is that he gives the distinct impression that he seems to sincerely believe it.

## **CONCLUSION**

One can say with some degree of certainty that President Bush's personal faith is genuine. When George Bush entered the White House he certainly did not check his faith at the door. And his behavior leads the observer to conclude that he makes little distinction in practice whether he is in the living quarters or in the Oval Office.

Two questions come to mind when contemplating the role of President Bush's personal faith in the execution of his duties. First, is it legitimate? And second, is it effective? With regard to the former there is strong evidence to suggest that President Bush is continuing a long presidential tradition of using faith-based language to frame political and social issues. That

tradition includes the likes of Washington, Jefferson, Monroe, Lincoln, and Clinton. Granted, President Bush at times takes that practice to new levels. But it is fair to say that he is continuing a tradition which has deep roots and substantial precedent. Certainly there are critics who believe religious comments should never come from the mouth of a public servant, especially one holding the nation's highest office; however, there are many other citizens who believe it is very "presidential."

The second question is far more difficult to answer. Has President Bush's religious stance been appropriate, effective and politically correct? Perhaps it is too soon to tell. No doubt history will be the judge of that. But one gets the distinct impression that George W. Bush is far less interested in being politically correct than he is in being faithful. Whether courtesy of Billy Graham, some other minister, or his own personal devotional life it is reasonable to conclude that the words of Saint Paul ring in his ears: "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2) And for George W. Bush that starts with his being faith-full.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> George W. Bush, *President Honors Scientists and Engineers in Awards Ceremony*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 12 July 2002); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/07/20020712-1.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Bush, *President Visits Displaced Families in Arizona*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 25 June 2002); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020625-4.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>4</sup> George W. Bush, *President Delivers State of the Union*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 28 January 2003); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Keller, "God and George W. Bush," *The New York Times*, 17 May 2003, (1542 words) [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 15 September 2003.

<sup>6</sup> David Frum, "Iraq Will Test Bush's Spiritual Bond with Americans," *USA Today* 23 February 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <[http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-02-23-frum\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-02-23-frum_x.htm)>; Internet; accessed 7 October 2003.

<sup>7</sup> George Bush, "An Exclusive Interview With President Bush," interview by Brit Hume, Fox News 23 September 2003; available from <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,98111,00.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of George W. Bush* (New York, NY: Tarcher/Penguin, 2003), xv.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> James Robison, "Texas Pastor James Robison on the Life-Changing Faith of George W. Bush," interview by Dick Staub, *Christianity Today* 10 March 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/110/23.0.html>>; Internet; accessed 7 October 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Mansfield, 111.

<sup>13</sup> Howard Fineman, "Bush and God," *Newsweek*, 10 March 2003, 24.

<sup>14</sup> George W. Bush, *President George W. Bush's Inaugural Address* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, January 2001); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/inaugural-address.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Frum.

<sup>16</sup> George W. Bush, *President Promotes Peace in Radio Address* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 30 March 2002); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020330.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>17</sup> George W. Bush, *President Bush Addresses the 51st Annual Prayer Breakfast* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 30 March 2002); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030206-1.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>18</sup> George W. Bush, *Radio Address by the President To the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 24 November 2001); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011124.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>19</sup> George W. Bush, *President's Remarks at National Prayer Breakfast* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 7 February 2002); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/20020207-1.html>>; Internet; accessed 20 September 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Mansfield, xiv.

<sup>21</sup> George Bush, "An Exclusive Interview With President Bush," interview by Brit Hume.

<sup>22</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 131.

<sup>23</sup> Keller.

<sup>24</sup> Mansfield, xiv.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Fineman, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Keller.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Carnes, "The Bush Doctrine," *Christianity Today* May 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/005/3.38.html>>; Internet; accessed 7 October 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Mansfield, xvi.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>32</sup> George W. Bush, *President Promotes Peace in Radio Address* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 30 March 2002); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020330.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Frum.

<sup>34</sup> James Fredericks, "U.S. Foreign Policy Today: Zealotry Triumphant," *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 April 2003, (1496 words) [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 15 September 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Woodward, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Tom Heneghan, "Bush Mix of God and War Grates on Many Europeans," 4 April 2003; available from <[http://www.resonant.org/newsarticles/2003.04.04-bush\\_mix\\_of\\_god\\_and\\_war\\_grates\\_on\\_many\\_europeans-news.yahoo.com-reuters.html](http://www.resonant.org/newsarticles/2003.04.04-bush_mix_of_god_and_war_grates_on_many_europeans-news.yahoo.com-reuters.html)>; Internet; accessed 7 October 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Frum.

<sup>40</sup> Mansfield, xvii.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Fineman, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Mansfield, xvii.

<sup>45</sup> George W. Bush, *National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving, 2001* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 22 January 2001); available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/20010123-2.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>46</sup> E. J. Dionne Jr., "When Presidents Talk of God," *The Washington Post*, (14 February 2003): A-31 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 15 September 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Alan M. Dershowitz, "Bush Starts Off by Defying the Constitution," *Los Angeles Times*, (24 January 2001): B9 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 10 January 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Michael J. Jordan, "Jesus in Inauguration Stirs Up Jewish Angst," *Jewish News Weekly of Northern California* 26 January 2001 [journal on-line]; available from <[http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story\\_id/15357/edition\\_id/299/format/html/displaystory.html](http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/15357/edition_id/299/format/html/displaystory.html)>; Internet; accessed 10 January 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Jane Lampman, "New Scrutiny of Role of Religion in Bush's Policies; The President's Rhetoric Worries Even Some Evangelicals," *The Christian Science Monitor* (17 March 2003): 1 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 15 September 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Mansfield, xviii.



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