

[http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis\\_e\\_elliott/2008/04/islam\\_as\\_a\\_political\\_football.html](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2008/04/islam_as_a_political_football.html)

## Islam as a Political Football

**The Question:** John McCain's spiritual guide, televangelist Rod Parsley, calls Islam a "false religion" that should be "destroyed." Should McCain renounce Parsley? Will Islam be an issue in this year's U.S. presidential election?

I am pleased, amused, and worried about all this media-chatter about the putative influence of "spiritual guides" on presidential candidates.

What PLEASES me is that most of my long life has been spent in the profession of "spiritual guide" - being one, helping to prepare hundreds for the work, and teaching clergy on the job (continuing education). It's nice to feel important (though with a tinge of guilt) after feeling too little important (with a larger dollop of guilt).

What AMUSES me is something more serious about guilt. It is "*guilt by association*" -- the at least ungenerous if not mean accusation of a candidate as contaminated by a particular local leader of his/her religion. Hillary Clinton won no votes when she said that she would not have remained in a church -- as Barack Obama did -- whose pastor said some of the inflammatory things Jeremiah Wright said. (Would she have remained under the spiritual leadership of the biblical "Jeremiah," the eponymous ancestor of the Rev. Mr. Wright? The very English word "Jeremiad" means an inflammatory sermon!)

And what WORRIES me is that the very flap over Obama's former pastor *miseducates* the public as to both the place of preaching in congregational leadership (pastoring, as it's generally called) and the relationship between pastor and parishioner (a relationship more complex than the teacher/student relationship). When the community ("church") gathers for worship, pastor and people direct their attention to GOD: all aspects of the service - including anything the worship-leader (pastor) says - are to express this intention to worship God. Anyone who bothers to read any of Pastor Jeremiah Wright's sermons will find this steady intention, through which all the particulars of the sermon (including "inflammatory" remarks) should be perceived and judged.

The latest dust-up in this controversy finds expression in the current "On Faith" question: "John McCain's spiritual guide, televangelist Rod Parsley, calls Islam a 'false religion' that should be 'destroyed.' Should McCain renounce Parsley? Will Islam be an issue in this year's U.S. presidential election?"

1.....John McCain has no "spiritual guide." Understandably, he's grateful for all the support he can get, especially when it's the good word from someone whose mouth regularly reaches many thousands of ears. But he should be more explicit that such support is *not retroactive, mutual*: somebody's supporting him for president should not be read as McCain's supporting anything that somebody says about anything else.

2.....The change of locus is notable. The locus of the Obama/Wright relationship was primarily in church Sunday mornings: the locus of the McCain/Parsley relationship is an occasional meeting in which the second person recommends the first person for a particular job, and the television use of the clips.

3.....Islam teaches that the other religions should yield to Islam, and Parsley teaches that Islam should be destroyed. Each religion is a particular comprehensive way of seeing the world and living in it, and is therefore *incompatible with every other religion*: that's the way it is with worldviews, nothing to get all excited and worried about. Each religion claims all the territory of space and time and truth, leaving all other religions outside and "false." Cool it, that's the way it is with paradigms, world-stories. / My world-story says that God came into the world in and as Jesus, and I face the fact that Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet inferior to Muhammad. What? Muhammad is superior to God? Blasphemy!

4.....But when I taught Islam at the University of Hawaii, I did not preach that it or any other religion is "false" and should be "destroyed." So far, we all have to live on the same globe; and we'd better find out how best to say "yes" to each other and to our heritages (with "no" voiced but muted). Yes, our world-stories collide; but they also converge. And its an old saying whatever truth you may wring from it: "Everything that rises must converge."

5....In American history, this is the first presidential election in which there's a *candidate conversant with Islam*. For at least this century, the predominant world-confrontation will be between Islam and the West. Barack Obama understands both, and his heart-and-mind commitment to reconciliation of unnecessary human conflicts is the most palpable aspect of his campaigning.....

6....so I think Islam will not "be an issue in this year's U.S. presidential election." If it were to come up, Obama would use it to his advantage – as he splendidly used race to his advantage when racism came up.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | APRIL 8, 2008; 7:40 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:       

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## Comments

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there is one god and there is no son of god.

there is one god and there is only one son of god.

there is one god and other 2 a triangl three god.

what is common in the above 3 statment?

any mankind in his/her right mind right ear right eyes know by just looking at the universe around that there is none but one god the creator of this universe .in order to claim god you need to claim him thru 2 ,  
1-the creation.  
2-the revelation.

have the so called son of god created any thing in this universe?  
have the so called son of god revealed any divine book?

is god 3?where? how? and since when?

please stop taking mankind backwards to the delusionsim of greco-romanism,what failed and ruined greco-romanism is the backwording of idolism and paganism.

please read, and when you read you need to read in the name of your creator lord who created you from none.

POSTED BY: MO | APRIL 9, 2008 2:43 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Self-important piety does not make a person a Christian.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | APRIL 9, 2008 1:32 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Angela you will find no stauncher Christian than Myself. I have taught about Islam at several points in time. One should at least endeavor to know something of one's opposition after all. I've have also taught classes about Hinduism, Buddhism, Animism, The New Age Movement, and various pagan faiths.

POSTED BY: GARYD | APRIL 8, 2008 6:02 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dear Dr Willis

I agree with you. This is just so much silliness. Half the time, the people in church are not even paying attention to the pastor, and half the time the pastor is struggling to say something, anything, provocative enough to keep people's attention. I am a little creeped out by the whole trend of this conversation, to be honest.

I hope when I am your age, I can think and write as well as you do.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | APRIL 8, 2008 1:14 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Now we're getting some where Willis. You said it all with, "I am pleased, amused, and worried about all this media-chatter about the putative influence of "spiritual guides" on presidential candidates."

Now which side are you on? There was that Baptist preacher worried Baptist would be banned that inspired Jefferson's famous, "wall of separation of church and state." And then there is the horde of Baptist preachers today that believe they have the God demanded duty for Baptists to take over the government.

Can't we say with certainty that Baptist as a group of mindless followers of their religious authorities are, "pleased, amused, and worried"? You're in the main stream. Take care not to get drowned.

POSTED BY: BGONE | APRIL 8, 2008 12:38 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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So Mr. Elliott,

You taught Islam in Hawaii and you're an ordained minister for the Church of Christ and American Baptist. That's hysterical! Not surprising by your one-sided post as always for Obama. Islam will always be a concern in politics even if it doesn't come up but it will be underlying. Most of these posts are pro-Obama which to me has nothing to do w/the post about Islam. I however, don't agreed w/Rod Parsley's teaching nor Jeremiah Wright we know who most people on this post would want to see win. We can comment on this every day but those who practice hypocrisy will always be part of the mainstream thinking...

POSTED BY: ANGELA | APRIL 8, 2008 12:06 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Apologies...I messed up my previous post, which was a couple of quotes by Asimov from his book of letters. I'll try again.

"All those who say that you cannot look at the sky (or at a leaf or at a gazelle or a mountain) without realizing that God must exist, don't consider that the hypothesis has already been put in their minds. As children they are taught that God exists and that they will go to hell if they doubt it. If their parents don't tell them, their teachers or their playmates do. ( Lots of children learn about God from the gutter.)

When they grow up, they seize on any seemingly rational excuse to make their beliefs non-superstitious. The real test would be to take someone who has grown up in a completely material philosophy and who has never heard of God. Let him look at the heavens ( or a turtle or a delicate rose) and let me hear him say, "Why, there must be some supernatural power that has created us all."

If he does, I will be shaken, but I am perfectly confident he will say, "My, Look at the heavens or turtle or rose; how pleasant to know a little about astronomy or zoology or botany so that I can truly appreciate the marvelous natural phenomenon." pp318

I would not be satisfied to have my kids choose to be religious without trying to argue them out of it, just as I would not be satisfied to have them smoke regularly or engage in any other practice I considered detrimental to mind or body.

No scientist in speculating on the origin of the universe offers the answer "God made it." He searches for an answer of another kind on the usually unspoken assumption that the existence of God is irrelevant in this respect. pp319

Pages 318 and 319 from "Yours, Isaac Asimov; A Lifetime of Letters" pub.by Doubleday NY>

POSTED BY: JIMBO | APRIL 8, 2008 10:37 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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All this nonsense about religion and gods. I'm with Asimov.

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From "Yours, Isaac Asimov". The letters of Isaac Asimov.

POSTED BY: JIMBO | APRIL 8, 2008 10:23 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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JoeT that is silliness of the first water. No candidate can possibly be held responsible for every crack brain with a following that endorses him.

POSTED BY: GARYD | APRIL 8, 2008 12:36 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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By the way Dr. Willis E Elliot,

No sarcasm intended in my previous post on your essay, which was one of the lightest by you I've read in On Faith. I was responding in that spirit on the absurdity of some pronouncements by some "spiritual" guiders and advisers.

There are "spiritual advisers" to politicians. There may come a day when we have have "faith consultants" in the service of politicians.

....and your goodself a closet supporter of Obama or fascinated by his political savvy as I am?

Thanks and best regards  
"J"

POSTED BY: JIHADIST | APRIL 3, 2008 6:30 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Paganplace: I must not have been clear. I was trying to say the same thing you did, that getting an endorsement from Hagee and Parsley requires more explaining than sitting in your parish pew. Hannity should be much more indignant towards McCain for that reason.

POSTED BY: JOET | APRIL 3, 2008 12:30 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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So what extremists are you referencing?

POSTED BY: GARYD | APRIL 3, 2008 9:36 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dr. Willis E Elliot,

You : "I face the fact that Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet inferior to Muhammad. What? Muhammad is superior to God? Blasphemy!"

I plead guilty as a Muslim that Jesus PBUH is not taught as God, but as one of the Prophets of God. One of the five most important starting with Adam and of course Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Prophet Muhammad as the last Prophet/Messenger of God. Pardon me if I sound blasphemous in listing Jesus PBUH as a mere Prophet of God and not God.

Odd that Islam should be an issue in US elections when other faiths is never a political or politicised issue in the elections of other countries, even in Muslim states.

As for your contention that "for at least this century, the predominant world-confrontation will be between Islam and the West", I do doubt it. It may be more accurate to state "confrontations" with Islam as a "competing" faith with both faiths collides in societies where one or the other is pro-secting.

Muslims don't think of being in "conflict" or in "confrontation" with Christianity or Christians globally, but more with specific western countries that seek to dominate their lands. We are also mostly in conflict with our fellow Muslims in our own countries - armed conflicts and ideas conflicts on reasons that may or may not be related to religion at all.

In this century, there will be increasing "competition" and possible "confrontations" and "conflicts" with India, China, and EU for resources and influence. And possibly with Russia too.

I agree with you that with Islam as a "political football", specifically on petty issues such as so and so calling for Islam to be "destroyed", or questions on Obama's Islamic background, the real issues, which should be debated and addressed are subsumed, including on the economy and Middle East unresolved conflicts and wars.

As for Islam, even during years when elections are not held, it is still a prickly issue among Americans, which, of course, really started full-bloodedly after 9/11 when there is almost monthly calls for Islam to be "destroyed" or "crushed" or "contained" or "confronted" by sundry personalities in the media, politics and faith leaders in the US and Europe. The latest being from Rev. Parsley of course. We can't keep up. We also can't keep up with our fellow Muslims calling for the US to be "expelled" from the Middle East everyday too, laced with inventive invectives.

But no matter on Rev. Parsley. In the Muslim world, even the nine Muslims who can read, the seven Muslims who have cable/satellite TV, and the three Muslims who have Internet access have never heard of Rev. Parsley and what he said. Another will come along and said something to that effect too.

Perhaps we should start "converging" Christians and Muslims who calls for the death and destruction of the Other in a meeting. They have so much in common and much to talk about ....and you have been slyly campaigning for Obama in at least two essays in On Faith including this one?

Thank you and best regards

"J"

POSTED BY: JIHADIST | APRIL 3, 2008 7:23 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Umm, none of those, Gary? Whatever's in your head? :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | APRIL 3, 2008 1:28 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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So are you saying Joe Lieberman is an extremist Pagan? Or are you talking about Parsley who doesn't even hail from the same state as McCain? And was with him at a campaign stop In Ohio where Parsley lives and has some political clout?

POSTED BY: GARYD | APRIL 2, 2008 3:15 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Well, Joet, there's a key difference between going to a church where something was said we don't like, and going to an extremist \*for\* \*policy and political support\* in the course of \*pandering to extremists.\*

Obama's being smeared by some 'guilt by association' thing, ...McCain's actually the one who's quite publicly shown that he \*is\* swayed by the talk of an extremist.

This is another reason why mixing religion and politics is such an unhealthy thing, though. If people want to vote for someone \*based\* on their idea of their piety, look at all the mess.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | APRIL 2, 2008 3:04 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I have marvelled at the pundits who attack Obama for spending so many years in the pew and defend McCain for his associations with religious figures for more limited time frames, as if the issue were how much time does it take for extreme views to taint an acquaintance.

For me, seeking a political endorsement from a religious figure not ones pastor as a political act (bad enough a priori) is entirely distinguishable from the religious act of participating in one's own parish community under a pastor to the flock. It is the former, not the later, that raises the issue of accountability for the views of the religious figure. For me, Hannity, et al., have it backwards.

POSTED BY: JOET | APRIL 2, 2008 12:41 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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