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PROGRAM

Intelligence Squared US  
America is too damn religious

BGT NO. .

## **PETER STEINFELS**

Good evening. I'd like to encourage people to come in and fill in the seats, even up in the front. Uh there's not going to be a collection or an altar call so it's OK. [LAUGHTER] I am Peter Steinfelds. And as moderator of this debate on whether America is too damn religious, I've been asked to offer the opening prayer. [LAUGHTER] It's very simple. We pray that all cell phones, pagers, Blackberrys, blueberries, strawberries, personal video games or anything else that beeps, squeaks or plays the *William Tell* overture or otherwise announced itself, be turned off for the duration of the evening. And if some people should fail to do this, may heaven open and turn them into pillars of salt, Amen. [APPLAUSE] We look forward to an exciting, stimulating and enjoyable exchange of ideas. Tonight's debate like its predecessors is being taped for radio broadcast. With each of these debates, this taping has grown more expert and refined. And there are now, I am told, microphones everywhere, hanging from the rafters, on the sides of the stage, probably in your lapels. And one result of this extraordinary taping is that certain sounds are magnified and distorted. I'm also told that unwrapping candy

or otherwise wrinkling cellophane sounds like fire breaking out in the auditorium. So if you anticipate an irrepressible need for a Snickers bar or a fresh packet of Kleenex to dab your eyes in response to our speakers' eloquence, please unwrap it right now. A further word about response this evening. Naturally we will all give our outstanding debaters a respectful hearing. No jeers, cat calls, throwing cabbages and so on. But applause is very welcome. And the sound engineers can pick up all its gradations from tepid to exuberant. Especially if they have something of a sound check. And so if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you right now, could you give us a round of say polite applause?

[APPLAUSE] Thank you very much, that was very polite. Perhaps bordering on the apathetic, but... [LAUGHTER] Now can we have an example of enthusiastic support. [APPLAUSE] I know I'd better not ask you for mindless frenzy. As the debaters make their opening statements this evening, you may be readying your own brief questions for the question and answer portion to follow. If you want three by five cards to write down your questions and that usually helps those of us who are shy and those of us who need some discipline, once we overcome that shyness, lest we be long winded, uh the ushers will provide you with such a card. And it is now my pleasure to introduce the chairman of the Rosenkranz Foundation, the sponsor of this evening's event, please welcome Robert Rosenkranz. [APPLAUSE]

**ROBERT ROSENKRANZ**

Well thank you that was polite. [CHUCKLES] I'm here with Dana Wolfe, the executive producer of this debate series. And it's my pleasure to welcome you. This is our first debate of our spring season, but you wouldn't know it was spring by being outside. We're thrilled that WNYC is recording this series of debates and that through National Public Radio you'll be able to hear this debate on public radio stations around the country. We also value the sponsorship of the *Times of London*. And I want to especially thank our moderator, Peter Steinfeld, who I'll formally introduce in a moment and the extraordinary group of panelists who are the real stars of tonight's event. You know, I was looking at some opinion polls taken abroad in preparation for my remarks tonight and I find that sixty percent of respondents in France and Holland think that America is too religious. And people who think that also tend to be pretty anti-American. In Pakistan, sixty percent of people are anti-American and they consider that we're not religious enough. They're offended by the secular nature of our culture. Uh and um so, maybe we can't win or maybe we've got it just right. What has been called our civil religion has a sacred history in America. Words from the Declaration of Independence—we hold these truths to be self evident. That we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights. The Gettysburg Address, four score and seven,

invokes the cadences of the Bible. Our Thanksgiving, our major national holiday, thanks providence for America and invites us to meditate on our meaning. The Fourth of July celebrates liberty, Memorial Day – sacrifice. The moral [00;06;10;12] imperatives of religion lead to an outpouring of support for victims of genocide in Rwanda. For victims of AIDS in Africa. For victims of national disasters anywhere on the planet. For a large and increasing number of Americans, Evangelical or Pentecostal churches give them what they need to live more responsible, more energetic, more meaningful lives. But as Mahatma Ghandi said, “those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion is.” And our politics seem to have a great deal to do with religion these days. Controversies persist over gay marriage, stem cell research. The under God language of the Pledge of Allegiance. Vouchers for parochial school students. The fitness for a Mormon to run for President of the United States. Are these normal issues in the usual force of political discourse? Or are they evidence that America is indeed too damn religious? Well let's see what our esteemed panelists have to say and which side of the motion will carry the day. Our moderator this evening is Peter Steinfels. Professor at Fordham University. Co-director of their Center on Religion and Culture, and a religion columnist for *The New York Times*. Peter created and continues to write his bi-weekly column, Beliefs, dealing with religion and ethics in the

*Times*. He's written numerous books on religion, including *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*. It's now my pleasure to hand the evening over to Peter.  
[APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much Bob for your introduction. I would now also welcome you to the fifth Intelligence Squared US debate. And I'd like to try and give you a brief rundown of the evening. First, the proponents of the motion will start by presenting their side of the argument. The opposition will follow. Each person will get a maximum of eight minutes and we will go back and forth from one side to the other. Second, when all six speakers are finished with their opening remarks, I will open up the floor to some brief questions from the audience and perhaps toss in a few of my own. Third when the Q and A is complete, each debater will have the opportunity to make a final statement lasting not more than two minutes per person. Fourth, during the closing statements ballot boxes will be passed around for voting. This is the ticket. Whoops. This is the ballot box which has come suspiciously open in my picking it up. [LAUGHTER] You will uh be asked to put in either the for piece, the against piece or the whole ticket if you still not – if you still haven't made up your mind as to which side you favor. If anyone does not have a ticket ballot, an usher will get you one at the appropriate time. Fifth

and last, after the final closing statement is made, I will announce the results of the audience vote and tell you which side carried the day. Let me now introduce the panel which I'm very proud to do. For the motion, author and program director of the think tank, the Center for Inquiry, Susan Jacoby. Executive Director of Americans United For Separation of Church and State, attorney and ordained minister, Barry W. Lynn. And author, professor of political science and director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College, Alan Wolfe. Against the motion, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago, political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain. Senior Fellow in the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program and College Park Professor at the University of Maryland, William A. Galston. And the Henry W. Putnam Professor in religion at Princeton University, religious historian Albert J. Raboteau. And I think all of you know that there are even more extended biographies of our panelists this evening in the programs. So we will begin. Like to start out with a speaker for, to take the podium, for tonight's motion. Uh Barry Lynn. [APPLAUSE]

**BARRY W. LYNN**

Thank you very much. Uh so now that you know that I'm both a minister and a lawyer, you know that I'm capable of forgiving you but going on to sue you anyway. [LAUGHTER] Um now what is it,

why is it that a church going, Jesus-accepting member of the Christian clergy is on this side of the platform tonight? And the answer really lies in the very carefully worded proposition that is under debate this evening. That America is too damn religious. I don't think there is too much religion in America. Although my own colleagues actually might disagree with that. But I clearly think there's too much of the damnable kind. What is a damned religion? Damned religion is a religion so weak willed and unsure of its own capacity to persuade others to support it or live by its guidance that it seeks the blessing of government. That it seeks financial aid from government. And that it even tries to convert its theological beliefs into legislative fiats. This damned form of religion is a corruption both of faith and of constitutional democracy. And it makes a mockery of the best in our history. It was the fifth United States Congress that unanimously approved the Treaty of Tripoli which unequivocally stated that this was in no way founded as a Christian nation. Thomas Jefferson refused to sign proclamations of prayer or resolutions of thanksgiving, believing how shocking is this, that it should be religious bodies, not governmental ones that decided what days should bring forth the greatest prayer from the American people. And James Madison even objected to the 1790 census form because it had a question merely asking you if you were a member of the clergy. Indeed, throughout most of our American history we've been

moving toward a greater embrace of religious diversity. A greater rejection of the idea that government, federal or state should pick favorites among religions or choose religion over non-religion. By 1960 then presidential aspirant John F. Kennedy addressed a meeting of Southern Baptists concerned about his allegiances as a Roman Catholic, to declare, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute." But what a difference a few decades can make. Now politicians see as much advantage in pandering to religion as the embarrassingly religion seems to gain or try to gain by seeking the assistance of government. So it's a dual corruption, tainting the secular nature of our government and making religious groups special interest supplicants at what is often a quite odoriferous public trough. [APPLAUSE] So let me just briefly go into these uh specifics in these minutes remaining, of how this unholy matrimony kind of plays out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, religious groups too often, if you will, seek the blessing of government. A few examples. As if the nation were somehow absent private property, now we see public spaces increasingly festooned with more and more religious icons and images, monuments and scriptural citations. Almost always at the behest of the currently statistically most popular religion in America, Christianity. Now I concede that a lot of Americans like it that way. In a December poll for example, seventy eight percent of the respondents said they wanted to



continue to see nativity scenes outside their local government offices. But curiously in the same poll only fifty three percent said they were actually planning to attend a worship service at Christmas. Is it really good for religion when its adherents in larger numbers would like to catch a quick glimpse of Jesus in a manger, possibly surrounded by a few reindeer and candy canes, rather than actually spend an hour sitting for a religious ceremony. It can't be. Or how about the reasoning used in a constitutional challenge to Ohio's official motto – “With God all things are possible.” The federal appeals court upheld the continued use of the seal, claiming that the phrase had essentially lost its religious significance. [LAUGHTER] There was widespread applause from the religious right. But again to me how can you be happy as a spiritual person when a court notes that the statement that God is both alive and omnipotent is seen as theologically meaningless form overuse. I should note sometimes occasionally legislators also go beyond this. They confuse religion with magic. After every major uh school shooting in the United States, members of Congress insist that if we posted the Ten Commandments on every school room wall we would stop the next violent student uprising from occurring. They're never willing to talk about gun control. They're never willing to even talk about spending money to work with at risk young people but the decalogue display is the panacea. But you know if proximity

to holy words really made us better people then the presence of Gideon Bibles in nightstands at motels would have ended adultery long ago and its has not. [LAUGHTER] It is not that simple. Now second, dissatisfied with some powerful symbolic support, some groups even go further and actually want to receive from the public treasury the tax dollars of all of this. Funding. President Bush likes this idea. He created an office of faith based initiatives back in 2001 to get more money for what he called the armies of compassion around America who cared for the poor, the hungry and the homeless. What he forgot to tell us is that government had been partnering with many religious organizations for many decades in this county with just two little caveats. First, any program that got federal money had to forget evangelizing in that program. So that if money went to counseling people suffering from addiction, you had to stick to medical and psychological counseling with those federal dollars and leave the idea of getting right with God to some other separately funded program. Second, it was presumed that you only got tax dollars to provide secular services and that you had to therefore hire the most qualified person for the job regardless of any preference you might wish to give on the basis of religious belief or affiliation. But for the President those caveats were just technicalities. He told an audience in New Orleans just one year before he forgot that the city existed that he saw his program as

one that would give funds to groups that are saving Americans one soul at a time. Once again confusing his role as Commander in Chief of that of theologian in chief. He claimed that hiring by faith groups could be done without regard to civil rights laws against discrimination and I find that such an absurd commentary for the early twenty first century. Does anyone think that Baptists or Buddhists or Atheists or Adventists actually ladle the food in a soup kitchen differently? Does it make any difference to you as a person living in a homeless shelter [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

**PETER STEINFELS**

One minute warning.

**BARRY W. LYNN**

Whether that – uh Adventist has tucked in your bed sheet or an Atheist has done it. Final characteristic of damned religion is the most pernicious. That's where religious groups decide that because they are sure that they have a Biblical understanding of an issue, say the right of reproductive choice, no one will be dared to have another opinion and act on it. That's why they seek things like constitutional amendments to prohibit all abortion. I know that there are people on the other side of this debate who will say that there is great evidence of progressive thinking in churches now and in the past and obviously that's true. But I remind you that Dr. Martin Luther King never created

a hundred million dollar dialing for dollars ministry on television. He never endorsed a single candidate from any pulpit in America. He knew that the long arc of justice would reach its goal only when all Americans, black and white, young and old, believer and non-believer, would count on the Constitution as the last great protector of the rights of the people. That's the faith that ought to guide religion in America but regrettably it's the damned kind that seems to get all the attention and have all the clout today. And luckily because I am not running for any elective  
[OVERLAPPING VOICES]

**PETER STEINFELS**

If you'll wrap it up [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

**BARRY W. LYNN**

...office, I do not have to say at the end of this small speech, God Bless America. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much Barry Lynn. And now the first speaker against the motion, Jean Bethke Elshtain. [APPLAUSE]

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

America is too damn religious. Says who? We could ask our greatest presidential theologian Abraham Lincoln, who references God fourteen times in the four paragraphs of his masterpiece of American political rhetoric, the second inaugural address. We could ask Martin Luther King with the rhythms of cadences and

words of Scripture flowing eloquently in his powerful civic sermons. As you listen to that remarkable voice, intoning the words of the prophet Amos, let justice roll down like a mighty river. Close your eyes and utter Amen brother, Amen. King certainly worked to bring theological beliefs into political imperatives. Indeed we could ask the African American community and my distinguished colleague, Professor Roboteau will say more, are you too damn religious? For that community has a long history of bringing religion into civic life. Or, you could consult Dorothy Day of this city. It was awfully damned religious of her to organize tax revolts and protest marches against all manner of injustice as she understood the public implications of her faith. Or Monsignor John Ryan, Father New Deal as he was called. And adviser to FDR who brought Catholic social teaching to questions of economic justice. And how about that FDR? Goes on the radio and offers a prayer on D Day, broadcast to all of America, to the world and to our soldiers on both fronts. Presumably we are not to have any more of that thing, kind of thing. We could ask pro life citizens today, many of whom are called by their faith to oppose abortion and to challenge what they take to be the abuse of state authority to sanction through law, a harrowing practice. I'm assuming most in this room don't agree with their position, but in their protest, I would remind you that they remind us of what free speech and free exercise of

religion is all about. Do we really want to put ourselves in the position of authorizing busybodies to say to our preachers and politicians and citizens at every turn you've crossed the line? You're now too damned religious. You're bringing your faith in everywhere and now keeping it safely contained. Tusk tusk. Now we will be likely to hear certain things from our opponents. We may be treated to a rogue's gallery, a line up of religious suspects. Guilty as charged. Fanatics out to steal our liberties and endanger the republic thereby. As I read these sorts of accounts I'm stunned that America has survived. We will be told that it is only the hyper vigilance of those determined to snuff out too damn much religion that has spared us. But the view that we are too damned religious does not pass critical muster. I'm a professor and tempted to be professorial by citing distinguished scholars on church and state, who point out that it is the vigilance of religious citizens to over-extension of state power determined to quash the too damned religious that has over the years, protected the freedoms of us all. Free exercise. Freedom of speech. Freedom of assembly. They haven't done this alone of course but please, I beg you, at this late date don't engage in the shallow exercise of pitting the non-religious who support civil liberties against those with religious commitments who allegedly do not. It flies in the face of the facts. And while we're at it, let's not traffic in the tedious pitting of faith against reason that we

hear so frequently. In the long history of Christianity as you heard from from Reverend Lynn, America's dominant faith tradition, the great theologians for centuries explored the entanglement of faith and reason. In my class yesterday at the University of Chicago we discussed Thomas Aquinas with his relentless emphasis on human reason and his definition of human beings as rational, mortal creatures. Of course you will find some who downgraded reason in the overall scheme of things. But you would be hard pressed to find a great theologian who understood faith as nothing but a leap into irrationality. Rather, the challenge was to ask how faith and reason worked together. How we could bring faith and reason to issues of our time. Rather than to assume that they were polar opposites. As to criminal activity, whether committed by the religious or non-religious, ladies and gentlemen we have remedies in law. We are not helpless when confronted by fanatics who commit crimes from whichever direction they come. The problem is that to our opponents, the fanatics tend to come from one direction only. Are we to compare terrible persons and happenings? I dare say that in the twentieth century the anti-religious who thought all religion was damned religion would win hands down. Who can forget that electric moment at the trial of the Nazi war criminal, Adolph Eichmann, when he refused to take an oath on the Bible. He was part of the Nazi inner circle. He would not touch his

hand to this book. The story of those despised Israelites and the Christians who effeminized people as the Nazis put it all the time, by trying to keep the strong from destroying the weak which is precisely what they were all about. Now in the history of our republic, confessional pluralism and social and political pluralism go hand in hand. If you think we're too damn religious, you're likely to think we're too damn pluralistic. One of the glories of this country has turned into a liability and a danger thereby. The great French observer of the American democracy, Alexis DeTocqueville, noticed something new under the political sun when he toured these United States. He took account of the way that religious conviction and associational energy and enthusiasm went hand in hand, helping to create a unique, robust, civil society. True then, 1830 – true now [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

**PETER STEINFELS**

One -

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

As my distinguished colleague, Professor Galston will point out. Ladies and gentlemen, this is New York City. I know you are a tough crowd. [LAUGHTER] I would ask you to listen to the voice of reason from our side. That understands that one should not, from any direction, separate America's citizens who accept a secular world from those, the religious, who allegedly do not.



Citizens of religious commitment are among the most enthusiastic supporters of a secular government. They don't want established religion but they also understand that to support a secular government and state does not commit us to a thoroughly secularized society, shorn of religious voices, symbols, activities and commitments. We would be a greatly impoverished country were this to come to pass. So too damn religious? Nope. Just pretty damn American. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much Jean Elshtain. And now speaking for tonight's motion, Alan Wolfe.

**ALAN WOLFE**

This doesn't [INAUDIBLE]. [CHUCKLES] If the proposition before us tonight was the proposition are Americans too damned religious, I would answer no. In fact I'd be on that side of the table. Um Americans it seems to me, could very well be much more religious than they actually are. If Americans were more religious, I believe, we would have much more social justice in this country. We would have much more of an active welfare state in this country. One of the reasons why European societies have their welfare states, with such extensive social provisions for children and for the elderly and for the helpless, is because they've had Christian Democratic parties that have relied on Christian social teachings to create a society much more caring

than our own. If Americans were much more religious there would have been much more pretest against the revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib and other aspects of our foreign policy. For someone to be tortured and hung up like he was being crucified would be so unacceptable if Americans were more religious that there would have been massive protests. Not only against the tactics, the illegal torture tactics used by the Bush administration but by the whole war in Iraq would have, which would have violated the social teachings of the single most, largest Christian denomination in the United States, the Catholic church. If Americans were more religious they would listen more to the Pope and his opposition to the war. If Americans were more religious however, if Americans were more religious, America would be much less religious. Our proposition is whether America is too religious and on that question I'm on this side of the fence. Because there's a difference between Americans as individuals and America as a public space and a public society. Now I want to offer [APPLAUSE] I want to offer this proposition as the basis of my remarks. If Americans were more damned religious as opposed to America, the single greatest benefit would be that George W. Bush would never have been elected President of the United States. [APPLAUSE] Why do I say that? Because I believe that the face of the Republican Party, sometimes called the Christian right is much more a political movement than it is a

religious movement. And that it has violated the spirit of what it means to be religious in American life and in particular it's violated the spirit of its own religious tradition. I'm fascinated by one historical figure who I believe to be the single most important American never to have had a full length biography written of him. His name was John Leland. He was a Baptist minister and itinerant preacher in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Uh he wrote in his memoirs, he said I've preached in four hundred and thirty six meeting houses, thirty seven courthouses, several capitals, many academies and school house. Barns, tobacco houses, dwelling houses and so on. He estimated that he converted sixteen hundred people to Jesus Christ and he praised Jesus Christ as his savior. We owe to John Leland, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. It was John Leland who engaged in a bargain with James Madison in Virginia that Leland would support Madison as a delegate to the convention that ratified the US Constitution if Madison would drop his previous opposition to a Bill of Rights and support one. James Leland uh John Leland was a Baptist. The Baptists in America under the guise and leadership of people like Roger Williams had been uh uh very, very passionate and devoted advocates of religious liberty in the United States. All that changed in the 1980s. It changed in the 1980s when John Leland's heirs, the Southern Baptist Convention, dropped its long history of commitment to religious

liberty to move in a more theocratic direction for explicitly political reasons. I'm sure that almost no one in this room knows that in 1973 when the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in Roe v Wade, the decision that presumably started the American culture war, the Southern Baptist Convention was fully in support of Roe v Wade. Baptists distrusted the state. They distrusted state intervention. If a state could tell a woman what she could do with her body, it could tell a believer what he or she could do with his or her mind. By 1980s the Southern Baptist Convention had completely changed its position. Repudiated its earlier support and become the major force besides the Catholic Church in America, to overturn Roe v Wade. Now I submit that between 1973 and 1983, God did not change his mind on the question of abortion. But Baptists did. Why did they change their mind? They changed their minds in part because they believed that America had become too decadent a society. But they also changed their minds because they saw an opportunity. The Reagan presidency. The opportunity to exercise political power in America. And they opted for political power and it was the direct result of this change in the Southern Baptist Convention. Our largest Protestant denomination that created the southern Republican Party and that eventually resulted in the election of George W. Bush with the enthusiastic support of people associated with the Southern Baptist

Convention. In a democratic society, all the more power to them. They don't like Roe v Wade, all the more power to them. Organize politically. Elect your candidates, change the law. Get new people on the Supreme Court. I am second to none in my admiration for their political success. I don't agree with them, I'm on the other side. But you, I cannot take away the brilliance of their political tactics or the brilliance of the Bush administration in using and relying on that base. But to think that this has anything whatsoever to do with matters of the spirit, matters of the heart or matters of one's relationship to a supreme being strikes me as far too great a stretch. I do not know George W Bush. I do know Bill and Hillary Clinton. I have no idea whether George W Bush in his own heart is a religious man. But in his public persona, he is the least religious President I could ever imagine. A man without a shred of doubt about the wisdom of his policies. A man without a shred of humility and modesty as he faces the difficult challenges brought on, I must say, by his own incompetence. [CHUCKLES] A man filled with public piety but without a conscience. If one could ever imagine, ever imagine George W Bush sitting around with his advisors and thinking about what he's gonna do and Karl Rove comes in and says I know what you gotta do you gotta do this, could you ever imagine George W Bush saying – Karl that's a great idea but I'm sorry, I'm a Christian.

**PETER STEINFELS**

One -

**ALAN WOLFE**

The most important word in Christian theology is the word no. There are things that I cannot do because my conscience will not allow it. It's inconceivable to me that that could ever happen. Precisely because the Republican Party has been so successfully political, politically it is incumbent upon people who oppose them to expose their use of religion for political purposes. To protect religion in America against those, the single greatest abusers of religion in America uh the Republican Party, the Christian conservatives and other people who are degrading everything meaningful, serious and spiritual in the tradition that they claim to represent. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you. Thank you very much Alan Wolfe. The next speaker, speaking against the motion will be Albert Raboteau. [APPLAUSE]

**ALBERT RABOTEAU**

Good evening. Week after next, Christians, the largest religious group in the nation will begin the season of Lent. A period of prayer and fasting in preparation for Easter. The holiest feast of the Christian year. In that context I recall the voice of Isiah speaking in the name of the Lord. Is not this the fast that I choose to loose the bonds of injustice? To undo the thongs of the

yolk. To let the oppressed go free and to break every yolk. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to cover them. And not to hide your self from your own flesh and blood. In a land of super-abundance and obscene excess, a land of economic inequality and serious levels of intransigent poverty and homelessness, can we hear the voice of Isiah and really claim that we in our nation are too religious? When we tally up our church attending statistics, and the large number of Americans who believe in God, do we remember the words of Amos, again speaking in the name of the Lord. I hate, I despise your festivals and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. But let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. By Amos' standard of justice enacted equitably for rich and poor alike, can we really claim that we are too religious? Mired down in a preemptive war that has cost thousands upon thousands of lives with no end in sight. Can we listen to the prophecy of Micah, they shall beat their swords into plough shares and their spears into pruning hooks. A nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they study war anymore. Can we listen to these words without a pang of remorse that our efforts to build peace and have been so feeble and so ineffectual. Do we observe the commandments delivered in the sermon on the mount. Do not resist evil-doers. If anyone strikes you on the

right cheek, turn the other also. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. No one can serve two masters, you cannot serve God and Mammon. Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. Do not judge, lest you be judged. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. Do we obey the singular new commandment proclaimed in John's gospel? Love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all know that you are my disciples by how you love another. A love in action, not just words. Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Welcome the stranger. Clothe the naked. Tend to the sick. Visit those in prison. For when you do these things to the least among you, you do them to Christ. The prophetic strain in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures has down through the ages constantly challenged religious communities to focus on the one thing necessary. What the prophets articulate in word and gesture and in the case of Christ literally in body according to Christian belief, is the divine pathos, to use Abraham Joshua Heschel's wonderful term. God's compassionate concern for the plight of human kind. Especially for the weak, the outcast, the widow, the sojourner. The prophet experiences the divine pathos as a fire in the bones, compelling him or her to speak and act. In twentieth century America an amazing network of religious activists carried on this prophetic tradition. Dorothy Day, co-



founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, established houses of hospitality to feed, clothe and shelter the indigent. Based on the belief in our personal responsibility to live in solidarity with the poor. AJ Musty, non-violent agitator and labor organizer, longtime director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation taught that suffering in the cause of justice releases God's presence into the stream of human history. Abraham Joshua Heschel applied the concept of divine pathos to the modern struggle for social justice. As he marched with King from Selma to Montgomery and organized active protests against the Vietnam War. Howard Thurman, preacher, ecumenist and mystic, co-pastored the first interracial and inter-faith congregation in the nation. And spent a lifetime teaching that the search for community is part of the very structure of our being. Thomas Merton, Catholic contemplative monk wrote compellingly about the necessity of solitude, silence and simplicity for discovering our true selves, beyond the false persona fed by the consumerism of our mass society. Martin Luther King Junior deeply rooted in the black religious tradition of suffering Christianity arising out of slavery, confronted racial and economic inequality and argued that we have to transform America from a thing oriented to a person oriented society, lest we succumb to the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism that continue to afflict us. If we heed the voices of these modern prophets and their ancient

predecessors, we won't conclude that Americans or America are too religious. If we take heed we will see how often we preach religion while practicing consumerist, conspicuous consumption. How often we turn piety into another form of ego gratification. Useful for comforting the comfortable and empowering the powerful. We will see how easy and seductive it has always been to blunt the prophetic drive of religion to radically change our lives and our society. We will see that we are not nearly religious enough. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much Albert Raboteau. And now speaking for the motion, Susan Jacoby. [APPLAUSE]

**SUSAN JACOBY**

I am not an ordained minister or a rabbi. So it seems I am here to speak to you tonight in the role of the atheist in the room. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE] Since these are Oxford rules I'm just going to pretend this is the Oxford Union and say that America is too bloody religious. Now the case for God's country is being made in great Biblical language and the scholarly language of Princeton, the University of Chicago and soon to come that might fortress of religion, the Brookings Institution. [LAUGHTER] Uh but ladies and gentlemen let us step down from the ivory tower and the church steeple into what one of President Bush's advisors famously called the reality based world. Down here in the reality

based world, we must first talk about the retrograde form of religion that holds one third of Americans in thrall. This is the proportion of Americans who say that they believe every word in the Bible is literally true. Not merely inspired by God but the literal handwriting of God. One out of three. What an astounding statistic. Reflecting a level of credulity that exists nowhere else in the developed world. The widespread persistence of such an anti-diluvian form of faith is a true affliction in American society and demonstrates alas, that the liberty of conscience guaranteed by our Constitution also leaves us the liberty to bind ourselves with the chains of unreason. Our opponents would have you believe that those of us who consider America too bloody religious are concerned mainly with legalistic issues involving the separation of church and state. In fact our nation's excessive religiosity affects individual lives and public policy in ways that are often matters of life and death. I could offer two hours worth of examples or eight hours but mindful of the clock, here are just two. First, consider that the United States is the only country in the Western world with the death penalty. Every study of this issue has shown that pro death penalty views correlate closely with biblically based religious beliefs. Justice Antonin Scalia, a Roman Catholic so far to the right that he is at odds with his own church on the issue, more Catholic than the Pope you might say – believes that since all

legitimate governmental power is derived from God and God has the power of life and death, so too must governments. In a 2002 speech Scalia quoted Paul's famous epistle to the Romans about government heads being duly designated ministers of God to avenge evil. Then Scalia noted nostalgically and I quote – “few doubted the morality of the death penalty in an age that believed in the divine right of kings.” Well yes those were surely the good old days. [LAUGHTER] And doesn't it say something about our excessive respect for religion in America that this is considered a perfectly respectable position. Scalia, after all, is a Supreme Court justice but I can assure you can find his sentiments in less elevated English on every crack pot right wing web site. Let us consider another very different example. The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy and one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers again in the developed world, why? Not because American teenagers are more sexually active than any other but because conservative religious believers have blocked sensible sex education programs and have made it as difficult as possible for teenagers to obtain contraceptives. Just recently, we learned that the man in charge of the only federal birth control program for the poor, one Dr. Eric Keroack spends much of his time appearing at religiously sponsored abstinence conferences, where he promotes the notion that premarital sex ruins your chances for lasting marriage

because too much sex makes you lose too much oxytocin. The hormone of pleasurable intimacy released with every orgasm. [LAUGHTER] Too many orgasms and there go your precious bodily fluids for the rest of your life. [LAUGHTER] It seems that Dr. Keroack is a disciple not of the Lord, but of General Jack D. Ripper from the movie Doctor Strangelove. [LAUGHTER] Uh this would be funny if our tax dollars were not paying this lunatic to peddle his nutty combination of right wing faith and junk science. Now – [APPLAUSE]. What of the majority of Americans who are the kind of religious believers who have made room for secular knowledge in their house of faith. Martin Luther King has been very much on my mind recently too. Because it's been forty years since he made his courageous speech denouncing the Vietnam War at the Riverside Church. Some of you were probably there. The most important points to be made here are that Dr. King, both on civil rights and the war, was speaking truth to power from outside the government. And he was speaking to a morality that transcended every religion and was in direct opposition to the religious beliefs of many Americans at the time. It is utterly nauseating to hear representatives of the religious right today, cloak themselves in Dr. King's mantle when their spiritual ancestors were standing in the school house door and waving Bibles in support of segregation. [APPLAUSE] So if you're going to talk about religion and all the good it can do in society, you

also have to talk about religion and all the bad it can do and not pretend that bad religion is somewhere out there and has nothing to do at all with good religion. Our opponents suggest that reasonable religion does have nothing to do with extremist religion. But there are a great many more people of unreasonable faith in this country than sophisticated experts on theology would like to believe. And would like you to believe. Barry Lynn has mentioned attempts to inject intelligent design in our schools. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life released the results of an opinion poll that was ignored in the press because Hurricane Katrina had slammed into the Gulf Coast the day before. Among the findings, two thirds of Americans want both evolution and creationism to be taught in public schools. Fewer than half of Americans accept any form of evolution, including evolution guided by God by the way. Finally, an astonishing forty two percent say that all living beings have existed in their present form since the beginning of time. These religiously based beliefs are an intellectual disaster for our country. Americans of all faiths have confused the freedom of religion in our Constitution, which allows people to believe whatever they want, with the respect for the beliefs themselves. Last fall in a lecture at a church affiliated college in the South, I said that I do not respect the belief that the universe was created in seven days. Even

though of course I respect any one's right to believe that. A very polite young woman came up to me afterward and said that she was an evangelical Christian and was personally insulted by my saying that I didn't respect her beliefs about Creation. I asked her if she genuinely respected [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

**PETER STEINFELS**

One -

**SUSAN JACOBY**

--my atheism and she admitted that she didn't. But she said she did feel sorry for me. She also told me she wanted to be a high school teacher because she, but she wasn't going to become one because she was sure she would be prevented from bearing witness to her faith. I suggested that she wait and indulge in some free inquiry before she made such a decision at age eighteen. I can't do that she said. With the accent on can't. There's no better idea than the truth. This was a young mind in faith based chains in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a nation whose Constitution was written by men of the Enlightenment. It is this young woman and millions of young women and men like her who represented the tragedy of Americans overly deferential toward religion. What we need in this country is not more faith of any kind but a new age of reason. Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much Susan Jacoby. And now the final speaker

against the, tonight's motion will be William Galston.

[APPLAUSE]

**WILLIAM GALSTON**

The topic before us is one that stirs understandable passions. And as if the topic weren't enough uh our worthy opponents are doing their best to pour gas on the flames. [LAUGHTER] But I'd like to proceed somewhat differently. Uh I'd like to appeal if I may to your reason. To your fair mindedness and to your sense of our shared national history not the myopia of the moment. Let me tell you what this debate is not about. It's not about whether you have to be religious to be a good American. Of course you don't. Nor it is about whether you approve of the way that the most intense elements of the Republican coalition speaking in the name of religion, have conducted themselves. As a lifelong activist Democrat I sure don't. Neither do most Americans and obviously neither do you. Nor finally is it about whether religion in America is without excess or without sin. Of course it isn't for the simple reason it is a human institution. Here I believe is the real question. If you believe America is too religious, you must believe that we'd be a better country if we were less religious or maybe not religious at all. That's the proposition I'd like to contest. Now, admittedly this isn't an easy argument or inquiry to conduct. It's rather like asking whether Bedford Falls would have been better or a better place without George Bailey. Well



quite obviously I'm no angel and I'm certainly not Frank Capra but I'm gonna do my best to persuade you. Invoking your reason, your fair mindedness and your sense of history, that America is better off with the religion it has with all its flaws than without it. I want to make three simple point, points. First of all, from the very beginning of our history, religious Americans have been at the forefront of most if not all of the turning points in our history. Consider the Revolutionary War, where for ten years prior to our Declaration of Independence, Protestant ministers from the pulpit, were teaching the lessons of liberty. And so when Thomas Jefferson came to draft the Declaration of Independence, he didn't have to make up a new theory. He only had to do what he said he did years later in a letter to a friend, to state the plain common sense of the American mind. Or consider the anti-slavery movement. First in England and then in the United States, religious Americans were in the lead. After the Civil War with the rise of industrial capitalist, the teachers of the social gospel spearheaded progressive reform. They were at the forefront of concern for immigrants and for the poor. As Professor Elshtain has already pointed out. In the 1920s the Catholic church engaged with organized labor and its leading intellectuals and theologians set the stage for the New Deal. In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement of course. Uh but the anti-war movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement was fueled and

sustained among other things by religious passions. Today, movements to fight AIDS, famine and genocide are led by Americans of faith. Last year I had the privilege of attending a rally on the Washington Mall against our government's inaction in Darfur. And I can tell you if you took the religious people out of that crowd, there would hardly have been anyone left. Here's my second point. [APPLAUSE] Religious Americans are among our most engaged citizens today and their engagement strengthens our community. I'm not gonna deluge you with statistics. But I can tell you this – religious Americans are far more likely than non-religious Americans to give to charitable causes and that includes non-religious causes. Religious Americans are far more likely to volunteer than are non-religious Americans and that includes for non-religious causes. Religious Americans are far more likely to participate in our nation's politics. To follow it closely. To attend political meetings. To join local reform groups. To contact elected officials and even to vote than are non-religious Americans. And all of these generalizations hold true after one corrects for income, marital status and all the other variables that social scientists like to play with. Here's my third point – religious Americans, unlike what you have heard from our worthy opponents are not, repeat not a threat to our liberties. An overwhelming majority of religious Americans practice what one eminent scholar has termed a

private faith. It is private rather than public. Tolerant and inclusive, moderate than extreme and above all, non-judgmental. These are not simple social science abstractions. If you don't believe me, look at the Terry Schiavo affair. Strident voices in the Republican base said go for it. The Republican Congressional leaders went for it. President Bush even flew back from Crawford, interrupting for one of the few times in his Presidency a vacation. [LAUGHTER] And then what happened? These folks were stunned to find that they had a genuine public revolt on their hands. Including a revolt of a majority of religious Americans who considered what the government was doing meddling and intrusive, a violation of family privacy and abuse of law to limit our personal freedoms. And so my friends, to sum up, religious Americans have been at the forefront of progressive change throughout our history. They strengthen our society and our politics today and they do not strengthen – they do not threaten, indeed they reinforce our tradition of liberty.

**PETER STEINFELS**

One -

**WILLIAM GALSTON**

Now, if you've followed me on this journey I'll hope, I hope you'll agree that just as George Bailey in normal, ennobled Bedford Falls – so religious Americans with all their flaws have ennobled our country. But my guess is that many of you remain

unconvinced. What about the shrill voices, the calls for a Christian America? Jerry Falwell's lunatic rantings? Well of this and more is true. But every movement, secular and religious has its extremists. Those with tunnel vision and an absolute conviction of their own rectitude who will brook no compromise. Let me ask you – who among you would wish to be judged in accordance with the most extreme version of the faith or beliefs you profess? To judge fairly you must look at the full picture, not the fringe. And if you do, I'm confident that you will conclude that America is not too damn religious after all. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much William Galston. We've now completed the first portion of the evening's debate. And at this point I'd like to announce the results of the pre-debate vote. Before the debate sixty seven point forty six percent of you – I like that uh second decimal uh refinement there [LAUGHTER] – sixty seven point forty six percent of you voted for the motion. Uh twenty four point four oh percent of you voted against the motion. And eight point one four percent of you were in the category of don't know. We're now ready to begin the question and answer portion of this evening's debate. I will call on the questioners. Someone on each side of the auditorium will come to you with a microphone. Please stand when you ask your question. I would ask that first you do not start to ask your question until you have the

microphone. Secondly and obviously importantly uh please make your questions short and to the point. If any questions come from members of the press, they should identify themselves as such. And finally members of the audience have the option to identify themselves or such – or not if they, depending on which they choose to do. So if we could have a first question.

**MALE QUESTIONER**

Thank you – am I – the one – I'm sorry they gave me the mic so I thought I was [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

**PETER STEINFELS**

I can't see – over here yes.

**MALE QUESTIONER**

Thank you. Thank you all the panelists for your excellent talks. My name is Jerry Orstrom. I'd like to ask the panelists opposed the motion uh their views on the teaching of intelligent design in the schools as an alternative to evolution.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Uh would any of the panelists volunteer to do that or shall I toss the question at one or the other of you or toss it over to the other folks to answer for the panelists who are against.

**WILLIAM GALSTON**

Well I speak as the son of the Sterling Professor of Biology Emeritus at Yale University. [LAUGHTER] Uh so I think you can probably guess what I believe about the matter at hand. Uh

having said that uh John Stewart Mills said something that stuck with me ever, ever since the first time I read it as an undergraduate. He who knows only his own side of the case doesn't even know that. Uh and I am I am fascin – I was fascinated to read a review of a biography of, of the uh you know the English botanist, Alfred Russel Wallace. You know who was a contemporary of Darwin and some believe anticipated him and how Wallace struggled with the question of the relationship between evolution and design. You know what, I think our students might be better off if they knew something about that controversy. I'm not saying I'm in favor of the kinds of curricula that the extremists are pushing but if you're asking me in principle, would it be good for our students to know that there is a history of debate on these issue, this issue, and people who are by no means manifestly foolish have taken various points of view. No I don't think they would be worse off.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Uh Barry Lynn did you want to respond to that.

**BARRY W. LYNN**

Um Bill I think this is a good example of what we're talking about tonight. The truth is that in two major recent studies, high school biology teachers said that they spent quote little or no time discussing evolution. Why do they do that? Because they are afraid of stirring up community distaste for what they're doing in

those public schools. So in a world, in some other alternate universe where we would have the time to spend enormous amounts of time talking about evolution and then perhaps discussing this controversy, you might be making a very important point. But we are now facing a dumbing down of science so terrible in this country that biology teachers, without any statutes or passage of any goofy resolutions from school boards, are simply afraid to teach the truth. The scientific truth as they know it to be true. They don't doubt it but they're afraid to teach it. And that's the climate of religious intolerance. Of religious efforts to move city councils, state legislatures, state boards of education in the direction of Biblical literalism instead of scientific truth. Without even understanding that there's a difference between the two disciplines. That's the real world that Susan was talking about. That's what we find when we litigate these cases as we did with the ACLU of Pennsylvania up in Dover, Pennsylvania.

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

I have to say I'm a little tired of this real world, illusory world distinction. Um as those of us over here somehow living in um I think you said an alternative universe where in fact certain kinds of discussions can go forward. And and be had and it's to the benefit of everyone. That's simply not the case. I think that we understand very well the kinds of pressures that can be brought

to bear given the way America has organized its schools we've never had total monolithic control of the schools. We have school districts with a lot of independence. That means you're going to get variety from place to place. If this process of dumbing down were as systematic as Mr. Lynn suggests it makes our continuing astonishing uh sort of scientific progress and the fact that people come from all over the world to study science here, a bit perplexing. Uh now having said that let me just indicate that if you look at the kinds of text books that are used, which I did but maybe I was doing that in an alternate universe that are used to teach science in our high schools and are the most widely adopted text books, you see that evolution in fact is covered and that it is something that is addressed. But it is also important not to become, it seems to me, if we're worried about fundamentalism uh there is a kind of Darwinian fundamentalism that in fact will brook no debate and no opposition. And the truth of the matter is, if you know anything about this field at all is that there's a tremendous amount of debate internal to it. And a lot of, and scientists who are uh see themselves as evolutionists who strenuously reject Darwin's classical theory and so forth. So I think students can handle these kinds of debates, both within science and between the scientists and those with an alternate account. Although I should say that a lot of the intelligent design people including a very distinguished scientist named Sir John



Polkinghorne do support some notion of intelligent design. So it's not just a bunch of whackos out there who want to dumb everything down, who think this debate should go forward.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Well we'll have Al and then Susan.

**ALBERT RABOTEAU**

OK this is tangential as I think most of my comments are tonight to some of the debate but if we're talking about the real world I think what really concerns me is not whether the, this debate about intelligent design and Darwinism, that has some importance, what concerns me is the corporate presence in our schools in which students are eating pizza from Pizza Hut and Coca Cola from the Coca Cola company. The rampant disease of consumerism. That is showing its way in terms of unprecedented numbers of child obesity in our society. In the real world what bothers me is that the average American child, whatever they study in terms of issues of Darwinism or intelligent design watches three and a half hours of television a night. The average American adult watches five hours of television a day.

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

Talk about dumbing down - that's where it comes from.

**ALAN WOLFE**

That's twenty one thousand commercials a year.

**PETER STEINFELS**

I'm gonna have to ask our, our debaters to be a little bit briefer in their responses so we can get to some more questions. But first of all Susan.

**SUSAN JACOBY**

Yes I would just like to say that Dr. Elshtain's comment is typical of this kind of argument. She is suggesting that there is actually debate about evolution versus intelligent design. There is of course much debate within the scientific community about many of the particulars of evolution. There is no debate at all in the scientific community about intelligent design on the one hand versus evolution on the other. Furthermore, uh, what Dr. Galston said, certainly intelligent design would be an interesting thing to have in a college course on, on the history of pseudo-science and religion, that would be good. But to include it in a high school biology class would be to include for example, the theory of that—the theory of that vortices were responsible, vertexes were responsible for the earth turning on its axis. That is not a debate, it's putting nonsense in the same classroom with science, period. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Could—could I have a question from this side of the auditorium, please?

### **MALE QUESTIONER**

Yeah, hi, thank you very much, Howard Baruch, I'm curious why the biggest threat, uh, to us as a society in this country, that even gives us the ability to have this conversation, wasn't touched on by either side of the panel. Uh, where right now in the Middle East we have people who wanna fly into our country and destroy our country but, you know, but nobody brought this up as a threat to our way of society, on both sides of the panel. And, just seemed to be neglected.

### **PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you. Uh, we'll, we'll have a brief comment on that, the—the motion was America is, is too damn religious, I think that probably accounts for some of the direction of that. But if anybody would like to make a brief response to that, uh, point obviously on people's minds. [PAUSE] We'll take another question then.

### **FEMALE QUESTIONER**

Oh, thank you. My name is Susan Harrington, and what I'm a little bit concerned about this evening is that the question for me is not is—are Americans too religious, that's of, really of no interest to me. More important to me is is the American *government* too religious. Are the American *schools* too religious. Is the American Medical Society too religious or affected by religion.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Panelists? Barry Lynn?

**BARRY W. LYNN**

I—I think, uh, Susan was, uh, addressing that issue as, as Alan and I were also that in...our—that our concern is the way in which religion has played off government and played off politics in these negative ways. Susan, don't, don't tell all of your free-thinker friends that I'm gonna say this but the fact that Franklin Delano Roosevelt said a prayer on D-Day over the radio, I'm not too troubled about. What I am troubled about is George W. Bush seems to have a prayer for every day from A-Day to Z-Day [LAUGHTER], and he's happy to share it with us at all times. His ideology, shared by many of those third of Americans who are Biblical literalists, has a tremendous negative effect on the way we can do science, the very things we can study in medicine and science, so while some are coming to America to study, you're right, Jean, it's also true that because of our absurd policies for example on stem-cell research, we are losing some of the top scientists in this country, East and West, to other nations. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Does anyone—Bill?

**WILLIAM A. GALSTON**

[LAUGHS] I really have to protest. Uh— [LAUGHTER] With—

with a smile. Uh...uh, one of the pieces, one of the pieces of my biography, uh, is that I was in the Clinton White House for two and a half years as his deputy, uh, deputy director for domestic policy. Uh, I have gone down with the good ship Al Gore, twice. [LAUGHTER] Uh, this—you know...uh, I did not come here, I thought, for a debate about George Bush and the Bush administration. Uh— [APPLAUSE] I...you know...I yield, I really do yield to no one in my opposition to this administration. But, to reason from the follies and excesses of this administration to conclusions about *America*, just strikes me as a syllogism with a missing middle—

**ALAN WOLFE**

Well, may—may I just—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

And as well— [APPLAUSE]

**WILLIAM A. GALSTON**

I think it was—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

And as a well—

**ALAN WOLFE**

Let me...let me just—

**PETER STEINFELS**

The mod—the moderator will take charge. Bill, are you finished with your remarks, 'cause I'd like Alan, who made the distinction

between Americans and America, uh, respond, uh, if, if that's all right and we'll, we'll carry on—

**WILLIAM A. GALSTON**

I think I've made my point.

**ALAN WOLFE**

Um, I'm a great admirer of all your work with [LAUGHS] Al Gore and Bill Clinton but, look, I'm the one who brought George W. Bush into this debate, and, and, how could you not? Uh, on, on, on this particular subject, it's, it's, we have seen, in the last six years, uh, a, a, really a—a radical transformation, in the, in my opinion the manipulation of a, political-religious, pseudo-religious movement, uh, to serve secular ends, but to cover— I believe to serve secular political ends, but to cover it with religious language. *Because*, it is widely understood in this country given its religiosity, that it's perfectly appropriate to argue about politics, but it's not appropriate to argue about religion, as Susan Jacoby said. Once you say you're religious then we're all supposed to say, oh, I didn't know, my goodness, of course I respect everything you say. It is, it seems to me, a violation of both the principles of liberal democratic debate, but even more importantly a violation of the fundamental Christian idea of rendering under Caesar what is Caesar's, and rendering to God what is God's. For politicians, George W. Bush and the Republican Party to try to, uh, impose undemocratically a radical

agenda on the United States, bad enough. And then to cover it in religious language as a way of immunizing themselves from criticism because we all know that this is a particularly thin-skinned administration that doesn't want the public to question what it does and what a better way to do that than to say, or to claim, that when people disagree with them, that's religious bigotry, that's religious prejudice and so on and so on. And that's why—

**PETER STEINFELS**

You know, Alan, Alan was—

**ALAN WOLFE**

—George W. Bush is the—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

There—there—there was a, there was a panel— [APPLAUSE] It was—there was a panel a couple of years ago at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, about 7000 people show up to this thing. And if memory serves, I think Peter Steinfelds was on that panel. Um, and it had to do with looking at the, uh, religious, explicit religious references and so on in the—or at least one person did—in the, in the speeches of President Clinton, and George Bush. Uh, or George Bush specifically and someone compared it to Clinton and it turned out, uh, that it was— that Bill Clinton referenced Scripture more frequently than Bush did.

**ALAN WOLFE**

Which proves my point—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

And, and, and with—and as Bill Galston likes to say, it's because he knows it better. Um— But at any rate it's— the no—the notion... [LAUGHTER] The notion that, the notion that you know, if we—I mean the, the political agenda that seems to be going on is because one opposes certain policies, one therefore has to oppose, uh, the fact that those promulgating these policies, uh, have strong religious beliefs. But when you—but if you favor the policies, uh, then presumably, the religious references, the use of Scripture and so on, is something to, to good ends, and I think that, uh, if we wanna blame, uh, Barry Lynn mentioned the faith-based initiative, I think, uh, the person responsible's right here. I mean this was a—this was a Clinton administration initiative. So I think there's a lot of, of, of strange, uh... there's a lot of history being rewritten here about how these things wok. And I also think, Alan, you're not—and I, then I know I've gotta stop here. You're not giving the American people enough credit to sort out the use and abuse of religion in the public sphere. I mean if indeed the Bush administration were so diabolically clever as you seem to claim it is, why aren't his, why aren't his ratings at up at 80 percent? Uh, his approval ratings, people have a capacity to think critically about this, give people some



credit.

**SUSAN JACOBY**

Uh—I—Peter—oh. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

One question. Uh, be brief, please—

**SUSAN JACOBY**

Uh, I'll—yeah, I'll, I'll—well I will, I'll, I'll forget what—I'll, I'll stop what I was going to say which is this is not a debate about Biblical references, I love it when people use Biblical references. It's like, like Barry, I don't love it when it's an obligation to con—con—finish every speech with “God bless America.” But the reason George Bush's ratings are down, is because you can't keep the reality-based world away forever. This is—just call this the revenge of the reality-based world. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

I—I—I'd like to, I'd like to throw in a question myself because, uh, despite the sparks we've seen, uh, in recent moments, uh, I detected a distressing amount of agreement underlying, many of the debaters' presentations tonight. Uh, namely there's agreement about all kinds of bad forms of religion, there certainly were not endorsements of certain kinds of use of government and legislative fiat, uh, for religious purposes. But I'm still not certain about the question, which in some ways Bill Galston posed. Uh, if the price...of getting rid of the forms of religion that bothers us

or the use of religion in conjunction with state power, or the means of getting rid of that, were to make Americans somehow or other less religious generally, pray less, read Scripture less, light Sabbath candles less, pay less attention to their religious leaders, is that the price that we think would be worth paying, and I thought Susan answered that to some extent directly in her remarks 'cause, maybe I'm wrong, she seemed to think that that would be one way of doing it especially in regard to that one third of the country.

**SUSAN JACOBY**

No—

**PETER STEINFELS**

But I don't have other people—I'd like to have other people's responses—

**SUSAN JACOBY**

But I'd like to—I, I didn't say—first of all I think that's—

**PETER STEINFELS**

Okay—

**SUSAN JACOBY**

—that's a false choice. I don't think that the—I don't think that the price we pay in, in not letting government be as involved with religion as it is in making Americans less religious at all. Uh, in fact, if you look at Europe, Alan mentioned Europe, and, and I don't entirely agree with him about this. In Europe there is in

fact much more official church-state entanglement than there has been here, all—all along. And yet Europe is indeed much more secular than it is here and probably that is the reason. So I cannot imagine why anyone would think that whatever we do about church and state will make Americans personally less religious.

**ALAN WOLFE**

Yeah, and, I—I thought it was interesting, important to—

**SUSAN JACOBY**

And I don't—not that I, not that I care, I think less religion would be better altogether.

**ALAN WOLFE**

Well, we, we—

**SUSAN JACOBY**

But I don't see why it would affect, why it would affect Americans' personal religion.

**ALAN WOLFE**

I—I was sure this issue would arise, and that's why I wanted to be on this side to point out to the audience that, we on this side can disagree with each other, on the question of whether Americans are too damn religious, and still completely agree on the question of whether America is too damn religious. That distinction just strikes me as enormously important, I am not Sam Harris, I am not Richard Dawkins, I am not—I do not object

to religion. I object to public religion, the use and deliberate manipulation of religion. That it seems to me is the problem, so Peter, my answer to your question is, we're not here to address the question you raised. The question of whether Americans are not religious enough or too re—is just not simply on the table. It's not what we're about. You wanna have Richard Dawkins debate John Polkinghorne [PH] or something like that, then have that debate. But that's not our debate. [APPLAUSE]

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

Um, Alan, public religion, um, refers not just to the people that you don't like misusing religion as you understand it. It refers quite specifically to the kinds of movements and efforts that our side has identified. That *precisely* involves bringing religion into the public square as a form of public religion. I think that your understanding of religion, is, is of a kind of quiet, contemplative sort where it's all about, uh, it's all about my own, uh, orientation. But as we all know, historically, uh, various religious traditions have strong histories of different forms of social engagement. The question is what does that engagement look like, what does it involve? And none of the folks that we talked about, none of the efforts we talked about, called for anything like, uh, establishing a faith, anything like something like quasi-establishment, but certainly believe that there had to be this strong public witness and public presence. And I think that's,

that's part of what—that's why I said we're awfully damn American, that's what America historically has very much been about, and it's one of the fruits...and here I think might be the one point where I agree with Susan. Uh...the fruits of free exercise. You precisely have the kind of hollowing-out of the religious traditions in Europe because of that history of church-state, which I think destroys religion over a long time when you've got established religion. We don't have that, we've never have that.

**ALAN WOLFE**

But we have people who want it. That's the point—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

No, no we don't—

**ALAN WOLFE**

—I couldn't agree with you more that—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

They don't want a—they don't want an established religion, they have too strong a stake in free exercise—

**PETER STEINFELS**

Uh, could I—

**MAN**

Bill, Bill—

**ALAN WOLFE**

No, the free exercise for the majority—

**PETER STEINFELS**

Well, here's—here's what we're going to do at this point.

[LAUGHTER] I would like actually to take a few more questions without getting responses, simply to get the questions, and if panelists would like to respond to one or another of them, that would be fine. There's a question, I—I encourage people to sit in the first row so there's a question right here, there's a woman right here, uh, who's eager to ask a question. And then we'll move back to that one and then over here, let's take, uh, three questions quickly... [PAUSE] And please be brief with your questions too.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER (female)**

My name is Inga Gittelman [PH] and I have just one question. How do you define religious. You all seem to see something else. And in the end you're all the same.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you. Question was, uh, that, that the definition of religion was at the, perhaps at the center of this, this debate.

**MALE QUESTIONER**

Hello, can I, uh, can I just—

**PETER STEINFELS**

Quest—what's—

**MALE QUESTIONER**

I've had, I've had this for a while, Peter—

**PETER STEINFELS**

All right.

**MALE QUESTIONER**

Hi, uh, I'm Professor Marufi [PH], I'm also from Fordham University. And I—I have a question, I think, one of the things that bothered me a little bit about this discussion, is that religion in my mind is a variable, it's not a constant. So it's very hard to answer this question. But the—what that leads me to believe, is that, the extent to which people use religion to underwrite ethics and morality, has an implication for public policy. So my question to you is, to what extent does the majority have the right, because of their religious beliefs, to dictate morality, conscience, and ethics, to people who don't share those beliefs who might be in a minority.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Good, thank you, and one more.

**MALE QUESTIONER**

Uh, Christopher Rizzari [PH]. My question in this debate has always been, where are the main-line churches in this debate, I think if you were to go to the Midwest, or even New Jersey, the most visible churches [LAUGHTER] that you would see are the big mega-corporate churches. Where are—where's the 150-year-old Episcopalian churches that have had white members who were involved in abolition and the civil rights movement, where are

those churches in this debate.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much, I hope that in their remarks, uh, some of the—their closing remarks, some of the debaters may in fact, uh, take up some of those very good, uh, cle—questions that I’m glad we got on the floor and I’d particularly like to thank all the audience for making your questions brief. It’s now time, uh, to vote. Uh, here’s the ticket if you want to vote for the motion... you tear off the “For” from the top and slip it into the ballot boxes. If you are against the motion tear off and deposit the “Against” and if you still don’t know where you stand just put the entire ticket in the box. The ballot boxes will be given to one person...at the end of the row and passed along, please pass them quickly to your neighbor... And one of the ushers will then take the box and pass it on to the row behind you. Everyone should get a chance to vote... Please don’t reach over, wait till the ballot box gets to yourself.

[EXTRANEIOUS TALK]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Uh, now, if we could do the rest of the voting, uh, quietly, if we could, if we could proceed a little bit more quietly I’d like to start with the final remarks from the panelists, beginning with the side opposing the motion. And I’d ask the panelists to please speak, uh, from their places. So first, speaking against the motion, Jean



Bethke Elshtain.

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

Uh, well, as we have learned this evening, uh, the interaction of religion and politics, is a continuing tension. It's a dramatic story. Uh, we have our version of it, and you've heard a bit of that version from our side. Uh, we've heard some, some rather dismissive remarks and some ridicule from the other side. Uh, but I would ask you to reflect on the question of American civil society, uh, as you go forward into this evening. Uh, the fact that religious commitment, citizens who are believers, believers who are citizens, have been the backbone and the heart of American civil society historically, that we would be enormously impoverished without their commitment, in almost every area of social life. Now, the notion that somehow, when people bring their religious commitments to the public arena that means they're trying to "dictate" their faith to the rest of us. No, they're doing what citizens do. They're trying to persuade you of something. Uh, they're trying to get you to think about things a certain way, they're trying to get you to vote a certain way. That's what citizens do. And we should not impose some kind of penalty on those with religious convictions when they bring those convictions into public life. Now one other important point here and that is, that religion helps to provide the kind of critical self-limitation that keeps a political system from dangerous overreach.

Um, that is to say, it helps to remind us ongoingly, of the dangers of a certain kind of political power, and the attempts to take over all areas of social life by saying no, wait a minute. Uh, we have free exercise in this country, certain things cannot be dictated to us, and certain kinds of controls cannot be applied, and that's part of the American story too.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much, Jean Elshtain. Now, uh, with some closing remarks, uh, for the motion, Barry Lynn.

**BARRY W. LYNN**

Uh, I have not given a speech in the last 20 years without mentioning one person's name, so I'll mention it now. Uh, on Saturday I'm going down to Pat Robertson's Regent University Law School to judge the finals of their moot court competition. [LAUGHTER] So even he and I do chat on occasion. And I am never saying, that people like Pat Robertson, James Dobson, Jerry Falwell do not have a right to speak, do not have a right to go to the public forum, in which they find, uh, their voices heard. I'm just saying that if you speak so unpersuasively that you don't...persuade people to do what you want them to do, then don't you dare go to the government and try to get the government to force all of us to live as you would have us. [APPLAUSE] And second, uh, and final point here, it goes to a question that was not addressed, yes, terrorists came to America.

And we should at some point debate fundamentalism around the world. The truth in the matter in this real world, in every world, in this universe, is that when Pope—the late Pope John Paul II condemned the invasion of Iraq in the strongest possible words used by any modern Pope, and said that the American officials who made the decision to invade Iraq would have to answer directly to God, George Bush's response was to call in a group of so-called religious right theologians two days later to come to the White House, chat with him, and explain to the press afterwards that they were convinced that this was a just war. I believe that if President George Bush had in fact done a little more intelligence-gathering, and a little less theological butt-protecting, there would be thousands of American families and tens of thousands of Iraqi families who would not be visiting their children in graveyards. It does matter. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you, thank you very much, Barry Lynn. And now speaking against tonight's motion, Albert Raboteau.

**ALBERT J. RABOTEAU**

Um...as I hinted earlier, well, let me, let me do something first, I—I'd like to express my appreciation to the Rosenberg [sic] Foundation and its executive director, Robert Rosenberg, for this occasion. And I'd like to—

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

Rosenkranz. Rosenkranz.

**ALBERT J. RABOTEAU**

I'm sorry...

**PETER STEINFELS**

Rosen—Rosenkranz.

**ALBERT J. RABOTEAU**

Rosenkranz, I'm sorry, yeah. Can't read my own writing. Uh, thanks also to Dana Wolfe for inviting me to participate in this debate and to Vern Calhoun and Kris Kamikawa for the arrangements which they handled so graciously. I'd like to also thank my fellow panelists for their thoughtful and cogent arguments. As I said earlier I—I feel somewhat tangential to this argument, in part because the argument was about religion, or church and state, religion and political culture. The way in which I took the question—and this partly gets at the question of what is religion—was, what's the role of religion in terms of the American ethos the spirit of the American people. Uh, as we all know Jefferson changed Locke's notion of the inalienable rights from life, liberty and property, to life, liberty, and the pursuit of freedom—of happiness, excuse me, pursuit of happiness. What I see as being part of the ethos of American culture, uh, and the American, direction, has been a reversal of that, those inalienable rights. That is we are back to life, liberty, and the pursuit of

property. Property in terms of rampant consumerism which is what I see as the real danger to American culture and spirit today. Now let me close with, um, with three short stories, brief vignettes, which have to do I think with the possibility of religion consum—continually renewing itself and reminding people who are religious or who hear, uh, in some ways religious symbols, who aren't totally tone-deaf to religion.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Al—Al, your, your two minutes is up, if you can make the stories very quick—

**ALBERT J. RABOTEAU**

Okay, I'll make them, I'll make them very, very, very short, I'll make, make it only two. Uh, the first one has to do with, with Abba Serapian[PH]. Abba Serapian, uh, one day was, walking down the road. It's in the fourth or fifth century. And, um, he gives his cloak to a poor man. And as he walks on he meets another poor man who's shivering in the cold and gives him his tunic. And then he sat down naked holding the holy gospel. Someone came along and asked him, Abba, who has taken your clothes. And he pointed to the gospel book and said, this is the robber. The last quick story, one day Abba Lott went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, Abba, as much as I am I, uh, I am unable, I practice a small rule, a little fasting, some prayer and meditation and remain quiet and as much as possible guard my

thoughts. What else should I do. Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten torches of flame, and he said to him, if you wish, you can become all flame. Now I present those to you as two Zen-like koans for your reflection about the abilities of religion to...renew itself, to see beyond itself, and to point to something important for the human spirit.

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you, Al Raboteau. [APPLAUSE] And now, uh, speaking in support of the motion, uh, Susan Jacoby.

**SUSAN JACOBY**

It's been suggested that religion creates a check against government overreaching. We wish. More often than not, it pro— can also provide an excuse for government overreaching. For overreaching in general in fact. We've heard a great deal in recent months about how the only strategy for liberal Democratic candidates is to fight fire with fire, by pitting liberal religious values against the dominant conservative values of the current administration. I knew that Hillary Clinton was running for President two years ago, when for the first— when the first time she said, "*our* Bible," in those pious, sanctimonious tones. [LAUGHTER] "*Our* Bible tells us this." The problem with this is that your Bible may tell you something else altogether, as indeed was the case with the Pope on one side and the various minister

hacks Bush got together on the other. What is the Bible telling— what, telling those very religious Senators now, as they fiddle and manage not to debate while Iraq burns. I for one would like to hear a lot less about theology and a lot more about the personal moral courage that has seemed so lacking in our political process. [APPLAUSE] Uh, whoever the gentlemen said, I—I do not believe we have to have a civic morality that while for many includes religion, has to be based on more than religion. Too often, referencing religion has become not a way to demonstrate personal responsibility, but a way to avoid it. And one final thing, *It's a Wonderful Life* is a movie. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank...thank you, Susan Jacoby. Uh, we'll now have finally speaking against the motion, William Galston.

**WILLIAM A. GALSTON**

It may be a movie, but it's a little closer to reality than many of the things that Team A has presented us with this evening. Uh— [APPLAUSE]

**JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN**

Hear, hear.

**WILLIAM A. GALSTON**

I, uh...I certainly, uh, you know...I, I certainly believe, uh, that there are dogmatic Biblical literalists, no question about it. I also believe, I think with good factual warrant, that there are dogmatic

atheists. Quite frankly I don't see anything to choose between them. In my presentation, I offered three arguments about the historical contribution of religion, about the current social and political engagement of religious Americans, uh, and third about religious Americans as not being a threat to our liberties. About the first of these propositions, apparently there's no contest. Uh, about the second, apparently no contest, or at least we, we heard none. And as for the third, the only evidence that was put on the table, was a parade of horrors which as Professor Elstain has pointed out, have been rejected by the American people themselves. The Terry Schiavo affair is a perfect case in point. A question arose, from the audience, about the rule of—the rule and role of law. Uh, I would remind everyone, that Martin Luther King was not simply appealing to conscience. He was advocating for law. In his judgment, conscience led to law, so the real issue is not law and coercion yay or nay, but rather the legitimate limits of law and coercion. I'm a professor of political philosophy, I'd be happy to debate that with you for hours on end, but that is the question. Finally, uh... Reverend Lynn referred to Thomas Jefferson, this is my peroration, Peter. Uh, and, quite appropriately. Uh, he was one of our, uh, I would say least orthodox founders. Uh, and we rightly honor him for his, uh, intellectual courage. So let me close with this quotation, from Thomas Jefferson. "Can the liberties of a nation be thought



secure, when we have removed their only firm basis—a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God.” Thank you very much. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you, William Galston, and now finally, uh, speaking for the motion, Alan Wolfe.

**ALAN WOLFE**

Well, we obviously have our disagreements on this panel, we obviously have our disagreements in America, we're deeply divided on some of these questions. But when we're attacked, when our enemies launch an attack against us, we come together, and we unite, and we rely on our armed forces to defend us as a people. At the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a publicly-financed institution, designed to defend all Americans against their enemies, has been taken over by evangelical Christians who use every facility at the Air Force Academy in their capacity to proselytize for Jesus Christ. Lawsuits have been brought, inquiries have been brought, the practices continue. This is the danger of America being too religious. This is not permissible in our pluralistic, democratic society. Jean Elshtain says, that what religious believers want is the right to free exercise. For a certain kind of religious believer, the right to free exercise is the right to proselytize, and the right to free exercise is to proselytize in public at public institutions.

Our First Amendment forbids the establishment of, of a state church, and protects the right to religious freedom. But for a certain kind of religious believer in this country, the right to exercise their freedom is constituted by the right to establish themselves as the official church in their local community, in their university, or in their public institution. Those are the dangers, it seems to me. This requires that we be extremely sensitive to paradox, that we walk fine lines. Of course we want people who are motivated by matters of conscience and by matters of faith, to make public their concerns. Of course, at least I believe, our entire political culture is enriched by the private consciences and the religious convictions of Americans, I knew that on my side of the panel, there would be people who would be probably somewhat less sympathetic to people of faith than I would be. But I wanted to use my opportunity to demonstrate, that when America becomes too damn religious, it's bad for religion. It's bad for people of faith. It is bad when people use faith for what are corrupt, unreligious, and for Christians, un-Christian ends, and I hope I've been able to persuade you of that. [APPLAUSE]

**PETER STEINFELS**

Thank you very much, Alan. Uh, I would in fact like to thank all the debaters, and the audience for their very good work this evening. I think we could give them another round of

enthusiastic applause. [APPLAUSE] Before announcing the results of the audience vote, I want to take care of a few other matters. First, the next Intelligence Squared US debate will take place on Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007, here at Asia Society and Museum. The motion to be debated is, "Global warming is not a crisis." [LAUGHTER] I'm not signing up on that one.

[LAUGHTER] The remaining three debates in our spring series, including that one, are all sold out. The good news is however that beginning next week, uh, Intelligence Squared US will start selling packages on-line and by phone for the fall 2007-spring 2008 series. We will be giving priority to full-season subscribers, so to avoid disappointment, you should buy those series packages immediately. In addition, tonight's debate can be heard locally on WNYC-AM 820, on Friday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, at 2 p.m. Copies of some of our panelists' books are for sale upstairs in the lobby. You can also purchase DVD's from previous debates, here tonight or from the Intelligence Squared US website. Finally, please be sure to pick up a copy of tomorrow's edition of the *Times* of London, and the *Times Literary Supplement*, as you leave the auditorium. And, uh, now I take—there's not an envelope to tear open but the results of our debate, um... There seems to have been a slight swing from the "Don't know" to the "For the motion." Uh, after our debaters did their best to persuade you, you voted, 70.35 percent for the motion,

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and 24.34 percent against the motion, and only 5.31 percent now in the “Don’t know” category. So, congratulations to all the debaters but especially for those supporting the motion.

[APPLAUSE] Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE