

January 23, 2007

An Open Letter to the Religious Community:

Many of you have seen hateful emails, blog postings and reports circulating on the Internet and in the media about Senator Barack Obama and his religious upbringing. These outrageous charges began as reports of his potential candidacy for President emerged and, as has become a shameful custom of modern politics, it has swirled through cyberspace with a vengeance and now has been picked up as fact by Fox News and some partisan commentators.

We are writing to deplore this despicable tactic and set the record straight. We have had enough of the slash and burn politics calculated to divide us as children of God.

We must come together as one nation, and see our stake in each other as Americans. The bitter, destructive politics that have so riven our country in recent years cannot stand. As American leaders of different faiths who have worked cooperatively and greatly respect all of the 2008 candidates in both parties, we do not offer this statement as an endorsement of any individual candidate. However, certain moral standards should infuse our national dialogue, and the recent attacks on Sen. Obama violate values at the heart of this dialogue. The false and malicious attacks levied at him are anathema to all of our faith traditions, and we condemn them outright.

The facts below are no mystery. Senator Obama wrote openly about his life in his autobiography, *Dreams from my Father*. We take Senator Obama's long-cited and uncontested description of his educational and faith journey at face value.

- Senator Obama never attended a radical Madrassa nor was he ever educated in a wahabi school. In the years he lived in Indonesia as a child, from ages 6 to 10, he attended a neighboring Catholic school for two years and then a public school.
- Senator Obama was not raised in a religious household.
- Senator Obama became a Christian long before he entered politics. While working as a young community organizer in the mid-1980s, working with a consortium of churches in a depressed neighborhood of Chicago, he became a Christian and became active in Trinity United Church of Christ. He, his wife and family are still active members of Trinity today.

It is important that we take a stand today against this willful, malicious attempt to mislead and inflame - and against any further attempts to use political attacks to divide the religious community. We ask that you share this letter widely, and help us beat back these hideous tactics, whatever their source. As people of faith, we cannot allow divisive attacks like these to stand.

Dr. Robert W. Edgar
General Secretary
National Council of Churches USA

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

Salam Al-Marayati
Executive Director
Muslim Public Affairs Council

Rev. Stephen J. Thurston
President
National Baptist Convention of
America

The Rt. Rev. Preston W. Williams
President, Global Council of Bishops
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director
NETWORK, A National Catholic
Social Justice Lobby

The Rev. John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy
President
Interfaith Alliance

Rabbi Jill Jacobs
Director of Education
Jewish Funds for Justice

Alexia Kelley
Executive Director
Catholics in Alliance for the Common
Good

Dr. T. DeWitt Smith, Jr.
President
Progressive National Baptist
Convention