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## Religious Leaders & Military Experts Denounce Islamophobia

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

A group of religious leaders and military experts held a conference call today to denounce Islamophobia and to urge that the planned Islamic community center and mosque in lower Manhattan, Park 51, be built.

Rev. David Gushee, a Baptist professor at Mercer University, noted the long history of Baptist support for religious liberty, including their role in supporting the First Amendment when it was first drafted. "Baptists should recoil from intimidation directed at any religious group," Gushee said. He urged those evangelicals who have stoked the flames of intolerance against Islam to "cease and desist."

Andrew Bacevich, a retired army officer and professor at Boston University, argued that the Islamic radicals who attacked America on 9/11 want to create the perception that America's struggle against terrorism is a civilizational war, that America is at war with Islam. Bacevich also noted that he is a Catholic and that in previous times Catholics had been the object of similar anti-religious bigotry.

The anti-mosque fervor is playing into the hands of Al-Qaeda, according to Matthew Alexander, a former military interrogator and author of the book *How To Break a Terrorist*. Alexander argued that the scenes of torture at Abu-Ghraib were essential tools in Al-Qaeda's recruitment efforts and that America's success in the war on terror rests depends on defeating Al-Qaeda's ability to recruit new members.

Lisa Sharon Harper, executive director of New York Faith & Justice, was one of many commentators who praised former President George W. Bush for his forthright speeches after 9/11, in which he said that the attacks were a perversion of Islam and that our battle against the terrorists was not a war against Islam. "Fear is no excuse for muddled language and twisted truth," Harper said. She also noted that 59 Muslims were among those killed in the 9/11 attacks and that the Muslim community center organizers are "doing

everything possible to be a good neighbor? noting that the facilities at the center would be open to all.

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