



National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

May 19, 2005

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Mark Whitaker
Editor, Newsweek
Letters@Newsweek.com
251 W. 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Editor:

Christians have a deep sense of devotion, respect and honor for our holy book, the Bible. The National Council of Churches USA, which publishes the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, cherishes the freedom we have in this nation to live by the values of the Bible, propagate its message, and hold it in the highest esteem.

We believe that such rights and privileges must extend to all religious people. We grieve with all religious people when their scriptures are desecrated.

Newsweek Magazine, in its May 23, 2005 issue offers an apology for its story on the desecration of the Qur'an at Guantanamo Bay. The magazine has been irresponsible in its reporting and this is an appropriate response.

While the specific source of *Newsweek* magazine's story may not have been reliable, there are nevertheless many stories of the desecration of the Qur'an documented in the press. These include a recent story in *The New York Times* ("Inquiry Finds Abuses at Guantanamo Bay," Neil A. Lewis and Eric Schmitt, May 1, 2005), which reports on a hunger strike held by detainees in protest to such a desecration and a public apology by a senior camp officer.

We affirm the eloquent remarks of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, on May 12, 2005: "Disrespect for the Holy Koran is not now, nor has it ever been, nor will it ever be, tolerated by the United States. We honor the sacred books of all the world's great religions. Disrespect for the Holy Koran is abhorrent to us all."

In that vein we urge the Secretary of Defense to immediately inquire into these allegations and appropriately and officially reprimand those who are responsible for the desecration of the Qur'an at Guantanamo Bay, or in any other place under US military control. Indeed, if our government leaders maintain that US foreign policy is ultimately aimed at spreading freedom and democracy around the world, they should insist, because religious tolerance is a cornerstone of true freedom and democracy, that their subordinates take the utmost care not to demean the religion of those who are the intended beneficiaries of US policy. In addition we urge the President to affirm the words of the Secretary of State and use his public voice to communicate to the world that the desecration of holy books is not in keeping with the values this country holds dear.

Sincerely,

Rev. Robert Edgar
General Secretary