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### August 5, 2008: Cal Thomas Calls Obama “No Christian”

Bruce Ledewitz

*Duquesne University*, [ledewitz@duq.edu](mailto:ledewitz@duq.edu)

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Title: Cal Thomas Calls Obama "No Christian"

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8/5/2008--Cathleen Falsani, religion columnist for the Chicago Sun Times, wrote a column today about Barack Obama's faith. The occasion for the column was a commentary by Cal Thomas, who wrote that Obama is not a Christian, based in part on an interview of Obama by Falsani in 2004. Falsani is convinced that Obama is a sincere Christian and she does not betray much understanding of what Thomas is talking about. I have not read the Thomas commentary, but Thomas was presumably offering an orthodox critique of Obama's religious faith. (Perhaps the problem is that Obama won't say that Jesus is the only path to salvation.) There are several levels on which to criticize Thomas. Theologically, Karl Barth, perhaps the greatest Christian theologian of the Twentieth Century, once said that being a Christian is not a matter of believing this or that proposition, but of a relationship to Jesus Christ. (I'm paraphrasing, but close enough). He also said that we cannot know who is a Christian and who is not. Pope Benedict wrote something similar in his book Truth and Tolerance. So, theologically, Thomas is just ridiculous. On another level, some secularists would say that this whole incident shows what is wrong with allowing religion to enter politics. Imagine an election campaign in which a candidate's religious beliefs can be considered relevant to this extent. It seems quite un-American. Falsani herself calls this inquiry into Obama's beliefs, "dangerous territory." Well, yes and no. Yes, of course the American political system should not be delving into questions of Christian orthodoxy or any other religious dogmas. On the other hand, Obama himself wants to run as a Christian. He is doing this to counter the traditional Republican advantage among religious voters. So, if Thomas is suggesting that Obama is cynically using religion to attract voters, it would seem to be a legitimate topic for criticism.