



**JEREMIAH, JESUS AND DOING JUSTICE:  
OBAMA'S CHURCH, CHALLENGE AND CAMPAIGN**

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Has it actually come to this, Black people, that White folks now dare to choose our church, approve and disapprove our pastor and dictate the spiritual and social content of our sermons without blinking, blushing or showing even a modicum of shame? Are we now to abandon our self-conception and historical identity as a moral and social vanguard in this country and the world and be coerced or seduced into silent acceptance and collaboration in our own oppression and the oppression of the peoples of the world for fear of being called unpatriotic and divisive? And are we to call a halt to the prophetic voice and moral vision of our preachers, prophets, priests, ministers, imams and moral teachers; put on hold our struggles for social justice; and place our hopes in a campaign for superficial racial reconciliation rather than in a movement for serious social change and substantive justice that would heal, transform and remake the world?

Clearly, it is against the best of our ancient and ongoing moral and spiritual tradition as a people to let others establish standards of relevance and responsibility for our faith and tell us how to act in the pews, perform in the pulpit and address the critical issues of our day in exchange for the promise and possibility of a Black president in our time-. Indeed, it is a moral imperative given to us by our ancestors in the *Husia* in the early days and years of our ancient history that we are to "stand up in the midst of silence,...bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice."

The cold calculated attacks on Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright of Trinity United Church of Christ must be understood then, not simply as assaults on Barak Obama thru Dr. Wright, but also on our right and responsi-

bility as a people to worship in our own self-determined way. Certainly, the primary motivation is to weaken and fatally wound Obama's winning campaign. But it is also a racist and arrogant attempt to direct how we as a people relate to God and each other, interpret our sacred texts, read and respond to the signs of the time and engage our ancient and ongoing ethical obligation to heal, repair and transform ourselves and the world in the image and interest of the Highest Good. These critics and their media allies give a racial pass to John McCain's and Hillary Clinton's supporters whose religious and racial rants were quickly reported and dismissed. But they have focused on Dr. Wright with extended ferocity and declared Obama guilty by unapproved association with his minister and mentor.

There is nothing inflammatory or unbiblical in Dr. Wright's sermons. He is firmly rooted in prophetic Christianity that understands God, embodied in Jesus, as the God of the oppressed who requires truth and demands justice and who judges humans by how they treat the least among them. Moreover, he is African-centered and Christian-committed or as he says "unashamedly Black and unapologetically Christian." And he practices what he preaches, having developed ministries and institutions for the ill, the aged, the infant, the poor, the captive, the student, and the community in general, and has lived a long life of service and self-giving in the interest of our people.

As Martin Luther King taught, within this Black Christian tradition and understanding which Rev. Wright embraces, Christians "are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemies, for no document from human hands can make these

humans any less our brothers." Thus, when Dr. Wright speaks for the poor and less powerful, the voiceless, the victims of U.S. domestic and international policies, for the Palestinians, Iraqis and others whom the U.S. government calls our enemies, he is not being inflammatory, unpatriotic or divisive. Instead, he is working within a social justice tradition whose moral vision and vocabulary and righteous struggle expanded the realm of freedom in this country and offers an important model for oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. Assuming a similar moral obligation of his biblical namesake, he accepts the divine assignment "to root out, pull down, destroy and throw down" evil, injustice and oppression, build up the people in rightful ways and plant the seeds of truth, justice and good works in the world (Jeremiah, 1:10).

Obama is to be praised and applauded for not denouncing his former mentor, but his conciliatory speech, in spite of his good intentions of a balanced presentation, leans too heavily toward pleasing and placating Whites. He tries to draw moral equation between our anger at our oppression and White oppression of us, between attitudes emanating from oppression and the attitudes and practice of oppression itself. It is not racism, racial prejudice, wrong or divisive to note Hillary Clinton cannot really know what it is to be Black, that rich White men control this country or that the U.S. should question itself about its commitment to empire and

militarism and expect inevitable resistance to it. Nor is it right to deny the awesome suffering of the Palestinians under a brutal Israeli occupation and reduce the problems of the Middle East to the ideologies of radical Islam.

It is not wrong or divisive either to hold society accountable for its injustice, for its worship of war and wealth, and its wanton violation of the rights and lives of the peoples of the world. And we must not allow ourselves to be turned into hired priests who practice a funded faith, preach prosperity at the expense of justice, and excuse and explain away evil as a perverse act of patriotism.

The long and destructive history of racism cannot be blamed on us, cannot be explained away as a moral equivalence of mutual dislike and harm by oppressed and oppressor, Black and White. The oppressor can never have the moral status of the oppressed, and no country or people is immune from criticism in spite of its claims to elect exemption and counter charges of "anti-them" in various racial and religious forms. In spite of their indictments of us and of the voices of righteous and rightful criticism and condemnation, we must forge ahead to build a good world and start a new history of humankind, and in the midst of all our efforts continue to speak courageous truth to power, uncompromising struggle to the people, and the right and rightfulness of freedom, justice and peace to the world.