

Letter to the Editor

Cleveland Plain Dealer

Re.: The Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr.

Dear Editor:

I am writing on behalf of my friend and colleague, Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr., the recently retired pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois. I have known Dr. Wright for more than twenty years. He was the preacher for the 100th anniversary of the Antioch Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio in 1993, a church I have served as pastor since 1987. He wrote an endorsement for one of my books, *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?* He has been a guest in my home, and he has always had a warm spot in my heart. I have never known a finer gentleman, a more earnest pastor, or a more powerful preacher within the prophetic tradition that runs from Amos and Micah in the Bible to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 20th century America.

The unending reruns of selected snippets from sermons he preached at Trinity offer an entirely distorted sense of the man and his ministry. Those reruns do not reflect the 36-year ministry of this pastor and preacher. Those reruns, deemed as incendiary, do not reflect the good work being done by the Trinity Church on the south side of Chicago. More importantly, those reruns make no attempt to capture the context within which Dr. Wright's undeniable anger was expressed in some of his sermons. That anger is not without some basis. On the one hand, his anger is rooted in the persistence of racism, the staggering human and financial costs of war, and U.S. complicity in creating the tense political climate that now threatens to engulf the world in global terrorism.

People may be unfamiliar with his method of delivery, and they may also object to his choice of language, but there is nothing untruthful about what he has said in the reruns that have been airing on TV up to this point. The United States is a country largely governed by rich, white people in both the public and the private sector. Hillary Clinton has not been called by the "N" word or experienced life as a person living within a single-parent family and on limited means. As far as his more harsh language is concerned where he critiques the idea of "God Bless America" and calls for God to "damn" America instead, I invite those who object to that language to revisit the language of the prophets of the Bible who clearly held the view that God could and would execute judgment as a result of the human sins of greed, cruelty, and oppression. People may not like Wright's theology, but they at least ought to understand the tradition within which he is rooted.

Jeremiah Wright is a man about whom the nation should know more than those snippets of sermons reveal. This former United States Marine is fluent in four languages and is gifted on multiple musical instruments. He has written several books and helped to co-author or edit several more. He has an earned doctorate from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He has mentored scores of young people who are now in the Christian ministry.

His well-known but not well understood church statement about being “Unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian” has to be understood in the context of being a Christian pastor in Chicago, the home base for the Nation of Islam. Trinity UCC makes the claim that being black in America is nothing to be ashamed of, as racial bigotry had long caused black people to feel. Moreover, being a black Christian in America was nothing to apologize for, even though members of the Nation of Islam taught that all black people should convert to Islam.

Finally, Dr. Wright operates out of a theological position where the sovereignty of God over creation often leads preachers to step beyond the limits that many Americans believe are imposed by the principle of the separation of church and state. That principle is not written in the U.S. Constitution. More importantly, there have always been people whose sense of justice caused them to critique and condemn the acts of injustice perpetrated by their own government. Understanding all of this will help you understand my friend, Jeremiah Wright.

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