

Reflections on “The Storm”

May 6, 2008

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In the “storm” surrounding the Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Senator Barack Obama one has to ask who was “The Source” that examined the sermons of the Reverend Wright and excerpted, snippets from some of them, played them out of their context and then challenged Senator Obama to disassociate himself, not just from the words/sentiments of the snippets but from the Reverend Wright himself?

What was the intent of that “Source” in so doing? It would be reasonable to conclude that the intent was not to aid the Senator but to raise questions about his integrity and patriotism on the one hand and/or to cast a cloud over the authenticity of his faith background and faith commitment on the other.

That “Source” has accomplished its/their purpose. This was done by again placing out of context the words and functions of Reverend Wright’s sermons of reference and then by holding Senator Obama responsible for the references in the context of his stated political agenda—to move the nation towards an embrace of her more noble ideals and declared sense of self.

Let’s try to step back and see things in context. First, look at Reverend Wright’s sermons in context. Preaching, sermons, are to be guided by and pronouncements of/from the scriptures, the Word of God. That Word has a number of major streams or themes. Sometimes they are streams/words of instructions. Sometimes they are words/streams of comfort and sometimes these streams are words of challenge, of rebuke to both religious and secular powers. The words of instructions are sometimes discomfiting. Words of comfort are always welcome. Words of challenge, of prophetic condemnation/rebuke are stinging and are most often met with retribution.

Neither stream is the totality of the biblical message. But the biblical message is grossly distorted if it is reduced to just one stream or dimension, if the totality is not embraced/accepted. Pastors, preachers, and prophets are called upon to proclaim the total word of God. But also people of faith are called upon to hear and embrace the whole council of God. They/we can not selectively hear.

Prophetic words are intended to provoke to self-examination, to a change of course. They are not nice. They are often spoken metaphorically, in graphic descriptions where truth is not in the details of the description but in the intended impact of the description, of the metaphors. Most of the time prophetic words are denied and rejected by the intended hearer. More than rejected, the prophet is put upon. Elijah had to flee Ahab and Jezebel’s wrath and Micah Ben Emlah was placed in a dungeon. John the Baptist was beheaded. Jesus was crucified. The scripture does not confuse the prophetic personalities. They are all different. They all function at different times. What they have

in common is the burden of speaking the unpopular and unacceptable and the lot of rejection when that is done.

Second, Senator Obama as a parishioner should not have been called upon to publicly judge the prophetic word of Reverend Wright. He does not have to like them. They were not spoken to/ or about him. They were spoken to/or about government. Should he be called upon to reject the words and dimensions, the messages of ministry that have been of comfort and affirmation to people? These are a part of the whole.

Senator Obama seeks to head the government as President. As the head he would seek to lead the government into paths that make for the wholeness, the better character that the country's ideals espouse, but which in the eyes of all she has not fully or even in some matters intentionally sought to realize.

Senator Obama is not trying to preach the word of God. He has offered himself as a person who can be a catalyst, a point of healing and advancement to the nation. Reverend Wright is not attempting to lead the government. He's a preacher who must respond to the call of the whole word of God. That God calls to righteousness, (Covenantal positive relationships between himself and His people and between people and people), condemns all unrighteousness and summons to life beyond feelings "come let us reason together says the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool".

The sphere of political leadership and prophetic speaking need to hear each other. The leaders/voices of the sphere, however, are not interchangeable.

The total Word should be embraced and not just by the black preachers in the black church. The Word is for all who would claim the God of the bible fully revealed in Jesus Christ as their God.

Of course, the "Source" that researched Reverend Wright's sermon did not have in mind any thing positive. The source was probably unfamiliar with the feed bed of preaching, the nature of preaching or the aims of preaching. But the intention of throwing Senator Obama off message and diverting the focus of the nation from fateful issue, the intention of causing the Senator to become a person feared and not trusted has become abundantly clear. Whether the source succeeds depends yet upon the prevailing or no prevailing of the better soul of the country.

What is abundantly clear is that there needs to be honest discussion within the faith communities of the function of faith within national life. Is that to be affirmed only when this action/ tendencies and directions of the country are affirmed? Is there a legitimate place for the faith community to challenge, to counsel, to work for realization of the Nation's constitutionally pronounced ideals?