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**STATEMENT ON THE POLITICAL PROCESS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN
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I AM PAINED!

I am pained! Many of the media and political pundits have attempted to call into question the patriotism and character of Senator Barack Obama by repeatedly highlighting sound bites from sermons preached by his pastor and by focusing on a small portion of the Senator's remarks made at a fundraising event; remarks about what he termed bitterness felt by middle class America over the loss of their jobs through the closing of manufacturing plants and/or their exporting to other countries. These attempts have unintentionally exposed some deep and dangerous flaws in the soul and character of our political process and have revealed a perversion of the integrity of the Christian faith by some of its professed believers through a selective hearing of the words of the bible, the central book of the Judao Christian Heritage.

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The bible in many ways is to Christianity what the US Constitution is to the nation. The country's laws and practices must be in accord with the spirit and specifics of its constitution. None can selectively choose what parts one wishes to obey or ignore. Similarly, the whole of the bible lays claim upon the conscience and conduct of those who would call it the word of God. The God depicted in that word is a God who loves all people and nations and calls upon those who acknowledge Him as their God to love as He does. Of God it is said, whom He loves He also chastens. He not only blesses, but He speaks words of judgment and chastisement to individuals and nations who are in violation of His will. Those words are sometime sharp! They sting! They discomfort! They condemn! They promise, however, a purified people when they are heeded. Words of love and of confrontation are articulated by prophets/priests who know themselves compelled to speak though their words/proclamations are not welcomed by their intended hearers. Kings killed the prophets. They burned the parchments on which their words were printed. The religious sought the death of Jesus. In our recent years the prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. Prophets become victims of the ire, the wrath of the judged. The judged often comfort themselves by selective hearing: blessings are claimed, curses are rejected.

I spoke to the head of the United Church of Christ on Friday night and expressed my gladness when the leadership of the church stood to affirm the Trinity Church in Chicago and to minister to its ministers. I also expressed my pain that few if any other voices of understanding and support came from the Mainline Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in the US. The prophetic word should not have resonance only in parts of the black church.

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It appears to me that many of the non black church community, and perhaps many of our own, have become partial proponents of the heresy of Marcionism—the teachings of one Marcion in church history deemed a heretic because he claimed that the God of the Old Testament was not the God of the New Testament. Therefore, the Old Testament was not to be heeded. Many now remain silent about the relevance of the prophetic word. By their silence they are condemnatory of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It appears that to many persons of faith, to challenge the nation is to be unpatriotic. No! To love the nation is to challenge her wrongs, the violations of her constitution, and her betrayals of her highest ideals.

Senator Obama is not prophet; he should not be called to condemn the prophetic voice in order to be affirmed as a patriot. I am pained that the political process should cause him to choose the words of condemnation in order to offer himself as a viable candidate for the nation's highest office. I am pained that he was put off message—of calling our country to live into the fullness of her possibilities and promise. That calling is true patriotism. That it is the voice of true Americanism.

I am pained that the majority of those of the news media are so ill prepared to speak of matters of faith that they are unable to pose questions of substance; rather do they raise questions of trivialities. Yet, tis they who help frame the categories of understanding of such a great swarth of the nation's minds.

I am pained that the political process has become so flawed that character destruction is the top news worthy matter rather than sound, substantive policy proposals and direction settings. I thought that Senator Clinton had so much going for her that she would likely become the democratic candidate for president and that she might win. I

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thought that she would make an excellent president. But it appears that she and her strategists did not figure on nor plan for the caliber and promise of the candidacy presented in Senator Obama. Why this failing? Is it revealing?

Now she is fighting for the life of her candidacy. I am pained that she finds it politically necessary and/or advantageous to play the game of personality destruction.

I am pained that Senator Obama feels forced to flaunt with the same tactics.

I am pained that current disputations may so muddle the distinctions of the two political parties that the clear choice needed for the general election in November may be blurred and even lost in the washout of low and vile political practices.

Even so, I urge you to go to the polls and vote your convictions regarding the candidates. And pray that the political process will not leave as a casualty in its wake the better character of the country.

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