

March 2008

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Christian in Name Only

His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.
--Isaiah 56:10

Questions concerning the origins of life and the headship of husbands were fast-pitched to Mike Huckabee during presidential debates last fall, but not to other contenders, Republican or Democrat, including at least two who describe themselves as “devout” Christians. But one of them, Barack Obama, is being questioned about the unusual teachings of Rev. Jeremiah Wright, his longtime pastor-mentor.

Sen. Obama (D-IL), attends the 8,000 member Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago where *Nation of Islam* leader Louis Farrakhan is welcome but “white America” and Israel are not. During a CNN interview last week with Anderson Cooper, Obama said he was not personally aware of race-based sermons or that his church aggressively promotes “black empowerment.” But now that shocking videos of racially-charged sermons have aired on cable news and the Internet for several days, Mr. Obama’s memory is refreshed and he says he will set the record straight.

Obama now acknowledges that Rev. Jeremiah Wright sometimes espouses things he personally doesn’t agree with. But he also hinted that America has a chance to finally get beyond racism if it sends him to the White House. Though Obama failed to explain why he has remained in fellowship at Trinity United for some twenty years, most talking heads think his speech went over fairly well. Given his considerable rhetorical talents, Gary Bauer thinks Obama probably could have recited “The Cat in the Hat” and reached at least second base with the media. Whether or not it was good enough to bring him to home plate in the April 24th Pennsylvania primary, remains to be seen.

For the first time in nearly six weeks, Sen. Hillary Clinton leads Obama, 49 percent to 42 percent in daily tracking polling conducted this past Sunday to Tuesday. His most recent lead (March 9-11 polling) showed him ahead 50 percent to 44 percent. While it is presumed that Obama still has a lock on his party’s nomination, Democrats fear that he may now be “damaged goods” when it comes to the November general elections.

Evidence that Obama may indeed despair of independent voters who were formerly interested in his candidacy, is expressed by Mary Katharine Ham, a thirties-something managing editor for *Townhall.com*. She writes:

“There are things I like about Barack Obama. Until the most vitriolic of the Jeremiah Wright sermons surfaced, Obama’s post-racial rhetoric was appealing to me. I believed that he believed it, and that his candidacy really did have the power to lift the nation and the Democratic Party, which has trafficked shamelessly in racial demagoguery for decades, above the “racial stalemate” he speaks of.

“The new revelations of Rev. Wright and the fact that Obama chose him as a close spiritual adviser for 20 years makes it nearly impossible for me to buy what the Messiah is selling.”¹

Up to this point, Democrats have been playing heavily to America's evangelical Christian community hoping to close the "God gap" between Republicans and Democrats. So far, Obama has made inroads with leaders of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) who are of late concerned with global warming. The appearance of a budding relationship with Pastor Rick Warren, author of "The Purpose Driven Life," hasn't hurt either. Obama was featured some time ago at Warren's global Aids summit at Saddleback Church.

But concerning other issues of importance to evangelical Christians, such as abortion and homosexual marriage, Obama is plainly wide of the mark. His tolerance for both is found, he says, "in the Sermon on the Mount rather than some obscure passage in Romans."

Although Obama's interpretation of fundamental biblical truth invites challenge, he is at least aware of the "obscure passage." Many who are known as Christians may not know that much.

In another "obscure passage," the prophet Isaiah said of Israel, "They declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not." (Isaiah 3:9) Chances are Isaiah might say the same of America were he to visit most any city from Tacoma to Tallahassee. In Israel, no godless act brought shame. In America, no godless act is unregaled—or so it seems.

Perhaps speaking to our generation, Isaiah says: "In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach" (Isaiah 4:1). Most Bible commentaries suggest that judgment will bring war, killing many men and resulting in seven women proposing to one man to take away the stigma of being unmarried and dying childless.

The Rev. David Wilkerson sees another meaning to that passage. He believes that the virgins were seeking an arrangement void of love, courtship, intimacy, or forsaking all others. He says Isaiah is describing women who are not looking for a man to love—they just want his name along with a loveless, noncommittal marriage that will provide them with a certain status.

"Often in Scripture," says Wilkerson, "the number seven represents spiritual things. Most likely, these seven women are meant to represent a certain people who appear to have a part in God's kingdom. They're telling this man, 'We'll make our own living and provide for ourselves. All we want is your name, to take away our reproach. We want to appear good before the world. Your name will give us that kind of status.'"²

Rev. Wilkerson goes on to say he believes Isaiah is speaking of the church, and the man these seven women wish to marry is Jesus. In times of turmoil, would-be believers will try to have a marriage of convenience with Christ. Yet such believers are Christian in name only.

I am strongly persuaded that people who enter a loving relationship with Jesus do not knowingly engage in sinful indulgences or take pleasure in those who do. Nor do people who carry a cross slumber in church, contemplating ways to make Jesus more culturally relevant (translation: less offensive) to a very troubled generation.

It's getting late. If nothing else, maybe we can go outside and at the least, start barking!

Rick Forcier

¹ Mary Katharine Ham, "Obama's Squandered Chance at Post-Racialism," Townhall.com, 3/19/08

² David Wilkerson, "Christian in Name Only," March 29, 2004