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March 28, 2008
Posted: 3/28/08

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The now-familiar images of Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, calling down God's wrath on America raise questions for Christians: What place does rage have in the pulpit? And when should worshippers show their displeasure with the pastor's preaching by leaving the church?

Professors Beth Newman of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond and Roger Olson of Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary in Waco agree Wright's anger must be understood within the context of the African-American experiences and worship.

Anger is an appropriate response to injustices experienced and prejudices endured, Newman noted.

"Even God gets angry," she said. "The Bible says to be angry and sin not."

Does a 30-second video clip qualify one to pronounce judgment upon the ministry of another? Regardless of his momentary offenses, should Wright's comments, so offensive to many, negate a lifetime of ministry?

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Newman suggests that although the language Wright used is offensive, she interprets it as Wright's calling down judgment on the nation that has allowed many of its people to suffer racial injustices and indignities.

White American Christians must struggle to comprehend the depth of humiliation racism creates as well as the rage black liberation theology expresses, Olson noted.

“Black theology is full of righteous indignation or simply black rage. It may be debatable how justified it is, but I can understand it even if I think that at times it crosses the line,” he said.

“The way he (Wright) is saying it is unfamiliar to a lot of people who don’t attend black churches. When you are in the pulpit in a black church, you are expected to be passionate. That’s what he was doing.”

Furthermore, Newman believes different worship expectations constitute one substantive difference between African-American and white churches.

She cites a conversation between Methodist bishop William Willimon and an African-American pastor. Willimon asked the pastor to explain the lengthy worship services.

The pastor responded, “Our people are repeatedly told during the week that they are less than what God created human beings to be. So when they come into worship, we have to set things right and give them the vision they should have of themselves and who they are in God’s story. It takes a long time to do that.”

Should Sen. Barack Obama—or any other worshippers—have left the church after Wright’s sermon? Neither professor thinks so.

“That smacks of a kind of consumer approach,” reasoned New-man. “‘If it doesn’t meet my needs, or if I don’t agree with what is said, why don’t I go somewhere else?’ I think that a part of what it means to be the church together is to be there with each other even during those times we think the other is mistaken. I think one of the things the church in the United States needs to aspire to is the willingness to stay put.”

Each professor emphasized, however, that at times leaving a church is appropriate. How does a person know when to leave? Olson offered this advice: “When you find that you are not able to contribute constructively to

the congregation and by your presence to edify others, it is probably time to look elsewhere. I would not leave just because I disagreed with what the pastor said unless it was terribly heretical or blatantly racist or something like that. That raises the question: Was Rev. Wright being racist? I have trouble judging that."

Perhaps it is precisely that issue that is most theologically troublesome. Does a 30-second video clip qualify one to pronounce judgment upon the ministry of another? Regardless of his momentary offenses, should Wright's comments, so offensive to many, negate a lifetime of ministry?

While Martin Marty taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School, he and Wright became close friends. He takes strong exception to some of the things Wright has done, but cautions against writing him off. "I've been too impressed by the way Wright preaches the Christian gospel to break with him," Marty asserted.

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