

A Message From our **PASTOR**

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The Christian Faith **CONFRONTS** Conservative Fanaticism

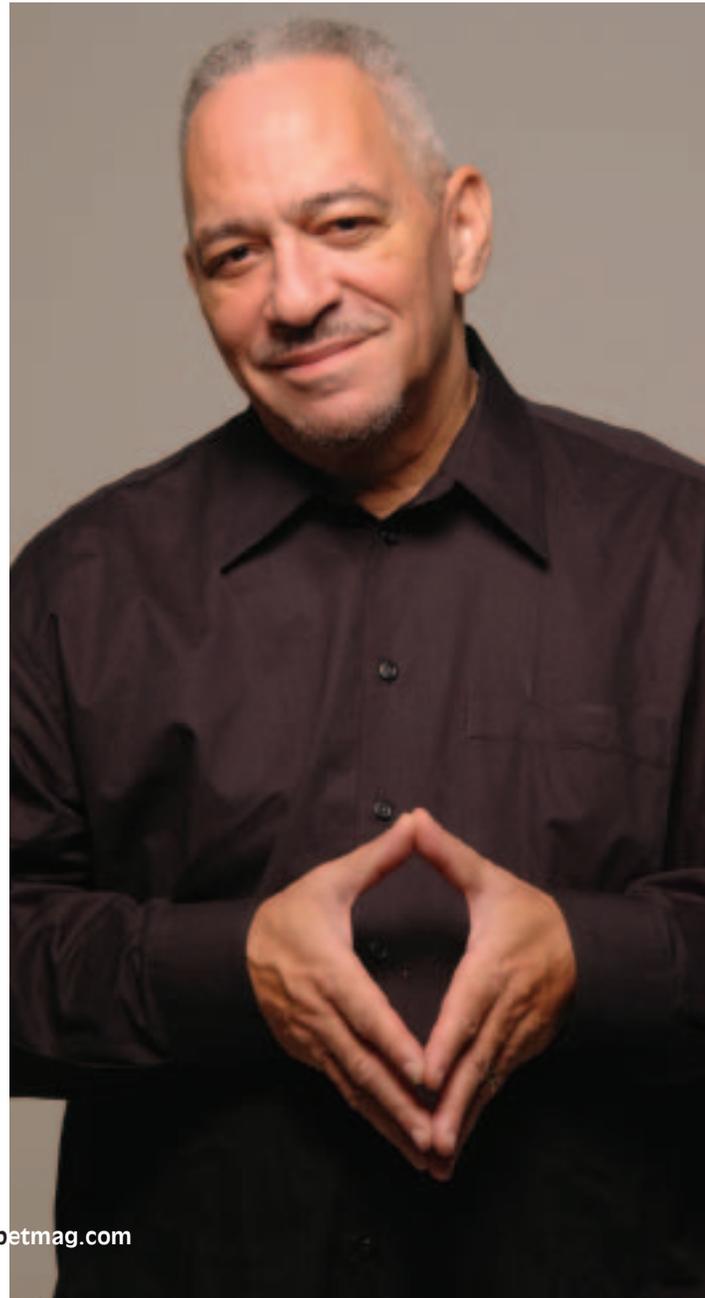
As the years roll by (I turn 64 this month!), I find myself looking back more than I find myself looking forward! As I look back, I see some giants looming large in my past and those giants have helped to shape the faith that I share and the faith that I preach. I see giants like Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Sr., Dr. Mary Henderson Wright, Reverend Hamilton Martin Henderson and Mrs. Mamie Henderson (my maternal grandparents) and Dr. Thomas Howard Henderson, my mother's brother and the president of Virginia Union University while I was a student there and a close colleague (and best friend) of Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor – another giant).

I see those men and women as giants in my life. The current crop of newcomers on the Christian scene would call these giants “cultural contradictions.” Why? Because they are African Americans from the Deep South. They are also African American giants who came out of “the country,” but who left “the country” far behind them as they embraced a Christian faith that is *far* more than a litmus test list of “do’s and don’ts.”

Those giants in my past taught me that the Christian faith is far more than what the conservative fanatics are making it out to be. Unfortunately, the media that is right wing and conservative (and Republican controlled) is only focused in on the conservative fanatics and the media is mis-educating the world and (mis-educating the African American community) as to what it means to be a Christian in the 21st century. The media, thank God, is not the ministry, however, and the media does not make up the list of giants in my past who have shown me by their lives and their legacy what true Christian faith is for an African American living in these tense times.

The conservative fanatics are made up of folks who are called “al-Qaeda” and/or “God Bless American Christians.” I will say more about that in a moment. The conservative fanatics are the people who make Christianity and “moral values” a matter of gay marriage, abortion, stem cell research and fighting a war against terrorism.

The rest of the Christian faith gets sidelined. The overwhelming majority of the things that Jesus taught gets lost in the emotional wedge issues of conservative fanaticism and African Americans who do not have a strong religious foundation or a Christian education background get sucked up, vacuum-cleaner style, in the media hype like small stores in the path of Wal-Mart!



The giants in my past taught me how to use both my head and my heart as a human being made in the image of God. They taught me in the words of Reverend Stan Purdum (a Methodist pastor from North Canton, Ohio), that the Christian faith is solidly based on the Bible. It does not see, however, the Scripture as God's *final* word on every subject. It sees, rather, the Word of God as a "foundation from which to process new information!"

Since 9/11/01, George Bush has convinced many Americans that to criticize his illegal war against Iraq is to be unpatriotic. That is conservative fanaticism. The Christian faith handed down to me by my giants teaches me to appreciate "an understanding of faith that focuses on matters of justice for *all!* Reverend Purdum puts it this way: "We are helped by an understanding of faith that recognizes the complexities of existence that is comfortable with not having all the answers and does not feel it necessary to defend God ..." against all critics!

It is that understanding of our faith that makes it possible for the giants in my past who taught me to have faith and makes it possible for me to have a personal experience of faith, to have a personal relationship with the Lord, to believe that Jesus is the "I Am," and to trust God for most of the things that I will never understand!

Conservative fanatics, however, are not comfortable with not having all the answers! They don't want to learn how to think. They don't want a faith that makes them think. They want to be told what to think and then they want to turn around and tell others what to think! Their churches are bursting at the seams, while churches that teach people to think are not bursting at the seams!

Barbara Reynolds helped me to put that reality in perspective while at a specially-called meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Pastors Conference in July. We met in St. Kitts to look at a media strategy for getting the message of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference before the American public (and before the world). The media only covers the conservative fanatics when it comes to religion. The media does not find the principles of the true Christian faith newsworthy.

The faith handed down by Samuel DeWitt Proctor, the faith taught to me by Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Sr. and Dr. Mary Wright, the faith lived by Dr. Thomas Howard Henderson and the faith that teaches Africans to use their minds as Jesus said ("*Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy mind*"), that faith is not exciting. That faith

does not make headlines.

That faith does not bomb abortion clinics. That faith does not say that a vote against George Bush is a vote against God.

That faith does not say that gays are going to hell. That faith does not say that we are right and everybody who is not on our side is wrong. The Christian faith that was given to me (from my past, that I keep looking back over) is a faith that faces each new challenge with the understanding that there would have been no civil rights movement if it had been left up to Christian fanatics. Christian fanatics used the Bible to keep us in slavery. Christian fanatics used the Bible to justify segregation and apartheid!

Christian fanatics were against Martin Luther King, Jr. Christian fanatics thought Dr. King had overstepped his boundaries when he moved from preaching against the evils of racism to preaching against the evils of war! It is that faith, however, that I embrace with all of my heart because it is of God, whom Jesus told me to love with all of my heart!

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, while speaking at Yale Divinity School in March of 2004, said something very important in terms of understanding the difference between the Christian faith and Christian fanatics. She said: "We need to remember that we were not attacked on September 11th by the Muslim world or by the Arab world. We were attacked by individuals belonging to a single terrorist group. Their crimes were not about religion because al-Qaeda is no more representative of Islam than the Ku Klux Klan is representative of Christianity!"

Conservative fanatics line up on the side of al-Qaeda or they line up behind George Bush. Both are terrorists! Both believe that war is the answer. Both believe in murdering innocent people.

George Bush lied to the public. George Bush lied to the Congress and as a result of his lies over 1800 Americans are dead and over 100,000 Iraqis are dead. The 1800 Americans who died are military. The 100,000 plus Iraqis who are dead were civilians. They were innocent people.

Madeline Albright, in that same Yale speech, indicates that those of us who embrace the Christian faith – and not conservative fanaticism – believe that we can "unite the world in our position to the murder of innocent people. But we

will never unite the world in support of the idea that Americans have a unique relationship with God or a better understanding of God's will than the worshippers from other cultures or lands." That kind of talking and that kind of thinking scares conservative fanatics.

Conservative fanatics want us all to believe that our relationship with the Lord is the only relationship there is. They want us to believe that we have a better understanding of God's Will than everybody else. They even want us to believe, as George Bush, that God tells us to go to war!

We as people of faith desire to believe what we want to believe. We tend to discard the things that we don't want to believe, however. Just ask the average Christian about sexual intercourse outside of marriage. As long as it is not gay intercourse, you don't get too much opposition! I am talking statistics, not what people say with their mouths. I am talking about what they do with the lives – not their *talk* but their *walk*!

We also enjoy believing what makes us feel good. That is why the prosperity churches are bursting at the seams. That is why people are flocking to conservative fanatic worship centers. Madeline Albright said in her Yale speech, however, that "faith does not always lead to wisdom, and in today's tinder box of a world, we had better find a way to start putting out fires instead of lighting new ones."

Conservative fanatics are experts at lighting new fires. George Bush's speechwriter is a conservative fanatic. He introduced into the President's "Siege of the Nation" speech last year the wedge issue of a constitutional amendment for marriage being between one man and one woman." He certainly lit a new fire. That new fire caused the re-election of the man who lied to lead us into war!

I told my wife on the night of that speech, "Well, he has just driven a wedge right into the heart of the Christian community. With that one line, written by a speechwriter who is a graduate of Wheaton College, he has summed up next year's election."

Creating wedge issues and causing Christians to start fighting among themselves lights new fires. Lying about a war and lying about the Lord lights new fires. Getting Christians to believe that God is on *our* side and not on the side of humanity that God created, lights new fires.

That is the methodology of al-Qaeda. That is the methodology of Muslim fanatics. That is the methodology of right-wing thinkers and to repeat Albright's warning, "In today's tinder box of a world, we had better find a way to start putting **out** fires" rather than constantly lighting new fires.

The Christian faith that my giants taught me does not say what the Christian fanatics say. The Christian fanatics say that God is on our side. The Christian faith says we had better hope that we are on God's side! We had better try to make sure that we are on God's side, and we need to be honest about falling short of what God has asked us to do!

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The same conservative speechwriter (the graduate of Wheaton College) came up with the term “**axis of evil**” that George Bush has made famous. Christian fanatics like that term but the Christian faith teaches that in this world there is another “axis of evil.”

Jesus said that God loves the **world** – not just America! The Christian faith says that we are to look at the world that God loves through the eyes of Jesus (“*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.*”). When we look at the world through the eyes of Christ, what we see is that the majority of the world’s people are threatened each day by the **axis of evil** that is called poverty, ignorance and disease. That **axis of evil** causes far more avoidable deaths and terror, and that **axis of evil** is at the root of the desperation that people feel and the loss of hope that they experience!

The greed of Christian fanatics that has caused a war for oil in Afghanistan, a war for oil in Iraq and a war for oil in Sudan ignores the **axis of evil** that causes the deaths of the citizens of those countries and the citizens of the world. Christian fanaticism, as a matter of fact, turns its eyes away from the women being raped in Angola, the Congo, Darfur and any place where the people are of color! Do you see anything wrong with that picture?

Christian fanaticism values white life more highly than the lives of people of color. Christian fanaticism squanders wealth and consumes the world’s resources instead of sharing those resources and being good stewards of the gifts given to us by God! Christian fanaticism sees absolutely nothing wrong with staring at frivolous entertainment while averting its eyes from the suffering going on in God’s world. Christian fanaticism boasts over and over again about how good we are and how people don’t like us because of “our way of life.”

The Christian faith, however, teaches me that **every human being counts!** To paraphrase Secretary Albright, if we truly believe that every human being counts, if we truly reflect upon what that sentence is saying and then if we turn around and act upon the fact that every human being really does count – and *act* upon it as a nation while acting upon it every day in our own personal lives, we will have the basis for unity within our borders and we won’t need a homeland security.

We will also have the basis for unity with freedom-loving people around the world regardless of what their personal faith is (Christian, Muslim, Jew, Sikh or Hindu); and then

we will stand firmly on the teachings of Jesus against the Apostles of hate who say that murder is pleasing to God!

It is the Christian faith that teaches me that every human being counts. Jesus said that God loves the **world** – not just America! Since every human being counts, what I am called upon to do is to take each day as a new opportunity to meet the demands of the faith that he asked to live when he said, “Follow me.” I am also asked to pray and *ask* God to bless America – not to *demand* that God will bless America or to assume that God is blessing America!

For Christian fanatics, that is a litmus test of patriotism. For the Christian faith, it sounds more like what the Apostles of hate are saying as they crash planes into skyscrapers screaming at the top of their lungs, “By the will of God!”

I left you hanging a moment ago when I said that Barbara Reynolds helped me to clarify the large numbers flocking to the “worship centers” of Christian fanatics. The sanctuaries of mainline churches like the United Church of Christ are not bursting at the seams while the sanctuaries of Christian fanatic houses of worship are getting bigger and bigger. I was wondering about that disparity and I verbalized it at the media meeting in St. Kitts.

Barbara Reynolds said to me in an offhanded way, “Nellie can get more people in one concert than you, T.D. Jakes, Creflo Dollar and Joel Osteen combined!” The numbers who flock to hear foolishness is not what counts.

What people of faith do about this world that God loves after all the shouting is over is what really counts. That is what the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Pastors Conference is all about. That is what the faith that was handed to me by the giants in my past is all about and that is what I have been preaching about for 33-1/2 years here in the pulpit of Trinity United Church of Christ. 

Respectfully yours,



Pastor Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.