

As clergy and lay followers of Jesus the Christ, we the undersigned affirm and uphold the Christian testimony and personal declaration of faith made by Barack Hussein Obama, the 44th President of the United States of America. We endorse the reconciling and challenging words of our colleague, Rev. Gil Caldwell, in the article below: "The Elephant in the Room is Race"

As citizens and adherents to the United States Constitution, we believe it is a public right and a democratic virtue to challenge any President's policies and politics. We also believe it is unfair, uncivil, divisive, inequitable and unjust for a religious preference to be ascribed to President Obama that he has not claimed. We call on people of faith, citizens of this nation and any who value fairness to join us in correcting the false information and baseless claims that remain a part of our national public discourse.

"The Elephant in the Room is Race"

By Gil Caldwell

**"As a black male Obama belongs to what is arguably - from a historical perspective - the most reviled and oppressed group in our society. Moreover, he carries a foreign, even Muslim-sounding name. But explicit racism is no longer in vogue in mainstream America. These polls show that people are circumventing the taboo by using Islam as a proxy for race." (Ramzi Kassem)**

This is the way Ramzi Kassem concludes his article, "[Why they call Obama a Muslim: Rule out the other theories and the elephant in the room is race.](#)" Kassem is a Professor of Law at The City University of New York. His article appeared in the Sunday, August 22nd, NY Daily News.com.

Many of us have known that we were not in a post-racial/racist time. We also knew that despite the racial "progress" that blacks have made, the elephant of race was still in the room. We rejoiced in the presidential primary campaign of Barack Obama. However, during the primaries there was evidence of "the elephant in the room". Some of us attempted to address that reality, but we knew we were between a rock and a hard place if we wanted to see Barack Obama win the primaries and move on to the general election. We knew that many of the attacks on Rev. Jeremiah Wright and Trinity United Church of Christ were expressions of the elephant of racism. But, our desire for the election of Barack Obama prompted caution on our parts; a caution that caused many to become silent accomplices to the lie that race/racism had little relevance to the candidacy of Barack Obama. I knew that even though the "styles" of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jeremiah Wright were different, they were saying some of the same things about our nation that has not become what it claims it wants to become. I wrote in a letter that was published in the New York Times that Drs. King and Wright said much of the same, but the style of Martin King allowed people to focus on his message rather than on him as messenger. This, I suggested, was not true of Jeremiah Wright. In other things that I wrote I pointed out that the critiques of both King and Wright were the same, but somehow this remembering of history did not gain resonance in the media that received my letters to the editor and op-ed submissions. And now, President Obama is the recipient of the criticisms and "being called out of name" in the same ways that Martin King and Jeremiah Wright experienced. "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" I offer the following suggestions relative to our national direction:

Allow this "best of times/worst of times" moment to be a learning moment. The elephant of racism (although we seek to speak that word as softly as possible) is to be found among our friends of the religious/political left as well as the right. The inability of much of the left to recognize that it has not

finished its struggle with its racism is obvious. And those on the right, with whom some have shared a common bed on some issues, have resorted to the distortions, fear mongering and innuendo that "back in the day", frightened folk into silence about racial segregation. A litmus test I have used to determine how deep a commitment persons have to the elimination of racism is to ask "Where were you and/or your predecessors during the Civil Rights Movement?" Some of my colleagues who have found meaning in the ministries of some of today's mega church pastors have told me that, when they have asked that question, all they got was a blank stare or evasiveness.

We who are black in predominantly white denominations are challenged to break free from the seduction of "integrated success" and our expertise in engaging in the "sound of silence" on race matters, and become the "teachers" in this time of such obvious racial ignorance. I sought to say this in my "Black Folk in White Churches" article in a February 1969 issue of the Christian Century and in a later United Methodist church school pamphlet, "Can Blacks Be Christian?" (A response to the significance of Malcolm X and the reality of the Nation of Islam, as critics of the Christian Church).

We whom Kassem writes of as being "from a historical perspective - the most reviled and oppressed group in our society" (black males), in cooperation and coalition with black women, are challenged to enable black folk and black community to distinguish between Symbol and Substance. We have allowed "the first black" designation of our breakthroughs into previously all-white settings to become heavy on symbol and little on substance. We have not been as astute as we could be in asking once we "arrived" to desegregate the church and other institutions; "What are the theological, political, missional, equality, understandings of authentic democracy deficits, that made you at one time exclude people like me/us"? Some of us are asking President Obama as the occupant of the White House to be a race advocate and teacher/prophet in ways that we have not been in our denominations, colleges, universities and other institutions.

If, despite any differences we might have with President Barack Obama, we have not understood that the assaults upon him (and his spouse and children) have a racial component, we are deaf, dumb and blind. Of course, ALL Presidents get criticized; of course WE might have done some things differently if we had been elected President. But, if we do not hear the Call to Action and respond, a call made clear by the Kassem article, then there will come a time when our children and grandchildren, our nieces and nephews as they read about the presidency of Barack Obama, will wonder why were we invisible and irrelevant and on those few time when we did speak, we were incomprehensible.

Today's chaos will continue if we do not proclaim in word and deed that the existence of racism makes impossible, the possibility of our becoming, "The Beloved Community".

I quote with some frequency the words Arsenio Hall once used to begin each edition of his TV program; "Let's Get Busy". It is time that we get busy as well.

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52. Pastor Jan Brown, Trinity Faith United Methodist Church, Detroit, MI
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82. Pastor Ronald Weatherford, Collins Grove UMC, Greensboro, NC
83. Pastor Sharon White, New Hope United Methodist Church, Anderson, IN
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86. Pastor Lance Eden, Beyond Blessing Church, New Orleans LA
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98. Pastor Tim Bias, Hyde Park United Methodist Church, Cincinnati, OH
99. The Rev. Karen Greenwaldt, Nashville, TN
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