

## Why Wright is Wrong

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The Reverend Jeremiah Wright yesterday addressed the National Press Club seeking his fifteen minutes of fame. That fifteen minutes, of course, lasted more than an hour and will continue for several days as his banter is broadcast and debated on the network news and various talk shows.

Revising history, skewing theology, and demythologizing Christianity as he spoke, his most egregious moments followed his speech in his responses to prepared Press Club questions. While most of his comments have been reviewed and rebutted by figures in the national media, one of his scintillating statements has received no further mention. The question and answer that has been so ostracized went as follows: Question: "Reverend Wright, Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father, but through me.' In light of that statement what do you think of the religion of Islam?" Reverend Wright: "Jesus also said, 'Other sheep have I that are not of this fold ...'"

Now it is understandable why the secular media would not want to comment on such a question and response. There is no politically correct way to handle the commentary, since it would expose the usually carefully guarded (or censored) belief system of those in the public eye, except the carefully-crafted-to-be-palatable "faith" of political figures released at election time. Whether one addresses the question or the answer, criticizes or upholds it, this exposé is certain.

From an interpretation that is literal, that takes the meaning of words at their face value, these words of Jesus taken from John chapter 14 can be understood by everyone. In the context of this verse (verses 1-5) Jesus and His disciples are having a discussion about His return to heaven and Jesus' promise to come again and take them there (to the Father's house). When asked by one disciple how this would be possible, Jesus explains (verse 6) that He is the way (to God) because He is the truth (of God), and the life (God gives eternally) is found in Him. Therefore, the only means of access to heaven (the Father's house) is through a relationship with Him. Whether or not they personally believed it, whoever posed this question at the Press Club understood this literal meaning.

Now we come to the Reverend Wright's interpretation. His bravado (bolstered by his fan base in the audience) betrayed he felt he could say no wrong. Assuming the mantle of Christ in His replies to the Pharisees, he answered them with scripture, smiled the smile of the over-confident, and thought he had won the day. But the Reverend Wright could not have been more wrong. Jesus' statement about "other sheep ... not of this fold" in the context of John 10 from which the verse is taken, is made in view of His having come as the promised Shepherd of the sheep (Ezekiel 34:11-23). In this Old Testament context, the Jewish people are addressed as "My flock." Jesus Himself explained to non-Jews that in His initial mission He had been sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). When he speaks of "other sheep" in John 10, His reference, therefore, must be to non-Jews, that is, to Gentiles, for the Bible recognizes no other distinction

(compare Romans 1:16) and. Jesus' mission ultimately included the good news of salvation through Him as Savior to those formerly outside of the Nation of Israel, as Paul says in Romans 1:5: "we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake ..." "Other sheep" then refers to another race, and not another religion and views them coming to God only through Jesus Christ "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20).

So how did the Reverend Wright make this text include Islam, and in particular the Nation of Islam and its leader Louis Farrakhan whom he has honored? In his inclusivistic theology, which admits all but white racists and U.S. terrorists (government and military), he has room for any in all religions that are oppressed. Most white Christians (and probably black ones as well) do not understand his brand of Black Liberation Theology through whose lens the Bible is seen as a manual of wresting deserved freedoms from the despots of the world, but especially the white world. In his religion God is to be defined by the experience of the individual, and therefore the god of the oppressed is not the same as that of the oppressor. In reality, however, when native Africans were being transported in slave ships, the God recognized by the slavers was most-likely understood in terms of the Bible while the god of the slaves was most-likely understood in terms of their tribal folk religion, what the Bible calls (and condemns as) "idolatry." John Newton, once Captain of a slave ship, confessed that his actions in the slave trade were an offense to the God of the Bible and turned to Him for forgiveness, what he later called in his popular hymn, "amazing grace." As a result, he was influential with William Wilberforce for having the slave trade abolished in England. No doubt some vestige of Christianity still remained in North Africa at this time, even though the religion of Islam had invaded this once Christian part of the continent and all-but eradicated the worship of the God of the Bible. At any rate, the Reverend Wright would see salvation for "all" who are oppressed (e.g. Palestinian Authority), regardless of their own oppression of other religions (e.g. Christian Arabs).

Reverend Wright has claimed to represent the black church in his present experience of being oppressed by the national (white-controlled) media. To be sure he does not represent their collective theology, which had its origin in the Bible (whose pages are black and white, not just black) and in the traditional values that resulted from the biblical worldview that once informed our American culture. Although Reverend Wright uses words like "saved" and "filled with the Holy Ghost," these are now only symbolic expressions from those better days before Black Liberation Theology when they had real purpose and power, as they still do for most of the black church in America. The problem for Reverend Wright is that misunderstanding the plain promise of Jesus as the only way to God, he has missed the message that truly sets his (and all other people) free. And that is why Wright is wrong.

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