

Grace: The Answer to the Race Card

✘ Last Sunday,

May 1st, I appeared on Roland Martin's *Washington Watch* program with two other DC pastors. Our discussion centered on the role of the clergy in politics. One of my fellow participants, Dr. Charles Wallace Smith, came to national prominence because President Obama attended his Easter services this year. Starting the Monday after Easter, conservative pundits played excerpts of one of Dr. Smith's previous messages on race almost non-stop. A January 2010 speech at Eastern University in Saint Davids, PA conveyed these emotionally charged words:

"It may not be Jim Crow anymore. Now, Jim Crow wears blue pinstripes, goes to law school and carries fancy briefs in cases. And now, Jim Crow has become James Crow, Esquire. And he doesn't have to wear white robes anymore because now he can wear the protective cover of talk radio or can get a regular news program on Fox."

Dr. Smith must have known that he would eventually get a reaction from this speech, even though it was delivered 16 months ago. Despite his low opinion of conservatives

and the Fox News team, I came prepared to affirm Dr. Smith's right to speak. Further, I wanted to remind the nation that America has been repeatedly transformed by a free pulpit. The important fruit of religious liberty is easy to forget when someone is saying something we do not like. Further, I attempted to offer a plan of action for the nation to begin to tackle the 800 pound gorilla in the room – 400 years of racial turmoil in America.

Marriage Madness in Maryland

✘ This past week the Maryland Legislature has wrestled back and forth with the issue of same-sex marriage. For months gay marriage activists have boasted that there had been no real organized resistance to their redefinition campaign. The most surprising aspect of the battle was that last week an army of traditional marriage proponents appeared in Annapolis, MD. Even though this group had testified and lobbied for over 3 weeks with focus and passion, they obviously saved the best for last. During this past week over 30 different groups lobbied in shifts. None of them had received the memo that they were supposed to be the desperate underdogs. In fact they seemed just the opposite. They were as spirited and coordinated as

Florida A&M's (my father's alma mater) marching band during halftime.

Both religious and secular groups prayed, lobbied or protested according to their own strategies and belief systems. The religiously based opposition was unique – Mormon, Pentecostal, Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterians, and AME leaders busily moved from office to office. These spiritual leaders also represented a diversity in the size of their flocks and parachurch organizations. Churches ranged from 300 members to ministries shepherding over 20,000. The nationally known, mega-church pastors moved with an equalitarian unity among their smaller church colleagues. In addition, the Collective Banking Group (consisting of over 300 member churches), the Southern Baptist Convention of Maryland (with 500 churches), the Maryland Catholic Conference with over 300 churches), the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference's Maryland chapter (with over 200 churches), and regional pastoral alliances from Frederick to the Eastern Shore were all represented.

CNN and the Black Church

☒ Two weeks ago the black church world stopped for a moment when Bishop Eddie L. Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta addressed his congregation. The 25,000-member church (once the largest of any kind in America) was briefed concerning a lawsuit that alleges their pastor had sexual relations with four young men. His statement to his church was simple but clear. He said that he never claimed to be perfect but he was not the man the media portrayed him to be. With that in mind, he declared that he wanted his day in court. Further, he vowed to fight the civil lawsuit.

Who is Eddie Long? Simply, he is one of the most exceptional orators of this generation. His international television broadcast has taken him into the homes of people around the globe. Further, as the recipient of the Trumpet Award for leadership in 2005, he has been acknowledged time and time again for his leadership in the black community. He also serves on the board of numerous universities and colleges, including Morehouse, Emory and North Carolina Central.

Filled With Misgivings: 9/11's Birthday

☒ Last Friday I had the privilege of appearing on the MacNeil/Lehrer Hour. My segment of the program had a Muslim leader, a liberal church leader who had worked extensively in New York just after 9/11, a secular current affairs blogger and myself (an evangelical minister). Our exchange was lively but thoughtful. The rest of the panel accused the majority of

Americans of religious intolerance to some degree. They saw the threat of Koran burning made by Pastor Terry Jones of Dove Fellowship in Gainesville, Fla., as emblematic of a huge national resurgence of anti-Islamic sentiments.

On the other hand, I pointed out that the nation has never fully processed its grief about Sept. 11 or been told how to conduct itself in the “new” America. I cited the fact that religious leaders have the greatest access to the bulk of the American public. Unfortunately, many of us have not addressed the twin sisters of intolerance (fear and anger) that lurk within the hearts and minds of many of our parishioners. Political correctness has not allowed spiritual leaders to talk about their members’ concerns or encourage them to be tolerant of Muslim neighbors’ faith and background. I also was able to declare that tolerance works two ways. A few years ago, my congregation experienced a situation in which several community groups opposed our desire to build in a very exclusive neighborhood. Although we have the right to erect a church on an historic farm, which included the state of Maryland’s oldest beach tree and a slave graveyard; it would not have created an environment for ministry in that community. Therefore, we chose to sell the property to a developer and find another location.

Let Freedom Ring

☒ This past Sunday, an excited and focused group of people gathered together for a singular purpose – to let our government leaders know that we stand for traditional marriage and for the right to vote on issues that

affect the moral compass of our society. Deitrick and Damita Haddon, the Rev. Walter Fauntroy and the Rev. Alveda King (niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) were among the notables who spoke. Here is the speech I delivered at that event.

Today we are gathering in front of the greatest symbol of American power – the Capitol. We come here today to express our confidence in the institution of marriage. More specifically, we have also come to say to the residents of Washington, D.C.; our two houses of Congress, the Supreme Court and the President of these great United States that marriage (in its traditional form) is one of the nation's richest treasures.

Race Based Politics

✘ Last week, Rep. Artur Davis (D) lost his primary bid for governor of Alabama in a crushing defeat. His opponent, Ron Sparks, won by 25 points in a contest which some believe shows that the race-based politics of the south have not changed. This conclusion has been postulated because traditional, non-elected black political stakeholders seem to have temporarily derailed the career of one of the Democratic Party's fastest rising black stars.

Before the emergence of President Barack Obama on the national presidential scene, lots of Democrats felt that Davis would eventually become the nation's first black president – especially members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

His credentials were incredible. In fact he was a classmate of President Obama at Harvard Law. He was incredibly articulate and what he lacked in charismatic speeches, he made up for in strategic thinking and networking ability.

Crying Wolf on Racism

✘ The controversy surrounding Arizona's new border law is unprecedented. From the White House to girls on the basketball team, we find people voicing their criticism of the legislation. Many people upset about the law call it "racist" and "xenophobic." Unfortunately, it seems the real reason for the outcry is a political attempt to change the tables in the 2010 and 2012 elections.

The real game-changer would occur if the largest minority vote, the Hispanic community, falls uncontested into the hands of the Democratic Party. If the Democrats can ramp up the rhetoric loud enough and long enough, they may very well attract a majority of Hispanic voters for the next two and a half years. If they can keep the controversy going instead of solving the problem, the party will maintain both their Congressional seats and perhaps even the presidency.

Religious Predators Target Girls?

For many years, Africans and immigrants from the Middle East have secretly remained faithful to cultural rituals and rights of passage that have been designed to keep their young women chaste and eligible for marriage. Partial or total female circumcision is one of these practices.

In an alarming reversal of protocol and wisdom, this dehumanizing practice is gaining acceptance within the U.S. In fact the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended that American doctors be given permission to perform “ceremonial” female circumcisions.

Once again American leaders are fearfully overcompensating for cultural and religious practices from other lands. America especially seems to be intimidated by rituals found in Islam.

There are some cities in the nation that even desire to allow Sharia law to operate in the United States. In that spirit of accommodation, the AAP wants to give pinpricks or to “nick” the genitals of young girls here in the U.S. whose families come from cultures that mandate female circumcisions. The doctors’ rationale is that if they perform the lesser procedure here in

the States,
it would keep their families from sending the girls overseas
for full
circumcisions.

Before I go further, let me explain
exactly what female circumcision is. The biological reason
behind this practice
is to reduce a girl's sexual desire. Many cultures and
religious groups are
convinced that this practice will ensure a young woman's
virginity until marriage.

Removal of all or part of the clitoris is the essence of
female circumcision.

The more extensive procedure could also involve stitching the
vagina. Reducing
the size of the vagina is also intended to increase the
husband's enjoyment of
the sexual act.

Although the current law "makes
criminal any non-medical procedure performed on the genitals"
of a girl in the
United States, the AAP believes that U.S. residents will be
discouraged from
returning to their homelands for the cruel surgeries often
administered by
midwives or female village elders.

Thankfully, there are many opponents to
female genital mutilations. Joseph Crowley, Democrat of New
York, actually
introduced a bill that would make it a crime to take a girl
overseas for such a
purpose. Georgeanne Chapin of Intact America has urged the AAP
to avoid moving
down a "slippery slope." More specifically she said, "There
are countries in

the world that allow wife beating, slavery and child abuse, but we don't allow people to practice those customs in this country. We don't let people have slavery a little bit because they're going to do it anyway, or beat their wives a little bit because they're going to do it anyway."

Today, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists report that over 130 million women and girls have undergone female genital cutting. Circumcisions are typically performed on girls under 15-years old in countries including Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia.

Earlier this week, I saw a BBC special from South Africa which had a village

"mother" explaining her commitment to cutting the genitals of the younger women

with wives tales about their sex organs growing backward inside of their

bodies, thus creating long term health problems. Unfortunately, the true story

is that there are severe consequences to this surgery. The problems

include:

- 1.) severe complications with pregnancy,

- 2.) problems with childbirth, and

- 3.) sexual dysfunction later in life.

Nonetheless, the AAP restates its rationale as follows "in some countries where FGC (female genital

cutting) is common, some progress toward eradication or amelioration has been made by substituting ritual 'nicks' for more severe forms."

America needs to take an about face from our temptation to tiptoe around problems like these. Our national leaders like Eric Holder, U.S. Attorney General, are reticent to "tell it like it is" if another faith -especially Islam – could be seen in a bad light. We must take a different approach and speak out against genuine sexist or dehumanizing practices which can harm our people. We cannot let any faith tradition get away with abusing our citizens – especially children.

We applaud our national desire to allow religious freedom. This openness is something we have all learned from Christianity. Other nations, however, are hardly as open or respectful of human rights.

More specifically let's look at the Muslim faith's track record of religious tolerance. In the Islamic world there are several nations, which have large populations of non-Muslims who had been conquered by jihad wars. Historically Islam conquered huge territories in Africa, Asia and Europe from the 630s AD until 1683 or so. In these nations, dhimmitude is a status given to non-Muslims and their own formerly sovereign land. The word "*dhimmitude*" comes from *dhimmi*,

an Arabic word meaning protected.

Dhimmi was the name applied by the Arab-Muslim conquerors to indigenous non-Muslim populations who surrendered by a treaty (*dhimma*).

Dhimmitude is an extension of the ideology of jihad.

The *dhimmis* – the conquered people who remain Christian or Jewish – have a protected status under Islamic law. Yet, they also are targets of mass discrimination. In Iran, for example, *dhimmis* may have to change the names of their children to Islamic names in order for them to be able to attend school. Their local religious leadership may be persecuted or deliberately eliminated to inhibit their practice of their “protected” religion. In addition, strict rules concerning public conduct have been imposed on *dhimmis* in certain communities.

In Turkey, religious freedom does not exist according to the definition established by the United States or the international community. Due to their policy of secularism, religious freedom walks on a tightrope.

Secularism is practiced not as a way to insure that religious groups do not exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings for personal or political influence, but it is a mechanism for state control over religion and the practices and rights of religious groups.

In conclusion, our parents, our schools, our doctors, and our laws must protect our most vulnerable residents

and citizens. Until other faiths, especially the Islamic community, observe the basic rights and freedoms of all people regardless of their race, color, gender and religion to enjoy constitutional and legal protection, they cannot lay claim to humanitarianism. At the same time we must resist non-productive compromises that endanger our people.

Why are Liberals so Afraid of Prayer?

✘ The last two weeks have been anything but calm in the world of faith and religion. Conservative Christians are wondering whether they are being betrayed by both officials in the White House and in the court system. The ruling of a Wisconsin judge that the National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional and violates the concept of the separation of church and state has been like a blow to the solar plexus for battle weary Christians. In the much touted culture wars, there has never been such an open case of liberals throwing down the gauntlet in a specific area that has been deemed “Christian territory.”

Steele Must Be Fired – Up

In recent weeks, several leading Republicans have been crying for the ouster of party Chairman Michael Steele. If Steele is fired or resigns before he completes a critical stabilization plan for the party, it may spell doom for the Republican National Committee (RNC) in 2010 and beyond. Let me say it simply: Steele must be kept in place until there is a clear vision and mandate that is created for the party's future.

His situation is very reminiscent of what happened to world-class CEO and businesswoman Carly Fiorina in 2005. During the time in which the technology powerhouse Hewlett-Packard felt that they needed to change their image and revitalize their brand, they sought to circumvent the normal painstaking process of self-analysis, restructuring and rebuilding by bringing in a management superstar – Fiorina. Her academics were impeccable, framed at Stanford University, University of Maryland and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But all of this was inconsequential because the board of directors had made an improper assessment of where the business was. Their vision was murky. Their mandate was muddled. Therefore the corporate message was unclear. Thus in a few short years, they fired the woman who once graced the covers of major national periodicals in their name.