

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.

Just before

the interview, I was surprised to learn that both Dr. Smith and the Washington

Post reported that the pastor had received over 100 death threats in the first

few days after Easter. While I believe Dr. Smith's claims, I question whether

all of these threats were actually from conservatives. I would not put it past

some liberal activists to fake a percentage of these death threats in order to

stir the pot of controversy and cast all "right wingers" as racists.

As soon as I

heard about the death threats, though, my heart immediately went out to Pastor

Smith personally. I could not help but remember the impact these kinds of

threats has had on my family, church staff, and congregation over the last two

years or so because of my stand for traditional marriage in both DC and in

Maryland. It was hard to believe that simply upholding the institution of

traditional marriage and preaching biblical truth could put a 21st century preacher in harm's way. For my family, it felt like living in a war zone.

In response to all this "hubbub" over Dr. Smith's views on race and the president's failure to find a church in the Washington, DC area, the liberal pundits took to the airwaves and viciously attacked the conservative electorate – not just the Fox Newsmakers. Liberal media persons very openly called Fox News anchors "birthers" who had demanded that the president produce an official birth certificate; they also called the Tea Party movement and Donald Trump "racists."

By the Friday of our taping with Roland Martin, just five days after Easter, both sides of the political aisles were accusing each other of playing "the race card." Against this backdrop, I found myself having to defend the conservative movement. Further, I felt I was being asked a couple of subliminal question by Roland Martin, "Who are the bigger racists: extreme right wingers or liberals?" and, "When will we solve this nation's race problem?" Our host, Roland Martin, even used a recent interview that Christiane Amanpour conducted with Franklin Graham as proof positive (in his mind) of the racism that he thinks

permeates the white evangelical community. Unfortunately, I found myself defending the Bible-believing evangelical community for most of the program.

After the show, an important explanation of where the nation is in terms of race relations was put forth by Niger Innis, national spokesperson for the Congress On Racial Equality (CORE). Many of my older readers recognize CORE as one of the nation's oldest civil rights organizations. My younger readers may remember that James Farmer Jr. portrayed in the movie "The Great Debators" became the founder of CORE. Mr. Innis made the following remarks about race in America today:

"The questions surrounding our President's religion and place of birth are a reflection and manifestation of an American populace that is simultaneously proud that it elected its first black president, but still curious about this young man that came virtually out of nowhere to become the most powerful man on the planet. Election 2008 was far less a normal election year, than it was a racial cathartic moment for the American people.... Questions about our President, regardless of how clumsy they look and conspiratorial they may seem are a reflection, not of racism, but of generally unanswered questions."

I believe that

Mr. Innis is correct in his analysis. A few rocky years are ahead of us as we finally begin to work on the problem of race. In all deference to Dr. Smith, incendiary sermons will not help us. Loving, pioneering church leadership that challenges people to rise above their personal histories and comfort zones is the only answer to racism in America.

The church is the only institution capable of leading the nation into a genuine process of racial reconciliation. The Southern Baptist Convention modeled this some years ago. Their leaders apologized for racism and then began to plant multi-ethnic churches in communities that church growth experts would have viewed as marginal. As a result, the Southern Baptists have grown dramatically in black and Hispanic membership. Their people are learning to live together and love one another.

In closing, let me give you a word of encouragement. We can change America on our watch. Using Christian faith as a form of social glue can help us create real changes in our communities. For more practical steps of action I would recommend reading one of these two books: 1) *Unity Embraced* by Tony Evans or 2) my book entitled *The Truth in Black and White*. Becoming salt and light within our culture is not for cowards and it requires personal commitment and personal

sacrifice.

Semper FI,
believers!