

Focus differs on Wright and GOP friend Hagee: "Wright didn't want to nuke anybody"

News in the [April 22, 2008](#) issue

Two politically attuned professors in the South called the sharp rhetoric of Jeremiah Wright understandable in the context of an inner-city, largely black church, and both experts marveled at how political opponents seized upon the former pastor's relationship to Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama.

"I just can't come up with a good example—a good analogy—of one church, one pastor, even one sermon having this kind of effect on a candidate," said Laura Olson, a Clemson University specialist on religion and politics, noting the repeated airing of clips from Wright's sermons.

Trinity United Church of Christ, located on Chicago's South Side, is the largest congregation in the overwhelmingly white UCC denomination, Olson observed. "You're trying to rile people up . . . shake people out of a cycle of hopelessness . . . not trying to tear down white America," she said.

Bill Leonard, dean of Wake Forest University Divinity School, said the divisive words were no surprise. The black community "both expects and needs him to wear the prophet's mantle in ways that sound very painful in the public square," said Leonard, who is white and has been active in African-American Baptist churches for 16 years.

Leonard pointed out that little heat has been generated by the close association Republican candidates Mike Huckabee and John McCain have had with San Antonio preacher John Hagee, who has been accused of making antigay and anti-Catholic remarks.

"Hagee is on television every day talking about the need to nuke Iran as a part of his view of biblical eschatology, and apparently nobody has raised any question" about

Huckabee preaching at Hagee's Cornerstone Church or McCain seeking, and getting, Hagee's endorsement before the Texas primary, Leonard said.

"Jeremiah Wright didn't want to nuke anybody. And so I think there's a great deal of rhetoric, left and right, going on that grows out of context." -*Associated Baptist Press*