



## **SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE, INC.**

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### Reflections on Recent Church Burnings Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.

"From Burning Crosses to Burning Churches!"

On the night of the murders of the nine Black worshippers at Midweek Prayer and Bible Study at Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina, I was preaching a two-day Revival at the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Columbia, South Carolina. I was the guest of Presiding Elder, Rosalyn Grant and one of her sisters, Reverend Dr. Debora Grant, Pastor of the St. John A.M.E. Church in Columbus, Georgia.

After our Worship Service at Bethel A.M.E., the pastors of the A.M.E. churches in the Columbia District (the Seventh Episcopal District of African Methodism) gathered for food and fellowship in the beautiful facilities of a sister-A.M.E. church in Columbia.

While we were enjoying the hospitality and the cuisine of South Carolinian culinary geniuses; Presiding Elder Rosalyn Grant got a life-changing call from another one of her sisters, the Reverend Dr. Jacqueline Grant, the world famous Womanist Theologian and tenured Professor at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Grant's call was to inform us about the terrorist act that had taken place one-hundred miles from us in Charleston, South Carolina while we were worshipping in Columbia, South Carolina!

On the next day, there was a hastily called, but perfectly planned, Public Service of Prayer and Remembrance for the nine martyrs who had been murdered by a racist the night before. Services were held all over the country in remembrance and in honor of the Charleston Nine. In Columbia, we gathered (once again) at the Bethel A.M.E. Church to honor the memories, the lives, the labors and the love of the nine members of the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston. The Bethel Sanctuary seats over 500 persons. The Sanctuary was packed.

Most of the persons who gathered for the Service of Prayer and Remembrance were not members of Bethel A.M.E. Church, however. The members of Bethel A.M.E. were at work in the middle of the day.

Those who gathered there were city officials, elected officials, appointed officials, business persons, pastors from other churches and other denominations, and of course, the ever present news media.

The Service of Remembrance was planned to last one hour. (We were out in fifty-five minutes!) The city officials, the City Council and business persons had to get back to work after the lunch hour, so the Service consisted of hymn singing, prayers, Scripture reading, remarks by the Mayor of Columbia, South Carolina and remarks by Presiding Elder Rosalyn Grant.

I was surprised forty minutes into the Service when Presiding Elder Grant stood up, read a Letter of Condolence and Commemoration from the Presiding Prelate of the Seventh Episcopal District, Bishop Norris. Bishop Norris had a kidney transplant the week before and was not allowed to be out in public spaces, lest he become infected and cause an unwanted rejection of the organ he had just received the Friday before the murders.

At the end of Presiding Elder Grant's reading of Bishop Norris' letter, my surprise came when she said publicly that she was relinquishing the rest of the time for her remarks on the program. She was giving her allotted time to me, the guest of the Columbia District of the A.M.E. church for the two-day Revival.

After quoting Isaiah 9:6 where it is written that His name shall be called "*Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace,*" I pointed out that we in the Christian faith had appropriated the Hebrew Scriptures as a sign that the One whom we follow is the Prince of **Peace!**

I then reminded those gathered at Bethel A.M.E. Church that noonday of the sermon that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached at the Riverside Church on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1967, "A Time to Break Silence." In that sermon, Dr. King pointed out forty-eight years ago that we are fighting a three-headed demon: racism, militarism and corporate capitalism (or excessive consumerism).

I then used the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Mark where Jesus confronts a demon and is powerless to overcome the demon (in verse 8) until He gets the demon's name! I cited one of the primary principles of the 12-Step Program for recovering addicts, which is: "You cannot *tame* the demon unless you can *name* the demon!"

It is only when you have the power to name the demon that you have power over the demon. Once Jesus got the demon's name, Jesus had power over that demon.

I reminded the worshippers that Dr. King had named America's demon(s) for us. The three-headed demon is named ***Racism, Militarism*** and ***Corporate Capitalism***. I then pointed out that it was the demon of *Racism* that killed Sikhs in their Gurdwaras. It was the demon of *Racism* that killed Muslims on the first day of Ramadan. It was the demon of *Racism* that killed Jews in their synagogues; and it was the demon of *Racism* that

killed the nine worshippers at the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church the night before we gathered there in Columbia, S.C. that day.

Dr. King told us who the demon was. Dr. King named the demon. I then said to those gathered in Worship that it was up to us to tame the demon. We know the demon's name. Now we have to set about the business of overcoming that demon!

It is the demon of racism that caused the Klu Klux Klan to burn (in the past and in the present) crosses. It is that same demon of racism that causes terrorists like Dylann Storm Roof to murder nine innocent people. Burning crosses was a racist tactic used to strike terror into the hearts of African Americans. Burning a cross was to show that the “god” of the Ku Klux Klan (a so-called Christian terror group) was more powerful and threatening than the God who is called “the Prince of Peace.”

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The Confederate flag – a symbol of white supremacy – and a burning cross – a symbol of racist white hatred – were and are used to terrorize African Americans. Hatred, however, moved white racists from just burning crosses to burning African American churches! Emanuel A.M.E. church was burned down in the 1800’s by white racist; and the pages of southern racist history are covered with the blood of lynched black martyrs and the ashes of burned Black churches. The hatred of Africans by white racists has a demonic history of burned crosses, burned Black bodies and burned Black churches. The seven burned Black churches since Dylann Roof’s act of terrorism point to the demon which Dr. King named for us on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1967.

Chris Hedges said in his July 7<sup>th</sup> *Nation of Change* article that, "*Corporate capitalism is the foundation of police brutality and the prison state*"...and that our "*national conversation on race and crime is based on a fiction... We discuss issues of race while ignoring the economic, bureaucratic and political systems of exploitation - - all of it legal and built into the ruling apparatus - - that are the true engines of racism and white supremacy.*"

Chris Hedges joins Dr. King in naming the demon. It is not only the demon of our racist culture in America. It is also the demonic economic system which grinds the poor, blacks, browns and the 99% into nonexistence. We have the evidence of the demon's activity as we look at churches that are burning and as we remember crosses that have been burned and are still burned. My question along with the Black youth in Charleston is when will we begin to tame the demon?