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Disinvitation by Obama Is Criticized

By [JODI KANTOR](#)

CHICAGO, March 5 — The Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., senior pastor of the popular Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago and spiritual mentor to Senator [Barack Obama](#), thought he knew what he would be doing on Feb. 10, the day of Senator Obama's presidential announcement.

After all, back in January, Mr. Obama had asked Mr. Wright if he would begin the event by delivering a public invocation.

But Mr. Wright said Mr. Obama called him the night before the Feb. 10 announcement and rescinded the invitation to give the invocation.

"Fifteen minutes before Shabbos I get a call from Barack," Mr. Wright said in an interview on Monday, recalling that he was at an interfaith conference at the time. "One of his members had talked him into uninviting me," Mr. Wright said, referring to Mr. Obama's campaign advisers.

Some black leaders are questioning Mr. Obama's decision to distance his campaign from Mr. Wright because of the campaign's apparent fear of criticism over Mr. Wright's teachings, which some say are overly Afrocentric to the point of excluding whites.

Bill Burton, a spokesman for the Obama campaign, said the campaign disinvited Mr. Wright because it did not want the church to face negative attention. Mr. Wright did however, attend the announcement and prayed with Mr. Obama beforehand.

"Senator Obama is proud of his pastor and his church, but because of the type of attention it was receiving on blogs and conservative talk shows, he decided to avoid having statements and beliefs being used out of context and forcing the entire church to defend itself," Mr. Burton said.

Instead, Mr. Obama asked Mr. Wright's successor as pastor at Trinity, the Rev. Otis Moss III, to speak. Mr. Moss declined.

In recent weeks, word of Mr. Obama's treatment of Mr. Wright has reached black leaders like the Rev. [Al Sharpton](#) and given them pause.

"I have not discussed this with Senator Obama in detail, but I can see why callers of mine and other clergymen would be concerned, because the issue is standing by your own pastor," Mr. Sharpton said.

Mr. Wright's church, the 8,000-member Trinity United Church of Christ, is considered mainstream — [Oprah Winfrey](#) has attended services, and many members are prominent black professionals. But the church is also more Afrocentric and politically active than standard black congregations.

Mr. Wright helped organize the 1995 Million Man March on Washington and along with other United Church of Christ ministers was one of the first black religious leaders to protest apartheid and welcome gay and lesbian worshippers.

Since Mr. Obama made his presidential ambitions clear, conservatives have drawn attention to his close relationship to Mr. Wright and to the church's emphasis on black empowerment. Tucker Carlson of MSNBC called the precepts "racially exclusive" and "wrong." Last week, on the Fox News program "Hannity & Colmes," Erik Rush, a conservative columnist, called the church "quite cultish, quite separatist."

In Monday's interview, Mr. Wright expressed disappointment but no surprise that Mr. Obama might try to play down their connection.

"When his enemies find out that in 1984 I went to Tripoli" to visit Col. [Muammar el-Qaddafi](#), Mr. Wright recalled, "with Farrakhan, a lot of his Jewish support will dry up quicker than a snowball in hell." Mr. Wright added that his trip implied no endorsement of either [Louis Farrakhan](#)'s views or Qaddafi's.

Mr. Wright said that in the phone conversation in which Mr. Obama disinvited him from a role in the announcement, Mr. Obama cited an article in Rolling Stone, "The Radical Roots of Barack Obama."

According to the pastor, Mr. Obama then told him, "You can get kind of rough in the sermons, so what we've decided is that it's best for you not to be out there in public."

Patrick Healy contributed reporting from Washington.

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