



ASSEMBLIES of GOD  
THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY

# Prez Release

An eNewsletter to  
AGTS Friends

July 2006

## Encounter Journal

Check out the new issue of AGTS'  
electronic journal

Theme: Expository Preaching

[www.encounter.com](http://www.encounter.com)

**Are you interested in graduate  
studies that will help you  
become a skilled expository  
preacher?**

Check out the James River Center for  
Expository Preaching at AGTS

[www.jamesrivercenter.org](http://www.jamesrivercenter.org)

**Degree Completion**

## Religion in the Public Square

One of the greatest challenges to followers of Jesus these days is the slow, but inevitable, removal of faith from dialogue and action in the public arena. Senators as different as Joe Lieberman (D-CT) and Rick Santorum (R-PA) will face significant opposition in their upcoming political races because they refuse to privatize their faith and exclude it from their public responsibilities. The usual battle between the secular elite and people of faith gets caught in shrill tones of disgust with each other and general unwillingness to find a common language so that minimal communication can take place.

A recent editorial, by Illinois Senator Barack Obama in *USA Today*, does provide a ray of hope in this ongoing controversy of what kind of language is acceptable in debate on very public issues. Some may want to suggest that Senator Obama's conciliatory attitude toward people of faith in public discourse is just positioning in an election year by the new "star" of the Democratic Party. Obama makes quite clear that Democrats need to chart a new course to win voters with deep faith to the Democratic Party. However, this editorial is more than an election year ploy, it smacks of common sense. Obama affirms that "if political

## Earn a Master's Degree one night a week in 18 months!

- **AGTS offers a Master of Arts in Theological Studies through its degree completion program designed for working professionals.**
- **Apply by August 1 for Fall 2006 and we'll waive the \$35 application fee!**
- **Contact us at 417-268-1022 or online at [www.agts.edu/degreecompletion](http://www.agts.edu/degreecompletion)**

## Contact Us

Phone: 1-800-467-AGTS

Fax: (417) 268-1011

Mail: AGTS

1435 N. Glenstone Ave.

Springfield, MO 65802

E-Mail: [sstarkey@agts.edu](mailto:sstarkey@agts.edu)

**The Prez Release is a commentary from the President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. If you want to be removed from this mailing list or would like to update your email address, please contact [sstarkey@agts.edu](mailto:sstarkey@agts.edu).**

leaders truly hope to communicate our hopes and values to Americans in a way that's relevant to their own, we cannot abandon the field of religious discourse." Obama notes that American history has seen the majority of great reformers not only motivated by faith, but also capable and willing to use religious language to argue their cause. People like Abraham Lincoln, William Jennings Bryan and Martin Luther King Jr. personify a rich American history of faith in the public arena. To deny such historical facts demonstrates the willful disconnection from historical precedent.

Obama further notes several key observations worth paying attention to:

- The call to sacrifice and the need to be concerned about more than "I" is a theme that resonates with all Americans, religious or otherwise.
- Separation of church and state has historically benefited religious minorities in American history

Obama's final point focuses on the practical implications of the separation of Church and State. This is an issue that demands close attention and will certainly foster heated debate. *Obama clearly argues that all parties involved in discussion in the public arena must explain their particular positions in a language that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all. That is not a politically radical idea; it is exactly the strategy of the writers of wisdom literature in the Bible.* Books like the book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes are human attempts to frame the world in decided faith-based language, but not to do so in professionally religious lingo that only a certain group could understand.

For example:

On fashion trends:

*"The eye never has enough of seeing or the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done*

*again. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look, It is something new.' It was here already long ago, it was here before time" (Ecclesiastes 1:8b-10)*

On the delusion of power:

*"Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. (Ecclesiastes 4:13)*

People of faith have a hard enough time getting heard in the public arena because the dominant tendency is to silence any language motivated by faith. We have to do better than merely point out the facts of reality as prescribed in our belief system. We must demonstrate we are up to the challenge and are capable of speaking a language that even opponents can understand. Obama's notes that all Americans are looking for a deeper and fuller conversation on religion and, subsequently, about a better America where faith is the central and awesome center of life and not just a political weapon to wield or attack depending on our political persuasion.

The options that Barack Obama proposes are doorways through which followers of Jesus must walk. Hard work lies ahead. We will continue to face unfair opposition because the secular elite will view Obama's suggestions with disdain.

Can we speak to be heard by those who even oppose us? I think it's possible and most likely necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.