

Obama isn't Christian? By whose standards?

On a recent hour of "The Diane Rehm Show" on NPR, a caller identifying herself as an African American Democrat concluded that President Obama is a Muslim for all of the reasons Rehm's conservative guest, Byron York of the Washington Examiner, said she understandably could be confused:

Because Obama has made it a point to reach out to the Islamic world by emphasizing his Muslim roots. Because he had a gutsy moment and refused to oppose the so-called an Islamic center near Ground Zero. And because, to quote another guest, journalist Dante Chinni, unlike his predecessor, Obama "has not brought religion to the forefront of who he is. ... You ask people what religion George Bush was, we all know."

Oh yes, *that* religion. The one the true patriots of this country supposedly embrace. A faith that includes pastors who hold pro-gun rallies at their churches and who encourage their followers to reject science and equality. A religion that is at times hard to link to a president whose actions don't match the images of it that we're familiar with.

I think America's struggle to believe that President Obama is a

Christian isn't just due to what Time magazine calls "Islamophobia." I think the suspicions surrounding his religion also have to do with our perceptions of Christianity.

Based on what we're used to seeing, whether he's Muslim or not, President Obama definitely couldn't be a Christian.

Forget making prominent evangelical pastors part of the political advisory team; Obama doesn't even to go to church on Sunday.

He should forget that he had to abandon his church after comments in one of his pastor's sermons were used to portray him as racist during his presidential campaign.

And although his absence probably protects a pastor from having his or her sermons scrutinized for use in out-of-context political attacks and prevents the congregation from getting distracted from worship, a Christian leader would invoke the

name of Jesus at every opportunity to win America's favor.

Obama reaches out to the Muslim world, which has earned him no small amount of grief. God forbid that a Christian act on the whole, "Blessed are the peace makers" thing.

Obama says he wants everyone — even people like me who don't have an employer to subsidize their health insurance — to be able to have affordable access to quality medical treatment.

But we're used to many Christians letting people do what they did in biblical times: pay for whatever they can and rely on miracles.

Obama is smart, and Proverbs 19:2 says "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge." But according to some people — many of whom claim to speak for their fellow Christians while making millions selling books and hosting talk shows — intelligence is elitist.

During the 2008 campaign, a friend and I delighted in the prospect of an intellectual Christian in the White House.

He would be someone with whom we could relate, someone who would abandon all reason when an act of faith specifically demanded it but who would otherwise operate in the knowledge attained from rigorous study and in the prayerful wisdom of life experiences to which others could relate.

Someone we could identify as Christian by Jesus's one definitive standard: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Could we recognize a Christian who did that? ♣

Mariam Williams is a Louisville native. More of her thoughts and stories can be found at RedboneAfropuff.com.



MARIAM WILLIAMS