

Black Pastors Fight Gay Marriage

Declaring that gay rights are not civil rights, some 160 black ministers urged Congress to support a marriage amendment

More than 160 African American pastors convened on Capitol Hill Sept. 8 to register their opposition to gay marriage and in the process publicly chided the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for failing to meet with them to discuss the issue.

The Sept. 8 press conference was the culmination of a 24-hour summit sponsored by the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), a conservative lobbying group based in Washington, D.C., and Strang Communications, which publishes Charisma magazine. The event was aimed at educating black ministers about the homosexual agenda and allowing them to voice their opposition to legislative attempts to legalize gay marriage.

Among the attendees were Bishop Paul S. Morton of the New Orleans-based Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship, California pastor Frederick K.C. Price, National Religious Broadcasters Chairman Glenn Plummer, Detroit pastor Marvin Winans and Church of God in Christ Bishop Samuel L. Green.

The pastors said their intent was not to bash homosexuals, but to oppose the assertion that the gay rights movement is a continuation of the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. They also expressed concern that gay marriage would threaten the stability of black families.

Recent statistics show that more than two-thirds of black

babies are born to single parents, which pastors say only adds to the challenges of divorce, teen pregnancy, fatherlessness and the disproportionate number of HIV/AIDS cases in the black community.

“These trends should not be overlooked,” said a statement signed by most of the summit participants and presented to the CBC. “Further destabilization of traditional marriage must be prevented at all costs.”

The ministers’ effort to preserve traditional marriage, which translates into support for a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to heterosexual couples only, put them at odds with the CBC, many of whom have expressed their opposition to a marriage amendment.

When none of the CBC members showed up for a meeting scheduled before the press conference, the pastors took note. “Apparently, [the CBC] doesn’t respect God’s people enough to meet with us,” Morton told the media.

Rep. William Jefferson (D-La.) and Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick (D-Mich.) later addressed the pastors. Jefferson told Morton he would support a marriage amendment. But Kilpatrick said that though she opposed gay marriage, she did not want to open up the Constitution “under this current administration.”

Winans, who is from Michigan, was not deterred. “Anything short of an amendment ... will be circumvented to allow gay marriage,” he said.

Despite their unity on gay marriage, the pastors were not all

supporters of President Bush, though he opposes gay marriage. Some argued that the fight for a marriage amendment would take years and wouldn't be won from the top down.

"The House must have two-thirds of the representatives in place," Winans said. "It aids when you have a man at the top [who is sympathetic to a marriage amendment] ... but again, the House of Representatives are from the 'hood to represent people and vote in accordance to what the majority of people want."

Others said supporting Kerry this month would send a conflicting message. "I could not vote for someone who was opposed to [traditional marriage]," Price said. "To me, you're saying ... that homosexuality is all right—especially when you say I have to bow my knee to it."

In the coming year, additional summits are to be held across the country, culminating with a large meeting in Washington, D.C. More than once, the pastors were told they held the key to turning the tide on gay marriage.

"This is our Esther moment," said Atlanta pastor Darryl L. Foster, who leads the ex-gay outreach Witness Ministries. "God has anointed African American preachers who believe the Bible to 'save our people'—white, black, everybody. Homosexual activists know they need the credibility of black people" to cast gay rights as a civil rights issue.

The pastors hope to present themselves as a nonpartisan group, but plan to work with the TVC as they develop a lobbying plan. "We want to create a tipping point," said TVC founder Lou Sheldon, "where every Christian knows they must call their ...

representatives about this issue.”

Adrienne S. Gaines in Washington, D.C.