

Inauguration of Barack Obama “Hinge point of History”

Christian leaders said the swearing-in of the nation's first African-American president is a sign of racial progress but worried that the battle to end abortion and defend traditional marriage would intensify in the coming months.

✖ [] Record-setting crowds braved frigid weather on Tuesday to witness the historic inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States. But while many applauded the event as a victory for racial progress, several ministry leaders warned that Christians must remain vigilant in a fight against abortion and same-sex marriage that is likely to intensify.

During his invocation, Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren called the swearing-in of the nation's first African-American president a “hinge point of history.”

“We are so grateful to live in this land, a land of unequalled possibility, where the son of an African [man] can rise to the highest level of our leadership,” Warren prayed. “We know today that Dr. King and a great cloud of witnesses are shouting in heaven.”

Warren asked God to give Obama the wisdom to lead with humility, “the courage to lead us with integrity [and] the compassion to lead us with generosity.” He closed the prayer “in the name of the one who changed my life, Yeshua, Isa, Jesus [Spanish pronunciation], Jesus, who taught us to pray” and recited the Lord's Prayer. (Read Warren's entire prayer.)

The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, a United Methodist minister and veteran of the civil rights movement, began his inaugural benediction with lines from James Weldon Johnson's song “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” considered the African-American

national anthem. He then prayed for the U.S. and "the community of nations" now facing tremendous economic uncertainty. "Our faith does not shrink, though pressed by the flood of mortal ills," he prayed. "For we know that Lord, You're able and You're willing to work through faithful leadership to restore stability." (Read Lowery's prayer.)

Bishop Harry Jackson, the African-American pastor of 3,000-member Hope Christian Church in suburban Washington, D.C., told *Charisma* Tuesday that though he doesn't always agree with Obama's worldview, God chose him to break a major racial barrier. "My hope is that the glass ceiling, if you will, will forever be shattered in the mentality of black America," he said. "And my hope for other minorities in America is that they would say [Martin Luther King Jr.'s] dream is a lot closer to being fulfilled than ever before."

Jackson, who supported Sen. John McCain during the presidential election, said he believes God will bless America through Obama if Christians pray. "We can pray against ungodliness flooding the land," he said. "And I think we as Christians need to be very wary that we pray for Barack Obama before we attempt to judge and evaluate his presidency."

Yet he acknowledged that the fight for life and traditional marriage would face greater opposition in an Obama era. "We are going to have to stop abortions by actually giving individual women alternatives as opposed to just relying on public policy to do what the church should do," said Jackson, author of *Personal Faith, Public Policy* and *The Truth in Black and White*. "In my own case specifically, I realize we are going to have to open a crisis pregnancy center in our city because it's going to be the grassroots, it's going to be touching people, that counts."

While calling Obama's inauguration a "triumph" for racial progress, Mathew Staver, founder of the legal advocacy group Liberty Counsel, expressed concern about reports that some of Obama's first acts as president may be to rescind the Mexico City Policy, which banned U.S. funding to groups that promote or perform abortions abroad, and that Obama might reverse policy barring federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.

"We have taken one step forward for racial equality but two

steps backward for life," said Staver, who is also dean of the Liberty University School of Law. "While President Obama condemned the killing of children by terrorists, forcing Americans to fund abortion worldwide will kill more children than al-Qaeda.

"President Obama said he wants to hear from the American people, but the unborn have no voice. A president for all the people must also include the unborn."

Jackson said traditional marriage is also likely to face greater assault in the coming months. He believes Christians, especially African-American believers, who were key in passing marriage amendments in Florida and California, would need to unite to defend the institution of marriage.

"There's going to be an all-out campaign to win the hearts of the black community," Jackson said. "Because everybody knows what the black community allows will ultimately be what happens with regard to same-sex marriage.

"We're going to need to be vigilant. We're going to have to support with our prayer and with our finances the defend-marriage campaigns that are going to come forth in the next 18 months because they are going to make a major difference in turning the tide."

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, said Obama's inauguration was a response to the question whether an ethnic minority can ascend to the highest office of this nation.

Rodriguez was one of several Christian leaders who participated in a private worship service Obama attended the morning of his inauguration. Bishop T.D. Jakes preached the sermon while Rodriguez, Church of God in Christ Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake, and Florida megapastor Joel Hunter offered prayers. Rodriguez said Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism also participated and that no Muslim clerics were involved in the service.

Rodriguez said all Christians, whether they voted for him or not, now have a mandate to pray for Obama's "success," but that it doesn't mean surrendering their values and influence. He encourages Christians to unite across racial and political lines to address moral issues ranging from abortion and gay marriage to poverty, health care and immigration reform.

"The church is the firewall for the proliferation of values,"

Rodriguez said. "The church needs to speak vociferously against any attempts to reduce the value of human life, not only in the womb but out of the womb. ... The church needs to rise up like the prophet Daniel and address the king's court on issues that pertain to God's values."

With a crowd of roughly 1.5 million people convened on the National Mall, the inauguration was a mostly peaceful event, according to media reports. Yet prayer leader Ken Joseph Jr. said a group of Christians evangelizing during an inaugural event was heckled and harassed. "At one point police had to be called to arrest one person who threatened their lives," he said.

Joseph reported that Christians, who were led by Norwegian evangelist Petar Keseljevic and affiliated with , a group known for carrying signs that say "God Hates Sin" or "Homo Sex Is Sin," were countered by crowds that jeered "Go to hell," "I love sin" and "You are crazy." Eventually, a man selling "Obama condoms" led the crowd in chanting Obama's name to drown out the Christians' message.

"We are just here to share the love of Christ," Keseljevic told Joseph. "It is so sad to see the way people are so hostile in America to Christ."

Pro-life activists affiliated with the Christian Defense Coalition (CDC) ended 19 days of fasting and prayer for Obama with a vigil in Washington on Monday then led a demonstration on Inauguration Day. "While millions are celebrating the inauguration of President Obama, it is critical to be a voice and witness for those who have no voice," said the Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney, director of the CDC. "We have come to [the] Inaugural Parade to speak truth to power and remind President Obama to stand for social justice and human rights for all Americans." **—Adrienne S. Gaines**