

Obama's Invocation Pick Draws Controversy

Hours after Obama chose Rick Warren to bless his first day in office, voices from both sides of the abortion and gay-marriage debate were sounding off.



[] Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren has drawn criticism from leaders on both sides of the culture war after agreeing to give the invocation at President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration on Jan. 20.

The Rev. Thomas J. Euteneuer, president of Human Life International (HLI), said on Friday that he has complete respect for the personal relationship Warren has developed with Obama in the last couple of years through their involvement in AIDS awareness campaigns. "But such a public and explicitly Christian endorsement as this invocation is certainly confusing to those who know Mr. Obama's record on life issues," Euteneuer said.

"We respectfully ask Pastor Warren to reconsider his participation in the inaugural ceremonies, given Mr. Obama's extremist anti-life views."

Warren is known for his staunch pro-life stances and publicly supported California's Proposition 8, the highly controversial ballot measure that amended the state constitution to ban gay marriage. After Proposition 8 passed, violence against conservative Christians was reported nationwide.

On Thursday, Warren commended Obama's willingness to face fury from his liberal base by offering the invocation address to an evangelical Christian who is known to disagree with him on key social issues.

"Hopefully, individuals passionately expressing opinions from the left and the right will recognize that both of us have

shown a commitment to model civility in America," Warren stated.

The Bible admonishes Christians to pray for their leaders, Warren added. "I am honored by this opportunity to pray God's blessing on the office of the president and its current and future inhabitant," he said, "asking the Lord to provide wisdom to America's leaders during this critical time in our nation's history."

But another prominent pro-life group leader disagrees with Warren's interpretation of scripture. "Warren [is] attempting to excuse his act of support for Mr. Obama, an ardent supporter of abortion, by saying, 'The Bible admonishes us to pray for our leaders,'" said Troy Newman, president of the pro-life group Operation Rescue.

"However, Pastor Warren's participation in Obama's inauguration is tantamount to placing his stamp of approval on Obama and his policies that stand in direct opposition to biblical truths," Newman said. "Instead of lending support to a man who clearly stands in opposition to God's law on the critical matter of child-killing, we fervently urge Pastor Warren to instead follow the examples of godly men who, throughout the Scriptures, boldly proclaimed God's truth and exposed the sin of leaders in order to protect the people from that sin."

Meanwhile, in an open letter to Obama on Thursday titled "We Hope You Will Change Your Mind," the National Organization for Women (NOW) said the selection of Warren "deeply offended progressive people," and the group chastised Obama for selecting a man who once compared abortion to the Holocaust.

"[Warren] delivering the invocation would be an insult to all of us, women and men, who support women's right to self-determination," NOW stated.

Neil Giuliano, president of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), said in a statement Thursday he was deeply troubled by the selection of Warren and called on all media

outlets to scrutinize Warren's history of "using his powerful platform to advance anti-gay rhetoric and prevent loving couples" from caring for one another.

"[Obama] has selected someone whose defamatory and damaging anti-gay statements and views, including linking marriage for committed same-sex couples to incest and pedophilia, clearly divide rather than unite Americans," Giuliano said.

Warren hosted Obama and former Republican presidential candidate John McCain at an open forum at Saddleback Church in southern California last summer. The meeting drew national media attention and many leaders praised the event for its civility and lack of partisan bickering. **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**

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