

CNN and the Black Church

✖ Two weeks ago the black church world stopped for a moment when Bishop Eddie L. Long of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta addressed his congregation. The 25,000-member church (once the largest of any kind in America) was briefed concerning a lawsuit that alleges their pastor had sexual relations with four young men. His statement to his church was simple but clear. He said that he never claimed to be perfect but he was not the man the media portrayed him to be. With that in mind, he declared that he wanted his day in court. Further, he vowed to fight the civil lawsuit.

Who is Eddie Long? Simply, he is one of the most exceptional orators of this generation. His international television broadcast has taken him into the homes of people around the globe. Further, as the recipient of the Trumpet Award for leadership in 2005, he has been acknowledged time and time again for his leadership in the black community. He also serves on the board of numerous universities and colleges, including Morehouse, Emory and North Carolina Central.

It is safe to say that most black Americans believe that the bishop and his church have been a model of grassroots involvement. The news from Sept. 21 through the end of last week surprisingly ran counter to the church's 30-year legacy. The most concerning aspect of the coverage was that CNN seemed poised to be judge, jury and executioner in this controversial case. They repeatedly rehearsed the accusations of the plaintiffs of the civil suit, while parading so-called experts into their studios to decry the leadership failures of the black church. For effect, they painted Bishop Long as a major leader in the "anti-gay" marriage movement. (As a national leader of the traditional marriage movement, I know he has not been involved in any substantive way in more than six years.)

So why was Long's story featured so prominently? I believe

there is a radical, gay rights contingent within CNN and several other mainstream media organizations that wants to discredit or remove the "moral microphone" from the hands of black leadership. After all, it was black clergy that unified people in California and Florida to pass marriage amendments, which prevented the redefinition of marriage in both states. Since that time, many black spiritual leaders have been ridiculed and identified as the enemy by gay rights activists. The idea that black church leadership is a threat to gay rights has been vocally trumpeted by the celebrity community. For example, many blacks remember Roseanne Barr stated that "their hateful ministers" had influenced black Californians to vote against gay marriage.

Even the white conservative movement believes the most imposing firewall that has protected the nation from the advance of gay marriage and other gay political agendas has been the black church. Therefore gay grassroots activists have vowed to infiltrate the black community and break down their resistance. Against this backdrop in Washington, D.C., so-called "black gay" leaders were marched out front in our community and presented as emerging leaders. In reality, however, white leadership such as the Human Rights Campaign, GLAAD, and others were actually calling the shots behind the scenes.

The media circus that has been created around Bishop Long is being used as an attempt to attack the bond between the black church and its leaders. Therefore, Long has been cast as homophobic, a "down-low" monster, and numerous other equally as reprehensible images because of this bigger battle. CNN seems to want to project that black leaders, who oppose gay marriage or other policy changes, are probably secretly struggling with the same kind of self hate that they project upon Bishop Long. Every hour on the hour, CNN and several other media outlets have been persistent in doing three things: 1. questioning the moral authority of the black

church, 2. questioning its stand against gay marriage and homosexuality, and 3. attacking what the media dubs “the prosperity gospel” preached in many black churches.

Why has the progressive media attacked the black church at this specific time? The media tirade strategically coincided with the failure of the Senate to pass a Defense Authorization Bill last Tuesday that would have abolished the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) policy in the military. The DADT policy did not allow gays to serve openly in the military. The DADT defeat was cleverly masked by launching this major initiative.

How are black church leaders responding to the intense scrutiny of Bishop Long? As I talk with leaders around the country they believe that Bishop Long was “lynched,” even if they do not condone an older man misusing his power, prestige, and prosperity to entice any young person into an extramarital affair. They believe the issue is more about the abuse of one’s personal power as a spiritual leader than it is about sexuality or public policy. Many of these leaders believe there will soon come a record number of IRS audits, civil investigations, and media attacks on other well-known local, regional, and national black clergymen.

If the CNN coverage of Bishop Long is really the beginning of an attack on the black church, it may break the tenuous progressive, political coalition that has attempted to keep blacks, Hispanics, gays and lesbians, feminists, and unions in the same broad coalition. It appears that every special interest group is getting something that advances their agenda except for the black community. These same leaders ask themselves, “Why should black Christians keep supporting candidates with an immoral national platform on abortion and marriage? Especially when decade-old problems of education, justice, and minority under-employment have been left unattended?”

One preacher said it best, “The liberal alliance better watch

out that they don't take the black vote for granted or it may cost them the next two elections in both 2010 and 2012."