

My Meeting With Obama

Who would have thought one year ago that the election for president this year would be between John McCain and Barack Obama? During the primaries only Gov. Mike Huckabee seemed to reach out to the conservative Christian base, which was slow to support “one of our own”—a man who heartily agrees with the biblical positions on life and marriage I’ve discussed here many times. Though Huckabee got further than anyone thought, it was clear by March that McCain would be the Republican choice. Because he’s strongly pro-life, supports traditional marriage and strongly supports Israel, I was relieved.

It took a few months for Obama to keep Hillary Clinton from getting from what she and the pundits felt was hers for the asking—the Democratic presidential nomination. Then something astounding happened—Obama began reaching out to the Christian community by emphasizing his own faith in Christ on his Web site, saying he wanted people of faith to be a part of the political process and inviting 43 Christian leaders to meet with him in early June in Chicago.

I was surprised to be invited to the meeting and attended out of curiosity. As I’ve reported in two Strang Report blogs, the gathering was polite and Obama came across as sincere. I asked the only question about abortion, and his answer was pretty standard for a Democrat—he doesn’t like abortion, but a woman should have the right to decide, and it’s better for the procedure to be legal than for women to be forced to get so-called back-alley abortions.

He talked about the need to prevent unwanted pregnancies and to take care of the children after they’re born—nothing I could disagree with. But it is obvious he isn’t going to change his view, and if he is elected, when it is time for him to appoint justices to the Supreme Court, he will choose those

who will work to keep abortion legal.

The Christian leaders in the room were mostly from more liberal denominations or were “moderate” evangelicals for whom the environment and other issues are as important as the “litmus-test” issues for which the religious right has become known.

In contrast to Obama, McCain seems to have distanced himself from conservative Christians. In a knee-jerk reaction to some media criticism, he rejected endorsements from John Hagee and Rod Parsley—a big mistake, in my opinion. I’ll let you know if I get an interview with him. Obama has already agreed to an interview with Charisma.

One African-American leader phoned me to complain that in my Strang Report on the Obama meeting, I said a Christian couldn’t vote for Obama because of the pro-life issue. I didn’t say that. But he said I should understand that blacks vote Democratic because they believe Democrats are more concerned about social justice and problems in the black community.

Another African-American leader at the Obama meeting rattled off a list of things Christians shouldn’t like about McCain, including the fact that he’s been known to swear in public and left his first wife to marry a younger woman. Also, McCain apparently is not comfortable talking about his religious faith.

This leader challenged us about the inconsistency of being pro-life yet supporting the Iraq war. He seemed to be asking, “If Christians can vote for a flawed candidate like McCain, what is wrong with voting for someone such as Obama?”—who supports what the Democratic party has supported for a long time: abortion rights and, more recently, civil unions for gays and lesbians.

Personally I feel it’s time America elected a black president.

On a personal level, I found Obama very likable. I began to understand why some people are enthusiastically behind him.

But for me, the pro-life issue trumps all the other important issues in this election. Though my comments are not an official endorsement of McCain, the facts don't allow me to vote for anyone other than him.

You can read more about the meeting in Chicago and the strong opinions my remarks elicited by going to . Be sure to sign up to get the Strang Report approximately once a week and add your comments to the blogs.

If reaction to my Strang Reports is any indication, this is going to be a long and divisive election season.

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