

## The trouble with Rick

By Ed Fowler

It's a fine brouhaha we have over President-elect Obama's selection of Rick Warren to deliver the invocation at his inauguration. Many homosexuals have taken offense that Obama would give so visible a role to an opponent of Proposition 8 in California, the anti-homosexual civil union measure.

Their primary talking point is that Warren has compared homosexuality (etc.) to such deviant behavior as pedophilia. In context, his point was that the Bible prescribes sexual union only for a man and a woman in a marriage covenanted before God. All other forms of sex – bestiality, pedophilia, homosexuality, polygamy, you name it – are forbidden.

So offended are the homosexuals and their allies that even zealous pro-Obama media commentators are indignant over his choice of Warren. Frank Rich of *The New York Times* was so dismayed that he compared Obama to George Bush, surely the ultimate slur, noting that "the president-elect is not free of his own brand of hubris and arrogance."

Some evangelical leaders, on the other hand, disapprove of the choice of Warren because they consider him insufficiently evangelical. He waited until late in the campaign season to declare his support for Proposition 8 and then kept it as tepid as possible. This group regards the megachurch pastor and author of *The Purpose Driven Life* as an apostle of a self-help gospel who allows his social agenda to overwhelm the biblical one.

If the homosexual lobby would calm down and listen to these evangelicals even for a moment they would take great comfort from their words. And find their faith in Obama restored.

The president-elect describes himself as a "fierce" advocate of "gay civil rights," including civil unions. And that's exactly what he is. He also has the gifted politician's keen sense of the possible. America is moving toward majority acceptance of homosexuality (etc.) as a way of life. A few years ago, a measure similar to Proposition 8 passed in California with 60 percent of the vote. This time it polled 52 percent. But America has not quite arrived at this enlightened state.

As Obama realizes, Warren provides a bridge. He is in the vanguard of a movement within the evangelical church that is mimicking the social gospel the mainline denominations began advancing decades ago. As the Pat Robertsons and James Dobsons fade from the scene and the old guard of the "religious right" watches its discipline fade, Warren and his crowd are taking over the stage.

Their "relevant" message locks in on such sexy issues as HIV-AIDS treatment in Africa, climate change and even literacy. These are appealing causes, especially among the young. They are – in varying degrees – noble causes as well. Christians indeed ought to live out the love of our Lord for mankind through healing, stewardship of the earth and education.

This gospel is nonetheless an insidious one because it subverts the true one. These hot-button issues are promoted as more hip than the passé evangelical standards such as abortion and homosexuality. And the effect is to erode the church's – to say nothing of the culture's – concept of sin.

God entered the world and took the form of a man to bring peace to the world. False prophets had come before, proclaiming in Israel "peace, peace where there is no peace" (Jer 6:14). Israel did not have the peace God had promised because she had not obeyed God's commandment. She had not driven the idolaters from the Promised Land but had intermarried with them and fallen into their sins. And where there is sin there is not peace.

The Father intervened and offered the perfect sacrifice, who crucified sin and brought peace (Lk 2:14). Jesus Christ presented the world with *his* peace, not as the world gives peace (Jn 14:27). This peace, of a different quality than the peace the world offers, surpasses understanding (Phil 4:7). This peace was not a wish but a gift and a gift can be refused (Lk 10:1-12).

While it will not be fully realized until the Lord's return, the proclamation of it is the primary duty of the Lord's church until that glorious day. Those who accept this gift of peace will love their fellow man as our Lord has commanded. They will heal the sick, feed the hungry and visit the prisoners. But they will not allow causes even as noble as these to obscure the true gospel that the Prince of Peace brought. As long as sin remains, there cannot be peace. As long as sin remains, God and man are not reconciled. As long as sin remains, it will produce disease, poverty and crime. Only when sin is ultimately erased will there be perfect justice for all in the kingdom, which is God's peace.

In *The Times*, Rich quotes V. Gene Robinson, the avowedly homosexual Episcopal bishop and a critic of Obama's choice for the invocation, as saying of Warren, "And the God that he's praying to is not the God that I know."

This God of Robinson's does not condemn sin, even sins identified in the Bible in such unambiguous terms as homosexuality (Rom 1:26-27). Love is redefined. No longer is it the sacrifice Christ modeled on the cross but rather ratification of whatever behaviors people decide will make them happy. Rich also quotes Timothy McCarthy, a Harvard professor who served on the Obama campaign's National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Leadership Council. McCarthy declares that Warren should "recant his previous statements about gays and lesbians, and start acting like a Christian."

He understands very well that the goal is to redefine "Christian" in a way that omits the concept of sin. But the football fan Obama understands much more than his temporarily disaffected admirers in the homosexual lobby. He sees that America is not yet ready for V. Gene Robinson to deliver the invocation at the inauguration. By co-opting a leader in the evangelical movement who has already begun the retreat from a biblical definition of sin, however, he can move the ball down the field.

When the fullback dive isn't there, you run the counter trap. A little misdirection can overcome a stronger foe, especially one who is already leaning back on his heels. Rich, Robinson and McCarthy should take a deep breath and be patient a little longer. Obama knows what he's doing.