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Free the Saddleback One

by Debra J. Saunders
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Gay civil rights groups - the Human Rights Campaign and the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** - are calling on President-elect Barack Obama to yank his invitation to Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren to give the inaugural prayer on Jan. 20. They demand tolerance from others, but won't spare any for those with whom they disagree.

Unless, of course, that person is Obama, who, like Warren, opposes same-sex marriage. Then, they get real ecumenical. Not to mention, very forgetful.

"I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now, for me as a Christian - for me as a Christian - it is also a sacred union," Obama said at a presidential candidate forum at the Saddleback Church in August. Obama could not make his opposition to same-sex marriage clearer.

It's true that Obama opposed Proposition 8, the same-sex marriage ban approved by California voters in November, on the grounds that codifying a same-sex ban would be "divisive" - whereas Warren endorsed the measure.

Obama supports civil unions - "I think my faith is strong enough and my marriage is strong enough that I can afford those civil rights to others, *even if I have a different perspective or a different view*," Obama explained. Warren spokesperson Kristin Cole told me that Warren "is OK on civil unions, but does not believe in redefining marriage."

Then why are gay leaders applauding the election of Obama, while calling on him to exclude the participation of the Warren?

It makes no sense - unless they had convinced themselves that Obama did not mean it when he said he opposed same-sex marriage. As long as they think he lied, he still can be their hero.

Because Warren clearly meant what he said, he's a villain. Forget the campaign Warren began to organize 1 billion Christians to fight global poverty and scourges like AIDS. Ignore the countless children he has helped save. Think only of the feelings he has wounded.

In the modern world, words speak louder than actions. And there is always an incriminating video clip out there.

In that spirit, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force cited an interview Warren gave on *Beliefnet.com* and charged that Warren went "so far as to equate the marriages of same-sex couples with incest and pedophilia."

Warren did say, "I'm opposed to the re-definition of a 5,000 year definition of marriage. I'm opposed to a having brother and sister be together and call that a marriage. I'm opposed to an older guy marrying a child and calling that a marriage. I'm opposed to one guy having multiple wives and calling that a marriage."

Is that equating same-sex marriage with incest and pedophilia? If it you want it to, sure.

Or you could see the quote as proof that Warren holds traditional religious views - and cut the guy some slack.

You know, show tolerance while seeking tolerance.

Instead, many critics have chosen to brand Warren as a "hater" and a "bigot" - words that fire up the base, and alienate everyone else. They are sending the message that anyone who dares

speaking as Warren did - except Obama, of course - runs the risk of being tarred and feathered, 2008-style. Think Scott Eckern, who resigned as artistic director to spare the California Music Theatre in Sacramento from a boycott threatened because of his \$1,000 donation to the Yes on Prop. 8 campaign.

I suppose the Warren critics could argue that gays and lesbians simply want the same rights as others; that this is a big country, with room enough for the traditionally devout *and* same-sex couples.

Except groups like the Human Rights Campaign and the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** do not want to make room for people like Rick Warren. They want him muzzled, and out of the picture.