

Rick Warren accuses critics of 'Christophobia'

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LAKE FOREST, Calif. (ABP) — Pastor Rick Warren termed criticism of his selection to pray the invocation at President-elect Barack Obama's Jan. 20 inauguration "hate speech" and "Christophobia" in a video message on the Saddleback Church website.

"A lot of you have written to me this week and said, 'Rick, how are you going to respond to all these, you know, these false accusations and attacks, outright lies and hateful slander, and really a lot of hate speech?'" Warren said in a 22-minute [message](#) to church members. "It's what I would call Christophobia — people who are afraid of any Christian."

The *Purpose Driven Life* author denied reports that he equated gay partnerships with incest and pedophilia, but said he understands how some people would think that based on comments he made in a [Beliefnet interview](#). Warren said his main point was that he opposes changing the definition of marriage. He said he believes that homosexuality is "contrary to God's word," but also that "no American should ever be discriminated against because of their beliefs, period."

"Some people feel today that if you disagree with them, then that's hate speech," Warren said. "If you disagree with them, you either hate them or you're afraid of them. I'm neither afraid of gays nor do I hate gays. In fact I love them, but I do disagree with some of their beliefs."

Media "missing the story"

Warren said the media "is totally missing the story" by focusing just on homosexuality.

"You know the fact that an evangelical pastor believes in keeping the historic definition of marriage, that's not news," Warren said. "I mean that's not been news for hundreds of years. It's a non-story, nothing new. And the fact that the gay community would disagree with me, that's not news either."

"What's the real story? The real story is that a couple of different American leaders have chosen to model civility for the rest of the nation, and that Barack Obama and Rick Warren have decided to try to create a new politic that says we can disagree without being disagreeable. We can walk hand-in-hand without seeing eye-to-eye. We can have unity in our nation without uniformity. And we can have collaboration for the best of America."

Warren said the history of the invitation dates back three years, when he took a risk by inviting Obama to speak at a conference on HIV/AIDS at Saddleback Church.

"Now, when that happened, I was criticized incessantly from the right, and in fact it's never stopped," he said. "They've just criticized me and criticized me for inviting — as if having him here said that I agreed with everything that he agreed with."

"That is still going on," Warren said. "In fact one conservative writer who hates me for agreeing to pray for the invocation wrote me just recently, he said, 'You know, Rick, if you pray at the inauguration, you are sticking a fork in the head of every aborted baby.' Now, come on. I am doing this because I love America, and it's a historic opportunity, and it's an honor to be part of any inauguration of any president, and I love our country."

Big risk for Obama

Warren said Obama also took a big risk, by selecting him to pray the invocation despite knowing "he'd take flak from people who would disagree with me."

"But you know what, we're both willing to be criticized in order to try to bring America in to a new day of civil discourse and to create a new model that says you don't have to agree only with your side on everything," Warren said. "You can reach out in the middle and try to figure out to have a way that we can make America a better place — without having to agree on everything."

"You see, that's the story that the media is missing. It's the story of risk-taking, not that people on both sides of the opposite poles are angry at me or angry at President-elect Obama; that we're friends and that we admire each other even though we disagree on some things. It's the missing element of civility."

"I was a friend of Barack Obama's long before he decided to run for office," Warren said. "I talked to him about running for office before he even ran. And he has been a friend. As I said, I don't agree with everything he espouses. Neither did I agree with everything John McCain espoused."

Warren said he's learned several things about the media in the last few years. One "is the media never gets it 100 percent correct" and another is "the media lives for conflict."

"What I've learned is if there is no conflict, then somebody is going to create it," he said. "Now the media loves to create conflict. The problem with that is it's creating a more and more polarized nation, and that polarization is causing people to be ruder and ruder and more and more inflamed."

Warren blamed that on two groups — media programs "where the goal is to simply get people to yell at each other" and "bloggers who really need to get a life."

"A lot of people think that because they can sit in the quietness of their own home and hide behind a screen, they can hurl all kinds of bombs at people

and get away with it," Warren said. "Well no, they're just being rude."

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.