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Rick Warren: work in progress?

Joe Feuerherd | Jan. 1, 2009

The Purpose-Driven Life, one of more than 25 million sold in the United States. Warren, selected by Barack Obama to deliver the inaugural invocation, is much in the news.

He backed California's Proposition 8, a ballot measure banning gay marriage, arguing that "we should not allow 2 percent of the population [gays and lesbians] to change the definition of marriage." He fueled the fire, comparing gay unions to the marriage of a brother and sister or to polygamous relationships. Meanwhile, he recently expressed some openness to the idea of civil unions and domestic partnerships.

None of this is discussed in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, nor is his support for measures to curb global warming and to fund antipoverty programs, or his opposition to abortion.

The "purpose" Warren writes of is not ours, but God's. It is the individual's responsibility to discover the life the Creator wants for him or her and then lead it. A little strong on the predestination for Catholic sensibilities, to be sure, but a useful guide for readers looking beyond their personal desires to something larger, something more, well, purposeful.

Warren told **Beliefnet.com** last month that he supported Proposition 8 primarily because without it clergy opposed to gay marriage would be subjected to charges of "hate speech." This is a shallow argument -- public figures are objects of accusation all the time. And it's fanciful to suggest, assuming Warren meant some penalty would be invoked, that both the free-exercise and free-speech clauses of the First Amendment could be so easily discarded.

Still, Warren's latest anti-gay marriage rationale is based on amazingly narrow ground, less expansive than, for example, the Catholic church's opposition to same-sex unions.

Most Americans oppose gay marriage. Barack Obama opposes gay marriage. No Catholic priest, at least one who accepts official church teaching on gay marriage, would be welcome to pray at Obama's inauguration under the criteria established by Warren's critics.

God, writes Warren, "deliberately chose your race, the color of your skin, your hair, and every other feature." What about sexual orientation?

He doesn't go there.

Warren seems like a lot of conservative American baby boomers -- trying to reconcile ideas of fairness with the treatment gays and lesbians are accorded under our laws and customs. He appears, in short, to be a work in progress.

Aren't we all?

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