

# Open Letter To Brothers and Sisters At Saddleback Church

Gregg Cunningham, Esq. (December 21, 2006)

Pastor Rick Warren and the "Global Summit on AIDS and the Church ":

*Saddleback Delivers; Obama Chortles & Jesus Cringes*

From: Gregg Cunningham, Director, The Center For Bio-Ethical Reform

(Author's note: A draft of this letter was published to Pastor Rick Warren through A. Larry Ross Communications, his public relations firm on December 21, 2006, with a request for corrections of perceived misstatements of fact. The letter was more broadly circulated shortly thereafter. Despite confirmation of receipt of the draft, no reply was forthcoming. Since the initial draft of this letter, Senators Obama and Clinton declared candidacies for the Presidency.)

ChristianityToday.com has posted a Billy Graham biography with a focus on the great evangelist's early crusades. The story is oddly relevant to the controversy sparked by Pastor Rick Warren's AIDS conference invitation to pro-abortion Senator Barack Obama.

...[A]t a time when sit-ins and boycotts were stirring racial tensions in the South, Graham invited Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to discuss the racial situation with him and his colleagues. Then, before a capacity crowd at ... [Madison Square] Garden, he invited the black leader to join him on the platform and to lead the congregation in prayer. In his introduction, he said, 'A great social revolution is going on in the United States today. Dr. King is one of its leaders, and we appreciate his taking time out of his busy schedule to come and share this service with us tonight.'

The words did not explicitly endorse King, and King's prayer called for nothing more revolutionary than a 'brotherhood that transcends color,' but the implication was unmistakable: Graham was letting both whites and blacks know that he was willing to be identified with the revolution and its foremost leader, and King was telling blacks that Graham was their ally ... his voice was important in declaring that a Christian racist was an oxymoron.

Not so long ago, the argument that a racist could never be a true follower of Jesus was controversial. Today we debate whether a genuine salvation experience would invariably preclude the advocacy of abortion rights.

Pastor Warren's embrace of Senator Obama was as calculated as Pastor Graham's inclusion of Dr. King. Both were designed to send a message. Pastor Graham sought a closer association with civil rights activism. Pastor Warren seeks a closer association with AIDS activism. Both decisions were obviously going to be controversial. Among the civil rights activists Pastor Graham could have embraced, Dr. King was the most contentious for reasons which had *everything* to do with civil rights. Among the AIDS activists Pastor Warren could have invited, Senator Obama was the most divisive for reasons which had *nothing* to do with AIDS. Dr. King was controversial because he *fought* a system which was killing black people. Senator Obama is controversial because he *champions* a system which is killing unborn children. Pastor Graham's gesture insulted racists. Pastor Warren's offended pro-life activists. Pastor Graham wanted to distance himself from racists. Pastor Warren has removed any lingering doubt that he is moving away from pro-life activists.

He claims to be pro-life but he defines the term narrowly. He is a pro-life pacifist (as opposed to "activist" as in AIDS activism) whose opposition to abortion is essentially conceptual. He is detached. He avoids resistance which demands the risk and sacrifice he invests in the fight against AIDS.

He's "against" abortion in the same way the priest and Levite might have opposed mugging in Christ's Parable of the Good Samaritan; a theoretical, disengaged condemnation. It is not the anguished opposition which compels aggressive intervention. Feeling pity for victims is, of course, very different from taking pity on them. At least that's what Pastor Warren says about AIDS.

*New York Magazine*, May 28, 2007, in a statement not submitted to A. Larry Ross for comment, columnist John Heilemann quotes Pastor Warren on pro-life activism:

Whereas Falwell bemoaned the emerging strain of Evangelical environmentalism as 'Satan's attempt to redirect the church's primary focus,' Warren declares, 'The environment is a moral issue.' And regarding his pro-life stance, Warren says, 'I'm just not rabid about it.'

*Merriam Webster Online* defines "rabid" as "going to extreme lengths in expressing or pursuing a feeling, interest, or opinion." When Pastor Warren says he's "just not rabid" about abortion he is in essence saying he is not hot, not cold but kind of lukewarm about abortion. In Revelation 3:13-22, Jesus says, "I know your deeds .... So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." Is God "lukewarm" over child sacrifice or is He rabid?

In Ezekiel 16:20-21, 35-36, 43, He says, among other things, that His own people "... have enraged me ..." with child sacrifice.

In Psalm 106:37-42, He says, among other things, that because of their child sacrifice "... Jehovah's anger burned against his people and he abhorred them. That is why he let the heathen nations crush them."

In Jeremiah 7:24-26, 30-31, He says, among other things, "... and they burn to death their little sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods -- a deed so horrible I've never even thought of it .... "

In Jeremiah 19:3-5, 7-9, 11, God says, among other things, that because of child sacrifice, "... will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. "

It is pretty easy to take God's temperature here -- and He is not lukewarm. He is hot. White-hot.

In Isaiah 59:2-3, He says, "...[B]ut your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood .... "

In Jeremiah 7:16, He says, "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. "

In Jeremiah 11:14, He says, "Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call me in the time of their trouble. "

In Jeremiah 14:11-12, He says, "... 'Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry ....' "

In Jeremiah 15:1, the prophet says, "Then the Lord said to me, 'Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight ....' "

God sounds rabid about child sacrifice. Very rabid. In Matthew 24:12, Jesus told us that we could expect the end times when "the love of most grows cold." Saddleback's love for the unborn may not have grown "cold" but it has certainly cooled and is now no better than "lukewarm."

But perhaps Pastor Warren doesn't recognize abortion as child sacrifice of the sort which provoked God to the most incendiary eruptions of rage described in the Old (or New) Testament. If not, he is gravely mistaken. New Age pagan author Brenda Peterson was declaring abortion to be the sacrifice of a living, human baby to a pagan deity as early as 1993 in a cover story in the September/October issue of *New Age Journal*. Referring to "pagan, Earth-centered goddess religions ..." she describes a "matriarchal time" during which "... the power to give and deny birth belonged to the goddess and to women." She goes on to quote pagan author Ginette Paris in her book *Pagan Meditations*. Peterson says Paris "... describes abortion as an essentially religious act, a sacred sacrifice to Artemis." "One aborts an impossible love," she writes, "not a hatred." The article says that in a later book, *The Sacrament of Abortion*, Paris explains further that if we saw abortion as a sacred ritual, it would restore to the act a sense of the sanctity of life. ...For those sisters who have chosen the 'sacrament' of abortion, we will make sacred the sacrifice. "

The apostle Paul taught that those who sacrifice to idols are unwittingly sacrificing to demons and by implication to the prince of the demons (I Corinthians 10:14-33). Satan has always been a baby killer. The baby Jesus survived a satanic bloodbath as the prince of darkness tried to kill God's infant Son through Herod's butchering of every child in his jurisdiction under the age of two. Satan would kill God if he could but he can't so he grieves the heart of God by inspiring the slaughter of the children created in God's image.

The pagans may be confused on that point but they aren't confused about whether abortion is child sacrifice. It is the Christians who don't seem to have a clue. Most Christian leaders just don't take abortion as seriously as God takes it.

Pastor Graham made Dr. King enormously more effective in the battle against racial injustice. Pastor Warren has made pro-life activists immensely weaker in the battle against abortion. Pastor Graham's gesture was selfless; Pastor Warren's seems less so.

I was one of the signers of an open letter urging Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church to remove Senator Barack Obama from the speakers' lineup at Saddleback's second "Global Summit on AIDS and the Church." I joined the opposition because of Senator Obama's unapologetic advocacy of abortion rights. Senator Hillary "Third Way" Clinton triangulates on "choice" by lamenting that "every abortion is a tragedy" while she votes to keep every abortion legal at every stage of pregnancy. You will hear no such equivocation from Senator Obama. He describes himself as a "leader" in the abortion wars. He is proud of his relentless determination to keep the sewers of our cities running red with the blood of our children.

Senator Obama twice refused to support a ban against partial-birth abortion as a state legislator. He even blocked consideration of the "Born Alive Infants Protection Act." He also refused to support a parental notice requirement as a predicate to abortions for minor children and twice refused to

support a ban on public funding for abortion. This guy is as bad as it gets on the most important moral issue of our time -- and he brags about it.

I was, nonetheless, reluctant to sign this letter in part because of my suspicion that the press would mischaracterize my measured expression of concern with incendiary terms like "torch " and "lash out, " which is, of course, exactly what they did. I have never met Pastor Warren but I have long been an admirer of his ministry, even when I disagreed with him in significant respects. I have read many of the criticisms of his "Purpose Driven " concepts, including strained allegations of "New Age " associations, but I am unconvinced that he is other than a reasonably orthodox Baptist. I, therefore, did not want my opposition to Senator Obama's involvement in the Saddleback conference to be misconstrued as disapproval or ingratitude for Pastor Warren's leadership on the important problem of AIDS.

Neither did I agree with the letter's overwrought assertion that Senator Obama's position on abortion disqualifies him for involvement in the fight against AIDS -- or the implication that collaboration between Christians and pro-abortion politicians is always inappropriate in matters of public policy. I simply believe that the Church should structure such cooperation in ways which protect against exploitation by some of the Left's more opportunistic politicians. That may mean working behind the scenes with problematic officials, as Pastor Warren has done with pro-abortion Senator John Kerry, rather than honoring Senator Obama with a featured role in a high-profile conference.

The press has recently quoted Pastor Warren arguing that "... differences on some issues shouldn't prevent ... [he and Senator Obama] from working on the AIDS problem. " Of course not, but Pastor Warren could work with Senator Obama on AIDS in ways which are less likely to send confusing signals to evangelicals who already struggle to decide how important abortion should be in choosing between candidates for public office. Why practically deify a pro-abortion politician who is a probable presidential contender? (The *Chicago Sun-Times*, his hometown newspaper, carried a recent story with the headline "Obama is going to go for it " -- and if not now, he certainly will later.) Pastor Warren's statement that "You've got to have two wings to fly, " one Republican and one Democrat, is fair enough as an expression of commitment to bipartisanship. But he could have invited a Democrat with substantial AIDS credentials who is also pro-life. That would have clearly signaled recognition of the fact that abortion grieves the heart of God just as painfully as AIDS.

What if, hypothetically, Senator Obama supported the creation of a right to molest children? Would that have been enough to dis-invite him? If his advocacy of the right to kill children wouldn't disqualify him, why would support for the right to abuse them be a deal-breaker? Or, if Senator Obama were guilty of anti-Semitic Holocaust denial, would Pastor Warren have shrugged it off as mere "differences on some issues " ? If he would, he should have his ordination revoked. If he wouldn't, he trivializes abortion.

In the *Philadelphia Inquirer* ( "The Purpose-Driven Pastor " ), January 8, 2006, Pastor Warren presaged the Senator Obama invitation with the following: "I'm worried that evangelicals be identified too much with one party or the other. When that happens, you lose your prophetic role of speaking truth to power," Warren said. " Big red herring. No one is criticizing him for associating with a party. I am not even criticizing him for associating with someone who demands that baby-killing be legal. I am merely asking that such people not be publicly lauded, expressly or impliedly, whether Republican or Democrat.

Pastor Warren further patronized his critics in an ABC TV interview in which he repeated the notion that "If you can only work with people you agree with, you have ruled out 100% of the entire world." That's a "straw man" which fails as a fair point because most of his critics are not demanding that he only work with people with whom he agrees on every issue. All I and others asked was that if he must work with baby killers, he do so discreetly. Discretion seemed a reasonable request when the lives of children hang in the balance.

On MSNBC television, Tucker Carlson called my co-signers and me "isolated" and he has a point. This dismissive adjective pretty well sums up our minority status in the Church. Many evangelicals don't care nearly enough about AIDS -- or abortion. But they should. They should be grateful for the beleaguered pro-life activists who make abortion tougher to ignore or trivialize. They should also be thankful for Pastor Warren's efforts to organize a coherent Christian response to the AIDS crisis.

In the 25th Chapter of Matthew, Jesus warns that He will judge our willingness to "comfort the sick." Our Savior spent much of His ministry healing those afflicted with diseases such as leprosy and mental illness which stigmatized and marginalized their victims. We have a clear Biblical mandate to do no less in response to the most anathematizing illness of our time.

But if Christian charity doesn't motivate the Church to engage on AIDS, perhaps raw fear will suffice. *The Atlantic* magazine, December 2006 (Containment Strategy) says that Pentagon officials now rank AIDS the greatest single threat to national security after terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The article describes a recent study of 112 countries which found that severe AIDS epidemics were more likely to spawn civil strife and war:

Even in countries that don't collapse, AIDS deaths can threaten security in the form of AIDS orphans, who are desperate, disenfranchised, vulnerable to radicalization, and projected to reach 25 million worldwide by 2010.

\* \* \*

The epidemic accounts for seven out of ten military deaths in South Africa and kills more Ugandan soldiers than any other cause, including the brutal twenty-year insurgency and two wars in Congo. AIDS deaths have reduced Malawi's forces by 40 percent. Mozambique can't train police officers fast enough to replace those dying of AIDS.

\* \* \*

Asked to send troops to the troubled Darfur region of Sudan, South Africa couldn't field a complete battalion of uninfected troops; an estimated 17 to 23 percent of its military is HIV-positive and tests in 2004 on two battalions found infection rates as high as 80 percent.

\* \* \*

Because African Union members contribute 37 percent of all United Nations peacekeepers, the shortage of healthy manpower has rippled through the world's hot spots and is of growing concern to the United States, which leaves peacekeeping duties mostly to other nations [AIDS rates are also rising in India, the 3rd largest supplier of peacekeeping troops].

That is why the U.S. military is quietly committing large amounts of money and manpower to the fight against AIDS in Africa as well as places like Vietnam and Ukraine. What started as humanitarian relief for others is rapidly becoming an issue of self preservation for us. Skeptics may dispute man's ability to influence global warming but the global AIDS crisis can and must be contained.

But none of Saddleback's noble AIDS initiatives (notwithstanding the condom conundrum) mitigate the grievous injury which Pastor Warren has now done the pro-life movement. Granted, he has issued the obligatory but carefully worded condemnations of abortion. He has also expressed polite but dispassionate disagreement with Senator Obama's pro-abortion politics. But disclaimers of this sort are hopelessly inadequate as against the impact of video and photos depicting this evangelical pastor with this pro-abortion Senator holding hands and embracing at the podium. One publication captured the spirit of the coverage with a bear hug photo (three columns wide) captioned with the words "ALL SMILES. " Senator Obama must have pinched himself in disbelief.

Why does Pastor Warren's very public association with a pro-abortion leader matter? Because when Saddleback sneezes, the culture really does catch cold.

CNNMoney.com recently described his considerable influence ( "Will Success Spoil Rick Warren? ") October 31, 2005, summarized as follows. Some 30-50 million Americans call themselves evangelical. Pastor Warren's book, *Purpose-Driven Church*, has sold over 1 million copies. His next book, *Purpose-Driven Life*, has sold roughly 26 million copies (updated to 30 million in 56 languages in a recent Meet The Press interview). His Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA, hosts 22,000 worshipers every weekend. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports that attendance swells to 38,000 over Christmas week and that Saddleback has 80,000 names on its rolls.

His church has a \$30 million budget, 300 employees and a 120 acre campus. His Purpose-Driven Ministries, a for-profit corporation, once served a world-wide network of 150,000 pastors with a staff of 180 workers and a budget of \$39 million (now with reduced staff and services and operated by the staff at Saddleback).

He describes himself as Rupert Murdoch's pastor. He recently shared a platform with Microsoft founder Bill Gates at *Time* magazine's conference on global health. He is friends with former General Electric CEO Jack Welch and has done charity work with Bono, lead singer for the Irish rock band U2.

*U.S. News & World Report* says "Peter Drucker, the management guru, has described Saddleback's organizational model as 'the most significant sociological [phenomenon] of the second half of the [20th] century.' "

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* article also called Pastor Warren "... perhaps the most influential evangelical Christian in America " and someone who "... is often seen as the heir to the Rev. Billy Graham as 'America's pastor.' "

Understanding how and why Pastor Warren broke faith with pro-life activists is important because hundreds of thousands of Christian leaders are heavily influenced by his ministry. The Church has never decisively engaged on abortion but small numbers of individual believers have. They are the source of virtually every resource on which a struggling pro-life movement relies for its very existence. So much of our energy is spent on mere survival that little is left to prosecute a serious offensive against baby-killing. The effort to outlaw abortion is failing because most of the Church

has remained on the sidelines. If Pastor Warren takes a walk on pro-life activism, he will take much of the rest of the Church beyond our reach. The result will be a pro-life movement permanently reduced to "swatting mosquitoes. " Any hope of "draining the swamp " will recede still further into the distance.

Because journalism remains the first draft of history, it may be useful to examine press accounts of how far over the top Pastor Warren went in linking himself, and by implication the evangelical Church, to Senator Obama.

*The Orange County Register* ("Evangelicals embrace Obama") December 2, 2006, quoted Pastor Warren describing Senator Obama as one of "two members of Congress he most respected." This is the same Senator Obama who has publicly told Planned Parenthood (and stated repeatedly in earlier campaigns) that "age appropriate" sex education "is the right thing to do" for kindergarteners (ABC News website, July 18, 2007). It got worse. "'You may not always agree with what they say [read abortion], but they always speak with integrity -- and more than that, civility,' Warren said. " Implicit in this remark is the notion that even tactful expressions of concern are "uncivil " if they are directed at evangelical leaders who lionize pro-abortion politicians. "Integrity " and "civility " are certainly to be prized among born people but should they be permitted to trump justice and mercy for the *unborn*? As will be documented below, this tendency to counter-attack even thoughtful critics with ad hominem accusations is an all-too-reflexive Saddleback response to criticism. It is the most dangerous consequence of near-constant exposure to adulation. Even the mildest rebukes become intolerable.

Who doesn't lament the coarsening of the culture? But when "integrity " is defined down to mean little more than deeds consistent with words (absent any judgment as to the morality of those deeds) then even Heinrich Himmler qualifies as a person of "integrity. "

The next day's Register quoted Pastor Warren describing Senator Obama as his "good friend. " Innocuous enough in any other setting but in this context it tends to obscure the fact that Senator Obama is a sworn enemy of the unborn.

Reinforcing the impression that Senator Obama's abortion advocacy is a trifling matter was the "rock star " reception lavished on him by the Saddleback audience. It was much more enthusiastic than the tepid response which conservative speakers routinely receive from liberal audiences -- on those rare occasions when liberals grant conservatives an audience for any purpose other than heckling (think President Bush at Coretta Scott King's funeral). The Register also reported that "The standing ovation given Obama was longer and louder than that received by either Warren or Brownback. " This longing to gratuitously ingratiate oneself to the Left seemed to be contagious at Saddleback.

With these electrifying (or demoralizing) images dominating television and print coverage, the message to evangelical voters was decidedly mixed: Pastor Warren may not believe abortion is right -- but neither does he believe it matters very much. Nor, apparently, was he particularly concerned that Democrat political strategists would take the fullest advantage of Saddleback's easy imprimatur.

Senator Obama himself led the way by rushing the press coverage (all puff-piece, all the time) onto his website within minutes of publication. And why wouldn't he? Typical of the trend was Salon.com ( "Left Turn At Saddleback ") which quotes Pastor Warren introducing the senator as "... a man of brains and heart and faith. " But to what "faith " does he refer? Why, that practiced by The

United Church of Christ, whose position on abortion ([www.ucc.org/justice/choice](http://www.ucc.org/justice/choice)) sounds suspiciously as though it might have been written by Planned Parenthood.

Will the Left's propaganda victory at Saddleback matter -- or are Pastor Warren's critics over reacting? The *Los Angeles Times* ( "Obama tells evangelicals that AIDS battle needs churches ") December 2, 2006, began the parade of pundits who quickly confirmed pro-life fears:

For Obama, the Saddleback appearance offered a high-profile venue to highlight the role of religious faith in his life as he steps into a more prominent role on the national political stage.

A parishioner at Trinity United Church of Christ on Chicago's South Side, he has ... urged fellow Democrats to reach out to evangelicals.

\* \* \*

The Saddleback event also enabled Obama to spotlight his efforts to find common ground with Republicans on AIDS and other matters.

Chris Lehane, a Democratic strategist, said that after years of fierce partisan combat in Washington, D.C., voters were likely to look favorably on a presidential candidate who champions efforts to work together for the common good.

'At a political level, it's a very smart thing for him to do,' he said of Obama's improbable stop at a mega-church in Republican-leaning Orange County.

The media myth that Senator Obama is above partisanship is absurd. The *New York Times*, December 24, 2006 ( "Testing the Waters, Obama Tests His Own Limits ") reports that the National Journal ranks Mr. Obama's voting record as more liberal than 82.5 percent of the Senate, compared with 79.8 percent for Mrs. H.R. Clinton.

Salon.com's Tim Grieve agrees that advocates of legal abortion have been handed an enormous windfall:

[I]t's probably safe to say that few evangelical voters have thought of him as one of their own. At least until now. By allowing Obama to speak at his church, by throwing his arms around him -- both figuratively and literally -- Warren gave Obama both entrée and credibility; he put him on a stage where he wasn't some distant Other to be demonized or mocked, but a man to be measured alongside another, more familiar one.

'This counts as a political move,' Mark Silk, director of the Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College, told the *Chicago Tribune* earlier this week. 'It means he's not beyond the pale. We're willing to regard him as part of the conversation.'

\* \* \*

Exit polls taken in conjunction with last month's midterm elections show Democrats closing the 'God Gap.' ...Democrats have spent much of the last two years talking about how they

need to do a better job of talking about faith, and, in Obama, they could have a presidential candidate who can actually do it.

More than a week after the news cycle had moved on, columnist Kathleen Parker, in the Orlando Sentinel, December 10, 2006, was still calling Senator Obama's appearance at

Saddleback a "water-parting event in itself.... "

Many months later, a June 6th, 2007 article in the *Christian Science Monitor* kept the "progressive " optimism alive with the headline "Can the religious Left sway the '08 race? Pro-abortion liberals are more convinced than ever that Pastor Warren has given them a shot at his constituents.

The article says "Democratic presidential candidates are speaking openly about faith, competing for 'values voters.' " The story describes former Senator John Edwards and Senators H.R. Clinton and Barack Obama feigning "faith " (as I would term their ploy) at a forum sponsored by the liberal "Christian " group called Sojourners (who founder says he is "pro-life " but apparently not very "rabid " about it either).

It's an important strategic move for all these people -- not to say their faith isn't genuine," says Jim Guth, an expert on religion and politics at Furman University in Greenville, S.C. 'But I think they recognize that in a very closely divided electorate, any ability they have to peel off moderate religious conservatives or centrists, by making it clear they're comfortable with the language of faith -- that's a political advantage and wise strategy and maybe good policy and good politics.'

Senator Obama's stunning success with "pro-life " Pastor Warren may have helped convince another pro-abortion senator, Hillary R. Clinton, D-NY, to hire Burns Strider, former head of "Religious Outreach " for the House Democratic Caucus to "... tap into the evangelical Christian movement " for Mrs. Clinton's probable presidential campaign (*Los Angeles Times*, "The Clinton Machine is a Tighter Ship, " December 31, 2006.)

It is difficult to imagine that Pastor Warren and his expert advisors would not have anticipated the degree to which this invitation could shift the delicate balance of power between the Right and the Left. Did he underestimate the damage to the pro-life movement or was that damage a price he was willing to pay to curry favor with the political Left (and their spokes-folks, whom he seems to own, in the press)? If the latter, we are left to wonder if he has underplayed his hand. Senator Obama made no philosophical concessions to gain Pastor Warren's quasi-endorsement. Does Pastor Warren really believe that he must stand down on abortion before the Left will allow him into their fight against AIDS? That would be a serious miscalculation. They long for access to the vast resources he commands. Liberals would surely welcome him on his own terms. Why is he so eager to accede to theirs? But if Saddleback never intended to associate itself with serious pro-life activism, perhaps he concedes nothing of value when he abandons the babies to appease the liberals.

Abortion is legal at any time for any reason and it will stay that way until we force a dialogue that no one seems to want to have: pro-abortion politicians because they know that the absence of dialogue preserves public ambivalence, risk-averse evangelicals because they recoil from the price they would have to pay for forcing that dialogue.

Whatever his motives, Pastor Warren is making Howard Dean look like a genius. ChristianityToday.com reports that "The day before he was elected chair of the Democratic National Committee ... Dean [outlined] ... an approach that will emphasize outreach to evangelicals. " Dr. Dean is arguably the most belligerently pro-abortion governor to ever inhabit a statehouse but Christianity Today quotes him as saying, "People of faith are in the Democratic Party, including me. " Pro-abortion Democrats talk about "faith " as though it were an abstract good. They seem to believe that it doesn't matter what they believe, so long as they believe something, anything, they can describe as "faith. " But what does Dr. Dean mean by this "outreach " which puts Leftist "faith " to action?

Senator Obama knows what he means; "change the subject. " Don't change your views, just talk your adversaries into talking about something else; something which interests you. The Orange County Register ( "Evangelicals embrace Obama ") December 2, 2006, quotes Senator Obama:

'We are all being challenged by this crisis. It is a challenge not only of our willingness to respond, but of our ability to look past artificial divisions and debates that have shaped our response all too often.'

The call to "look past artificial divisions and debates " is a call to look away from the slaughter of unborn children. Abortion, the argument goes, is a private matter; hence the insistence that we avert our gaze. This is a clever reprise of the Democrats' audacious demand that the country "look past " President Clinton's perjury problems and just "move on. " It was, after all, just a lie about sex and isn't sex a private matter? Isn't abortion also just about sex? Didn't Roe v. Wade make abortion private too? Yes and no and yes, but why is the Church helping people who are helping keep abortion legal by keeping it private?

Senator Obama got good at persuading adversaries to change the subject on abortion long ago. MSNBC.com reported this fact on August 9, 2004, in an article titled "Keyes assails Obama's abortion views ":

Obama said he didn't question the sincerity of those who are deeply concerned about abortion, but he said he believed there are many other issues on the minds of voters.

'As I travel around this state, I don't get asked about gay marriage, I don't get asked about abortion,' Obama said. 'I get asked, "How can I find a job that allows me to support my family? " I get asked, "How can I pay those medical bills without going into bankruptcy? "'

"Move on " has become MoveOn.org and even among Christians, the crusade to change the subject is building like a big wave surf break.

John Fund agrees in *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2006 ( "Not so fast "):

Many voters want to get beyond the stale culture-war issues [chief among which is abortion] fought over by rival camps of baby boomers. Mr. Obama's uplifting rhetoric about 'looking for something different' is appealing.

Michael Barone also describes this search for relief from "social issue " combat fatigue. In the December 25, 2006 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* ( "The Experience Factor ") he says:

There is clearly a demand in the political marketplace for candidates who can rise above the bitter partisanship that has dominated our politics since Bill Clinton took office in 1993.

\* \* \*

And it has been bitter because the demographic factor most highly correlated with voting behavior is religion and degree of religious devotion -- which is to say, people with deeply held moral views [the most divisive of which involves abortion].

\* \* \*

Obama, by emphasizing what Americans of differing views have in common, invites us to an era of less bitter partisanship.

Of course Senator Obama wants us to stop fighting over abortion. That way it remains legal and without meaningful regulation. It won't be outlawed without a fight and to be effective, that fight will have to be forced -- and be far more bitter than anything the culture has endured to date; perhaps as bitter as the fight over slavery and civil rights for African Americans. The culture became war-weary during those conflicts as well.

Rich Lowry, at NationalReview.com (December 1, 2006) also picks up on Senator Obama's deft sleight of hand but Mr. Lowry's breezy manner suggests that he may be missing some of its more sinister implications:

He is the only presidential candidate from either party about whom there is palpable excitement. And that is because everything about him says, 'I'm not a Bush, I'm not a Clinton, and can we please talk about something else?'

To which Pastor Warren panders, "Sure, why not? "

And he is not alone. No one has fulfilled Dr. Dean's Great Commission to evangelize evangelicals with greater missionary zeal than U.S. Senator-elect Claire McCaskill. She toppled pro-life incumbent Jim Talent by appealing to Missouri's evangelicals despite the fact the "faith " she embraces on abortion is that of John Kerry, Ted Kennedy and other far-lapsed Catholics. The *Los Angeles Times* described her adaptation of Dr. Dean's "outreach " strategy in an article published on October 11, 2006, titled "Democrats Aim at the Red. " It can be summarized in a phrase: Change the subject!

McCaskill's biggest obstacle, by far, is her liberal views on social issues: She supports abortion rights ....

\* \* \*

But mostly, McCaskill is trying to persuade more rural voters to consider 'the money side' of the race. In the Bootheel's major counties, the poverty rate is substantially higher than the state average.

She spotlights her support for an increase in the minimum wage; denounces last year's energy bill for providing tax breaks to oil companies; and proposes new tax credits for college education, child care and first-time home buyers.

Waving a big wad of "let me buy your votes " cash is rather more crass than Senator Obama's epidemiological gambit but his offer to collaborate with evangelicals in the fight against AIDS worked just as well at changing the subject. Pastor Warren didn't sell out to a pro-abortion politician in exchange for pork-barrel payoffs but he did take help for victims of AIDS in a way which will hurt victims of abortion. Either way, lots of savable babies are now going to die.

Saddleback has declared its intention to expand its influence on all manner of issues but serious involvement with abortion would obviously slow and even halt that process. The Orange County Register's December 3, 2006 edition headlined the question "Who will decide God's politics? " The answer, in large measure, is Saddleback -- and its new best friends, pro-abortion all:

Warren's effort to make churches centers of evangelism and practical good works are efforts to expand Christian awareness and attention toward pressing -- and seemingly less controversial -- issues such as poverty and disease.

\* \* \*

The Warrens' willingness to reach across theological and party lines ... has made Saddleback the center of a growing debate about whether the evangelical movement's political activism needs to change -- or exist at all.

This notion that evangelicals should abandon "political activism " is the brainstorm of naifs such as David Kuo, the former deputy director of the White House's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In the December 3rd Register article, Mr. Kuo asserts that "We've tried politics. It didn't work. " If Mr. Kuo thinks the pathetic attempt by which Christians have "tried " to stop abortion is real "politics, " he obviously has no idea what real politics even looks like. He further embarrasses himself by arguing that Christians need to "abstain " or "fast " from politics. Does he think abortionists will reciprocate by "abstaining " from baby-killing?

At least Saddleback has acknowledged the need for Christians to work for governance which reflects Judeo-Christian values but why pursue certain important values to the exclusion of others? Evangelicals can fairly be faulted for doing too little to stop the growth of the AIDS pandemic and for failing to support its victims; but few if any have been directly responsible for spreading the disease. Engagement on AIDS is a stretch for many evangelicals but most can be prodded out of their comfort zones with little push-back. On the other hand, enormous numbers of evangelicals have been directly responsible for spreading abortion. Our churches are filled with unresolved guilt. The percentage of abortions obtained by women who claim to be "born again " Christians has recently risen from one in six to one in five. Touch abortion and there will be hell to pay -- literally. No one needs Peter Drucker to figure out that AIDS is a safer bet as an option for compassionate outreach. No one defends AIDS but lots of people will threaten to kill you if you threaten abortion rights. Just go to our website and see for yourself.

Is Senator Obama using Pastor Warren or could Pastor Warren also be using Senator Obama? The December 3rd *Register* article quotes one commentator who implies that the desire for a less adrenal agenda may indeed be mutual:

Daniel Vestal [coordinator of the 1,800 church Cooperative Baptist Fellowship] ... says, 'I think he [Pastor Warren] is asking different questions and raising issues of relevance and social conscience that are true to the Scripture.'

Relatively speaking, the "different questions " to which he makes reference amount to "anything but abortion. " This trend recurs throughout the article:

On Tuesday, the incoming president of the Christian Coalition, the Rev. Joel Hunter, resigned because, he said, the group's board of directors disagreed with his plan to broaden the coalition's political agenda beyond topics such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

"Broadening the agenda " is often a euphemism for "throwing in the towel. " It is what pro-life groups usually do when they "evolve " to become "pro-family. " They are still pro-life but their focus quickly shifts to the defense of marriage, opposition to gambling, condemnation of pornography, protection of religious liberty and the promotion of "intelligent design, " etc. Each of these issues is less costly to contest than abortion but still measurably more divisive than AIDS prevention and treatment. So pro-life organizations tend to become pro-family and pro-family churches tend to become AIDS ministries. These groups remain pro-life but it's hard to miss the rise in their stock as they "broaden their agendas. " It's win-win for everyone -- except the babies.

The *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 2006, interviewed Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, on this subject:

Evangelicals -- some of the leaders at least -- are beginning to say maybe we've had too narrow an agenda and we have to address issues like global warming, torture, Darfur, the AIDS crisis in Africa, maybe even speak out on behalf of immigrants -- many of whom are our kind of Christians.

Amen to more compassion for more victims but the Church's problems with social activism haven't been confined to "too narrow an agenda. " At least as serious a failing has been a craven refusal to press even that narrow agenda when it would cost us dearly to do so. Shouldn't unborn children be as precious to us as "our kind of Christians "? Then why haven't we fought to save them the way we are beginning to demand compassion for desperate immigrants?

Abortion isn't just "some issue, " to use the idiom of Pastor Warren. Global estimates suggest that there have been between 25 million and 40 million deaths from AIDS over the decades since the pandemic began. But abortion killings have reached 40 million in the United States alone and the World Health Organization believes that internationally, more than 50 million unborn children are killed by abortion *every twelve months!* How about a Saddleback P.E.A.C.E. Plan for the babies? Senator Obama has one but he would spell his with the letters P.I.E.C.E. to reflect his role in the chopping of children into little pieces. (The former acronym stands for planting/partnering with churches, equipping leaders, assisting the poor, caring for the sick and educating youth).

But confusion on AIDS and abortion is rampant in the Church. The December 2, 2006 Register article drives home that point:

Gordon Raley, who coordinates efforts with churches for Arlington, Va.-based Family Health International, said criticism of Obama revealed a shortcoming that sometimes occurs among Christians.

'Even within the church, sometimes we put politics before God,' he said.

Get it? Helping AIDS victims is service to God but helping unborn children is service to politics. This sort of absurdity may be politically correct but it is also a very great apostasy and it is corrupting the Church on every continent.

Pastor Warren says, "Laws don't change people." He then adds that "You only change people through the heart. And that's a God thing." But millions of men and women who claim to be "born again" have killed their children and many unbelievers who have seen the truth about abortion have rejected pregnancy termination as immoral. Every law student is taught what his professional experience will eventually confirm and that is that the law is very much a teacher. Real spiritual change must indeed be God-centered but untold millions of unbelievers (and not a few "believers") mistakenly imagine that any behavior which is legal must, by implication, be moral. Public acceptance of abortion rose exponentially in the years which followed the Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion. Change public opinion on abortion and you will change the law -- which further changes public opinion on abortion. Laws do, in fact, change people and not always for the better.

This strangely binary perception of the "only" way in which people change may lie at the heart of Pastor Warren's puzzling assertion that "It's time for the church to be known for love, not legalism." That's catchy but Webster defines "legalism" as "excessive conformity to the law." God's law forbids the shedding of innocent blood. It also commands that we intervene where innocent blood is being shed. How could conformity to that law be "excessive" where unborn children are at risk? Why is "love" incompatible with obedience?

This is a false dilemma which is only compounded by a related muddle in which Pastor Warren says, "It's time for the church to be known for what it's for; not what it's against." The eminent theologian Francis Schaeffer cautioned that if people who claim the Name of Christ won't stand up against something as evil as killing a baby, then the world has the right to ask whether Christ is real. So why shouldn't the Church be known for being against killing babies at the same time it's known for being for pregnant women and AIDS victims? That sounds like the real "God thing" to me.

Steve Saint, missionary aviation pioneer and son of Nate Saint, one of five missionary aviators killed Jan. 8, 1956 by Auca Indians in Ecuador with whom they were seeking to share the Gospel, believes that the American Church's relative indifference to the plight of the unborn is badly hurting our witness abroad. How could this Jesus really be God if His followers care little about the slaughter of innocents created in His image? Perhaps we ignore Dr. Schaeffer's abortion warning at our peril.

Our take on what the Church should be doing about abortion can be read on our website at [www.abortionNO.org](http://www.abortionNO.org) but that's a subject for another day. My more immediate concern is what the Church shouldn't do, which is make more formidable the enemies of the unborn.

Pro-life evangelicals believe that abortion is literally, palpably, satanic. They invoke 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 to describe the guile with which abortion advocates dupe their adversaries:

13. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness ....

Senator Obama, gentle man of healing, would, of course, cry foul at the invocation of these verses and deny, as he did in the *Los Angeles Times*, that he would ever stoop to "demonizing" others. But he is not telling the truth.

[www.YouTube.com/watch?v=yvA9q9bY5ns](http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=yvA9q9bY5ns) features a speech he delivered on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, April 30, 2006, concerning genocide in Darfur. He rightly "demonizes " a long list of those responsible for the demonic savagery by which hundreds of thousands of innocent people are being victimized. People of faith (and/or conscience) are obligated to do nothing less than "demonize " perpetrators and facilitators of demonic evil - whether the victims are born or unborn.

BeliefNet.com posts an article titled "Pushing Progressive Issues With a Focus on Faith " (March 10, 2005) which quotes Senator Obama's pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, who asks, "Are you following Jesus when you are vilifying others? " A few lines later the story says, "Wright is quick to call those who voted for President Bush stupid .... " Both the Senator and his pastor claim that it is wrong to vilify and then they vilify. That inconsistency may be intellectually dishonest but villainy should, in fact, be called by its proper name.

Pastor Warren would also be likely to declare satanic references out of bounds when aimed at his pro-abortion conference speaker but he too is reported to demonize his critics. WorldNetDaily.com, on November 29, 2006 ( "Rick Warren says he's sorry ") ran the text of an e-mail message reportedly from Pastor Warren to a member of Saddleback Church. It complained about criticism related to Pastor Warren's trip to Syria and his proclamation that Syria is a moderate country:

When Kay and I announced the launching of the P.E.A.C.E. plan a few years ago, we both knew we could expect severe opposition coming from different angles. The P.E.A.C.E. plan empowers churches to do the five things Jesus did, and Jesus warned us, 'People will do to you exactly what they did to me and they don't know the one who sent me.' John 15:21 (CEV).

\* \* \*

We are in a spiritual battle for the lives of billions, so we expect opposition. The Bible tells us that 'Satan is the accuser of the brethren.' Unfortunately, sometimes Christians do Satan's job for him. They accuse and criticize other believers. I'm sure that makes Satan smile.

The Bible says it is foolish to spout off about issues before knowing the facts...

\* \* \*

'Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions.'  
Proverbs 18:2 (NLT).

Recently, four 'bloggers' made accusations about my visit to Syria .... They based their accusations on a Syrian state press release! Of course, they had no idea what my motivation was, what I actually did and said, and the confidential results. But they attacked me anyway. Not a single newspaper carried the story but several websites repeated the gossip without talking to me to get the facts.

The first problem with Pastor Warren's accusations is that WorldNetDaily.com published, in the same article, what purported to be a transcript of the video in which Pastor Warren made his Syria comments. It quoted him describing Syria as "peaceful " and "moderate " and devoid of "extremism of any kind... "

One is reminded of blunders by Pastor Billy Graham, returning from the Soviet Union and favorably comparing Warsaw Pact religious liberty with that in the United States; or President Gerald Ford's declaration, in his second campaign debate with Jimmy Carter, that "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, " to which he added that "Poland is independent and autonomous "; topped by President Carter himself, later announcing an end to his "inordinate fear " of Soviet imperialism.

Pastor Graham and Presidents Ford and Carter were rightly hammered in the press for their dangerous naivete but thanks to the shocking effectiveness of Pastor Warren's amazing spin-machine, he has so totally co-opted the fawning press that he managed to avoid serious questioning on his equally dangerous gaffe on Syria.

That fact is scandalous because Pastor Warren's reported remarks are just as wildly inaccurate. Syria is a police state which brutalizes its own people, collaborates with Iran in attacks against Israel through Hezbollah and Hamas proxies, assassinates Lebanese Members of Parliament in an attempt to annex that country and facilitates attacks on American soldiers by insurgents entering Iraq from sanctuary in Syria. The Syrian government would have a propaganda field day with remarks such as these because it well understands the importance of evangelical political support for Israel. It would very much like to convince Pastor Warren's constituents that Israel is the problem and Syria is the solution in the Middle East. Pastor Warren's embrace of the Syrian regime has the same propaganda value to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as his embrace of Senator Obama conferred on the Democrat National Committee.

In fact, the White House has condemned trips to Syria by members of the U.S. Senate, precisely because certain Senators have a tendency to come home and praise our enemies. The Associated Press, December 15, 2006, ran a story titled "Visits to Syria draw a rebuke " and sub-headlined "The White House says senators' trips are sending the wrong message ":

The White House said Thursday that trips to Syria by U.S. lawmakers are a public relations victory for a government that is thwarting democratic reform in the Middle East.

\* \* \*

Sen. Ben [sic] Nelson, D-FL, emerged from a meeting with Syria's president in Damascus on Wednesday saying that Bashar Assad was willing to help control the Iraq-Syrian border.

Can Senator Nelson not realize that Syria has for years held open the Iraq-Syrian border to insurgents working to turn Iraq into a radical Islamic base from which to wage jihad?

The second problem with Pastor Warren's message is that he smears critics of his Syria gaffes with charges that they "do not know " God, are animated by "Satan, " and are "fools. " His tendency to demonize his critics is unbiblical and ill becomes him. He and his wife Kay told Dennis Rainey (FamilyLife Radio broadcast, December 8, 2006) that criticism of his AIDS conference was "chilling " and characterized by "anger " and "vulgarity " and that it was "vindictive " and "hateful " and offered by people who take "joy at trying to take someone else down. " They made no mention of the criticism which I know to have been balanced and caring and Mr. Rainey was just as obsequious as the secular journalists who seem so reluctant to ask embarrassing questions of Pastor Warren. Inaccurately suggesting that everyone who criticizes the Warrens is doing the work of the devil is a transparent attempt to stifle debate about ministry. It is contrary to Pastor Warren's nearly constant (but generally appropriate) criticisms of the ministries of others. But the fact is, critical discussion of the direction of the Church is a good thing. It is healthy. It is not to be discouraged.

At Saddleback, however, it seems to be discouraged indeed. Pastor Warren's inclination to suppress dissent is suggested in a set of obligations to which prospective joiners must commit as a condition of membership at Saddleback (The Purpose-Driven Church, page 321). Called "The Saddleback Membership Covenant," the document cites scripture to require that new members "... protect the unity of my church " by "... following the leaders. " It requires concentration "on the things which make for harmony.... " It repeats the duty "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. " It says again regarding leaders that members should "Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden. " Unity and harmony and loyalty to leadership are vital to the cohesive function of any organization but they can prove disastrous if used to discourage dialogue and diminish accountability. These are Biblical principles to be sure but they must be tempered by a few Proverbs: "...[A] wise man listens to advice, " Proverbs 12:15; "...[W]hoever heeds correction shows prudence, " Proverbs 15:5; "Plans fail for lack of counsel but with many advisers they succeed, " Proverbs 15:22; "A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes to a fool, " Proverbs 17:10.

When I first tried to understand Pastor Warren's thinking regarding the Senator Obama and Syrian affairs, I concluded that the pro-abortion senator and Syrian dictator must be possessed of Rasputin-like powers of deception and manipulation. I thought of Vladimir Lenin's "useful idiot " descriptions of Western visitors (such as union leader Walter Ruther) who would return home from the Soviet Union singing the praises of the gulag. I imagined that these men had somehow mesmerized Pastor Warren to obtain his careless approval. How else to account for these "Kumbaya " moments? Wikipedia's definition of this sappy song seemed especially consistent with this explanation for Pastor Warren's Obama/Assad cuddle-fests:

In a satirical television spot for the 2006 Congressional elections, made by David Zucker, an actress playing Madeleine Albright serves cookies and milk to a group of terrorists: when she notices gunmen and suicide bombers emerging from the basement, her guests distract her and allay her suspicions by picking up a guitar and breaking into a chorus of 'Kumbaya'.

But the greater probability is that the Saddleback team knows exactly what they are doing. How could it have escaped their notice their position on evangelical social activism is internally inconsistent? They are too smart to not be feeling lots of cognitive dissonance.

The Philadelphia Inquirer says this of Pastor Warren's call for renewed evangelical commitment to political involvement:

'One of my goals is to take evangelicals back a century, the 19th century ...' said Warren ....  
'That was a time of muscular Christianity that cared about every aspect of life.'

Not just personal salvation, but social action. Abolishing slavery. Ending child labor. Winning the right for women to vote. It's time for modern evangelicals to trade words for deeds and get similarly involved, Warren contends.

How does that call to arms apply to AIDS but not abortion? Does Pastor Warren imagine that child labor could have been abolished with the feeble effort the Church has grudgingly invested in the fight against abortion? Or slavery, for that matter? We hear his words on abortion but where are the deeds which match those he rightly demands for the fight against AIDS? *I'm* not saying that he should care about abortion; he says he should care about abortion. What comfort is passive concern to dead babies?

Is Saddleback ditching pro-life activism because it's too "Republican"? That is a non sequitur which implies a belief that "bipartisanship" is more pleasing to God than saving babies' lives.

On December 12, 2006, *The New York Times* published a full-page call to action against genocide in Darfur. Its cry for help was addressed to the President: "PRESIDENT BUSH: YOU'VE TAKEN A STAND AGAINST GENOCIDE. NOW TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION TO END IT." The ad goes on to say "THE GENOCIDE IN DARFUR IS GETTING WORSE. YOU MUST DO MORE TO STOP IT."

The abortion genocide in America is also getting worse. The Wirthlin polling group says that public support for first-trimester abortion stood at 50% in 1980. By 1998 Wirthlin reported that public approval had risen to 61%. In December of 2003, Gallup disclosed that 66% of Americans supported first-trimester abortion. It is getting worse. 90% of abortions are performed in the first trimester. Please use your influence to pray and urge Pastor Warren to do more to stop it. Many, many others will follow the influence he has so carefully cultivated -- not with half-measure, fig leaf gestures but with a serious commitment to stopping the killing, healing the wounded and mobilizing the Body of Christ to fight this scourge.