

Black Pro-Lifers' Joy and Pain

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President-elect Barack Obama's election Nov. 4 was historic in more ways than one.

Not only does it represent the first time an African-American has been elected to the White House, but his running mate Joseph Biden's election represents the first time that a Catholic will occupy the vice presidency.

Black Americans feel the historical moment most keenly. Especially black pro-lifers.

"It's an incredibly historic moment for our nation. There were many African-Americans who didn't think we would see this in our lifetimes," said pastor Arnold Culbreath, urban outreach director for Protecting Black Life in Cincinnati.

"However," he added, "abortion remains the leading cause of death in the black community. With President-elect Obama being as aggressively pro-abortion as he is, that makes our work more urgent and necessary."

The Church used the moment to both congratulate and educate.

Chicago's Cardinal Francis George, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote to Obama "to express our congratulations on your historic election as president of the United States" and to "pray that you will use the powers of your office to meet them with a special concern to defend the most vulnerable among us and heal the divisions in our country and our world. We stand ready to work with you in defense and support of the life and dignity of every human person."

Pope Benedict XVI also sent a telegram (*story, page 5*).

Black pro-life leaders struggled with mixed emotions about the win.

"While there is celebration and revelry around what happened, there is a path which the African-American community is moving down regarding the disproportionate impact abortion is having on us as a people," said Culbreath. "There are over 1,200 black abortions occurring in our country every day."

The Rev. Johnny Hunter also stressed the impact of abortion on blacks. He is national director of Life

Education and Resource Network in Fayetteville, N.C.

Hunter pointed out that in its early days, Planned Parenthood was started in part to purge America of minorities.

"People don't realize that abortion has killed more blacks than the Ku Klux Klan ever lynched. Planned Parenthood is the biggest of the abortion providers," he said. "Planned Parenthood endorsed Senator Obama, and he made promises to them. Any person of color who has made a promise to a group that targets groups of color isn't worthy of being elected."

Culbreath noted that blacks have traditionally supported the Democratic Party, but that by doing so, they've been forced to go along with a host of other issues that they don't agree with, such as abortion and the redefinition of marriage.

"They've had to take the bitter with the sweet, not realizing the Pandora's box that has been opened," said Culbreath.

Michael Steele is the former Maryland lieutenant governor and chairman of GOPAC, the Republican Party's political action committee. He's also a Catholic. He said that the party needs to do a better job of reaching out.

"We need to reach out to blacks, Hispanics, Catholics — show them they have another place to go apart from the Democrats," said Steele.

Based upon Democratic outreach efforts in his own Cincinnati neighborhood, Culbreath agreed that the Republican Party needs to do better.

"The neighborhood where I live is 75% black. The Democratic Party did a yeoman's job knocking on doors and hanging things on doors," said Culbreath. "There was no reciprocation by the Republican Party."

What the Election Means

Alveda King, pastoral associate of Priests for Life and niece of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., challenged pro-life voters, especially those who voted for Obama.

"To everyone who said, 'I am pro-life, but I will vote for a pro-abortion candidate this time,' I say now is the time to prove your commitment to the unborn," said King. "March for truth and justice. Flood the

White House and Congress with messages that you do not agree with the slaughter of innocent children. Stand up for ‘the least of these.’”

Most pro-life black leaders agreed that Obama’s election means difficulty for pro-life activists.

“I think it spells trouble for the life issue,” said Hunter. “I’m 100% convinced that pro-life activists are going to have a tough time during his administration.”

One of Obama’s first actions after Election Day was the appointment of Rahm Emanuel as his chief of staff. Emanuel, a congressman from Illinois and former Clinton staffer, has a 0% pro-life voting record.

Associated Press reported Nov. 9 that Obama plans to use his executive powers to make an immediate impact when he takes office, perhaps reversing Bush administration policies on public funding of embryonic stem-cell research.

Hunter noted one pro-family bright spot in the election. He’s convinced that the greater numbers of African-Americans who voted led to the passage of ballot initiatives protecting traditional marriage.

“The black majority has always voted for Democratic candidates,” said Hunter. “However, because so many blacks showed up and voted, propositions protecting traditional marriage, like the one in California, passed.”

California Proposition 8’s passage means that the state’s constitution will now define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. It reverses a May 2008 decision by California’s Supreme Court allowing same-sex “marriages.” Bans on same-sex “marriage” were also approved in Florida and Arizona. (*See related front-page story.*)

Lawson Lipford-Cruz, a senior at Ohio State University, is president of Black Students for Life. He appreciated the historic moment, but wished it went further.

“Obviously, it’s a historic moment and shows that we as black people have come a long way in this country,” he said, “but at the same time, I’m frustrated because a lot of people haven’t been able to see the bigger picture.”

“The unborn don’t have rights just like we didn’t as black people,” said Lipford-Cruz. “It’s frustrating that people can’t see that.”