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**Obama's Turn to the Right Leaves Out Poor LGBTQ Americans  
Inclusion**

**By The Reverend Irene Monroe  
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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The senate's most left leaning member, presidential hopeful Barack Obama, is now turning to the right.

And the turn, he's finding out, is not as easy as calculated.

On July 1 Obama announced partnering with communities of faith. His proposed plan is to dole out \$5 million a year in federal funds through churches and other religious organizations to God's most disenfranchised - American's poor.

"The challenges was face today - from saving our planet to ending poverty - are simply too big for government to solve alone," Obama announced outside a community center in Zanesville, Ohio.

While the moral imperative in any presidential hopeful's campaign should be to help the poor, the challenge Obama faces today, that is too big to solve alone, is winning evangelical Christians. And the poor, in this instance, become Obama's political pawn to win over this important demographic group.

But by prohibiting these evangelical churches and religious charities from considering

religion in their employment hiring, firing and serving the poor, this constituency group is not buying Obama's sales pitch. "For those of us who believe in protecting the integrity of our religious institutions, this is a fundamental right" Richard Cizik, vice president for government affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals told the Associated Press. "He's rolling back the Bush protections. That's extremely disappointing."

But Obama's sales pitch is also extremely disappointing for a voting constituency within his targeted group - poor LGBTQ Americans.

While the requirements for receiving federal funds in Obama's faith-based program is to protect those in need from religious organizations' proselytizing, preaching and providing religious instructions, poor LGBTQ Americans would unlikely seek or receive help not only from anti-gay religious organizations but from gay-friendly ones as well.

Why? Because implementing a theocratic model for government to effect laws and government structures in this country according to one's Christian ideal would not worked, on the best of days, in the favor of LGBTQ Americans.

The inherent discrimination in religious organizations like the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and Bush's faith-based initiatives have all shown how uncompassionate Christian organizations can be.

And why would Obama's be any different?

For example, I remember a fundraising letter in November 2002 from Elizabeth Birch, former executive director of the Human Rights Campaign that stated, "The Salvation Army was in secret negotiations with the White House to win the legal right to discriminate against gay and lesbian workers in exchange for supporting President Bush's faith-based charity initiative."

In terms of which groups get picked for funding and which ones don't, LGBTQ activists and our allies have also shown the slim likelihood of queer faith-based groups like Metropolitan Community Church or Dignity would receive funding, compared to Christian rights groups.

While many federal programs are in need of prayer, as Bush's faith-based Hurricane Katrina and Rita disaster relief organizations have shown, these organizations highlight, unfortunately, the fault lines of heterosexism, homophobia and faith-based privilege.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, for example, LGBTQ evacuees and their families faced discrimination at the hands of many of these faith-based relief organizations because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or HIV status.

And because the fault lines of race and sexual orientation are on the "down low" in the African-American community, many African-American LGBTQ evacuees experienced discrimination from black faith-based institutions, like the Black Church. With black churches a large part of the relief effort, and unabashedly known for their homophobia, African-American LGBTQ evacuees and their families had neither a chance nor a prayer for assistance.

When you have an administration that believes in less government involvement and more participation of faith-based groups, it slashes needed government programs by calling on churches and faith-based agencies, at taxpayer expense, to provide essential social services that would also impact the lives and well-being of its LGBTQ citizens. And with many of these faith-based agencies touting anti-gay religious vitriol, LGBTQ

taxpayers and their families will be denied help, services and needed medical care, or be mistreated or denied shelter.


Faith is a necessary attribute to possess when engaging in acts of goodwill. Faith derives out of our shared human experience of struggle, especially in the face of social wrongs, human atrocities, and natural disasters.


But who would have ever thought that the hard earned gains that have been won to separate the church, an institution that summarily can and has excluded LGBTQ people, from the institution of the state, an institution that we have leverage to be included in, would show up in Obama's candidacy as it has in Bush's presidency?

**BlackCommentator.com** Editorial Board member, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). Click on the above link to order now at pre-release pricing. As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is [irenemonroe.com](http://irenemonroe.com). Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

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