

WOULD JESUS BE A LIBERAL? – SOME LIBERALS INSIST HE WOULD!

Stephen L. Bakke – August 30, 2011

I Was Inspired

I was inspired to look at this subject when I stumbled onto a “conversation” between Kathleen Kennedy Townsend (Bobby’s daughter and former lieutenant governor for Maryland) and columnist Robert Knight. This was prompted by a scathing article by Ms. Townsend about Rick Perry’s leadership at a Houston prayer meeting and his positions on certain social programs. It seems that not since Ronald Reagan has a Republican candidate for president evoked such outright fear and loathing from the mainstream media and the far-left.

The title of the article: “Is Rick Perry as Christian as He Thinks He Is?” Ms. Townsend attempts to make the case that legitimate claims to Christianity require one to believe in un-tethered governmental authority for authorizing and running charity and relief programs – and she uses Biblical references to support her claims. In response to that article, Robert Knight offered Ms. Townsend “a piece of his mind,” and gave reasoned support in favor of conservatives and their religious commitment.

I’ve often wondered how I might (if ever) address/answer/counter these kind of accusations by liberals at conservatives. They are calling conservatives hypocrites – particularly those well known for their religious convictions. Here is my first, and probably last, response to these liberal charges.

Bible Passages Quoted By Townsend and Others

And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question to test Him, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Mathew 22: 35-40 – NRSV

“For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Mathew 25: 35-36, 40 – NRSV

Ms. Townsend Comments

Some excerpts from the Townsend article:

The Texas governor is running an openly religious campaign, but does he overlook the parts of the Bible that do not support his political beliefs?

I see a fundamental inconsistency between Perry's concerted opposition to government social programs and his promotion of himself as a Christian politician Christ teaches us to feed the hungry and care for the sick, not to abandon them. Perhaps Gov. Perry hasn't read that part of the Bible where Christ admonishes us to care for "the least among us."

Maybe he believes, like some socially conservative evangelicals, that these passages refer only to personal charity, not governmental programs. I don't see any place in the Bible that says we shouldn't use all the tools we have at hand to help the poor, the sick, and hungry.

No one has a monopoly on faith. In a democratic nation, simply saying you believe in Christ doesn't mean you get a free pass and don't have to explain your positions. The story of the Good Samaritan reminds us that it is our actions, not our public displays of piety, that make us good neighbors.

But then Ms. Townsend does an about face re: following the Bible – she wants to have it both ways. This is in reference to Jesus teaching about “lust” in the Sermon on the Mount:

The Bible is certainly open to interpretation. For example, most churches in America today don't require us to gouge out our eyes if we look lustfully at someone, or to cut off our hand if we use it in a sinful way. And yet, right there in Matthew 5:27-30 are clear instructions.

My reaction to that last quote follows the next “Obama” section.

Obama – A Bible Scholar?

Obama once entered this messy discussion of Biblical references and politics. Perhaps he was just baited into saying something. It seems he was making an exact OPPOSITE point to that being made by Townsend – i.e. trying to follow Biblical teaching can be confusing and he discourages it. In a 2006 Washington, D.C. speech Senator Obama **mocked the Bible's relevance for politics:**

Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is OK? Or we could go with Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith ...

Good grief! Would he disregard clear and relevant Biblical teaching about life because of some “out of context” quotations from the Bible? On the other hand (always quick on his feet, and an opportunist to a fault) in a 2008 campaign speech, Obama cited the Sermon on the Mount to claim that Jesus would support homosexual civil unions (which I support, by the way). So, which way is it? Do you use the Bible for wisdom about living, or don't you?

If You Don't Understand the Topic – Consider Not Commenting!

I recommend that Obama and Townsend stay out of the discussion if they don't really know what "they be talkin' 'bout"! Let me borrow from Robert Knight's commentary. He points out, and I agree, that:

The Bible is a wonderful unmatched mix of history, poetry, morality, metaphor, and the greatest love story of all time. It really isn't that difficult to discern when a passage is descriptive, prescriptive or poetic.

Jesus Specializes in Personal Exhortations – And Accountability is Part of the Concern

Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."
– Mark 12:17 – NIV

How does that relate to what I am talking about here? Consider the following:

- **Permit me to be so bold as to suggest that Jesus was saying "there is a difference between the kingdom on earth and the Kingdom of Heaven – and that there is secular and there is spiritual."**
- **He was stating that it is "our lives, and how we conduct ourselves," that we give to God – not to be confused with mere "coin of the realm" which are paid to the government to keep order and provide other services.**
- **It may make some people uncomfortable, but Jesus is consistently very personal in his challenges to – and the response, according to Christian teaching, is also often personal. That is all part of the Judeo Christian tradition I have been taught.**
- **He called on individuals to respond, not the ruling Roman government.**
- Jesus was most certainly a "caring" teacher – His ministry was all about caring!
- Jesus did not equate government with charity as does Ms. Townsend.
- No one but God knows what is in the heart of Mr. Perry, or any other human being.
- **Perhaps Mr. Perry understands well the exhortation to care for "the least of these," and perhaps he is motivated to oppose programs that have trapped millions in poverty, dependency, crime and destroyed families and communities. (Mr. Knight's reminder)**
- **Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Bible admonishes us to care for widows, orphans and the poor – not create more of them.**
- **When Jesus asks the young man to give to the poor and follow Him, he isn't implying one should hand it all over to the Roman government.**
- **Certainly Jesus doesn't preclude government's role in charity, but He certainly didn't imply we should "rob Peter to pay Paul" with no accountability of results.**
- **Much of Perry's criticism of social programs is based on holding programs accountable for their lack of results.**
- **Nowhere in the Bible do we find that there shouldn't be accountability for governmental social programs – by any measure they have been unsuccessful and a waste of money. Since FDR's new deal, and also subsequent to the reforms of the 1960s, there is ever more poverty, breakdown in family, and class warfare.**

But what indications do we have that conservatives have indeed been responsible in carrying out these personal admonitions we find in the Bible? Check out the following section!

Something I Wrote Several Years Ago

It makes sense to dust off what I wrote a while ago in my early reports on “Liberal and Conservative Thought.” In that project, I countered the accusations that conservatives are uncaring and selfish. Here is an excerpt – originally from 2008, and later updated:

Are Conservatives Selfish “Pr...ks”? It’s a central dogma of the Left that conservatives are inherently selfish. Stingy, unfeeling and selfish are common terms used for decades by the Left to describe the Right. There has been legitimate research done to address this question – at least as it regards charitable contributions and volunteerism. The largest project was taken on by Arthur C. Brooks, [then] a Syracuse University Professor of public administration.

The study found that four forces are primarily responsible for making people charitable: religion, skepticism about government involvement in their economic life, strong families, and personal entrepreneurship. It concludes that, very generally, these determining forces are in sync with political conservatives and have “reverse polarity” relative to political liberals.

These determining forces act upon the political spectrum with the following results, according to the study:

- *Conservative families give 30 percent more in absolute dollars than liberal families even though liberal families earned six percent more than conservatives. Registered Republicans are more likely than Democrats to give at all – 90 to 83 percent.*
- *Conservative Americans also donate more of their time to charities than liberals.*
- *Religious Americans are more charitable than non-religious Americans irrespective of their politics.*
- *The more liberal you are, particularly for the secular Left, the less likely you are to donate your money or time to charity. Secular conservatives, a very small group, also ranked very low in their charitable giving – again, a correlation to religion. The churchgoer is nearly twice as likely as the secularist to give money to charities. And the amount given is an unbelievable multiple of 100 times higher than the secularist.*
- *Examining income categories, poorest Americans give the highest percentage of their income to charity, second is the wealthy, and last is the middle class.*
- *If liberals and moderates gave blood at the same rate as conservatives, the blood supply of the U.S. would jump about 45 percent*
- *The least charitable of all groups measured were young liberals – as regards money, time or blood – so much for the much exalted young idealism.*

- *Comparing U.S. charitable giving to western Europe, differences are huge. The reason lies in European attitudes toward God and state. Europeans have largely turned their backs on the former and consider the latter the answer to everything.*

Professor Brooks admits that his findings were the opposite of what he expected – so much so that he double-checked the results to make sure there were no mistakes.

Ms. Townsend Picked the Fight

Consider:

- Ms. Townsend picked the nature of the fight by using Biblical authority and references.
- Whatever one's theory on whom Jesus was, I think it's obvious that He always spoke very personally to all individuals.
- If one understands His "render unto Caesar" comments, it must follow that conservatives don't meet the description Ms. Townsend gives them in terms of "concern for others."
- The seriousness of conservatives "compassion" is evidenced by the statistics I offered!
- **Conservatives take "caring for others" very seriously, and do so in a MUCH more personal way, than do liberals. And Townsend is a member of that liberal group which apparently is somewhat uncomfortable accepting the legitimacy of private charitable programs.**

Back Off Ms. Townsend! Assigning Jesus a modern day political allegiance is a slap in His face – whoever does it!

This Is Not My Endorsement of Rick Perry! I May Not Even Like Him!

I am not ready to support Perry in his campaign. That choice will come much later. I really don't know anything about him and may not end up liking him at all! While the Townsend article directly attacked Governor Perry, she was really talking about conservative sentiments in general, while veiling it somewhat in an anti-fundamentalist "telling of the tale." That's what I'm resisting in this report.