

MORE ABOUT RELIGION AND POLITICS

Stephen L. Bakke – September 2, 2011

There is no maxim in my opinion which is more liable to be misapplied, and which therefore needs elucidation than the current one that the interest of the majority is the political standard of right and wrong.... In fact it is only reestablishing under another name and a more specious form, force as the measure of right.... – James Madison, letter to James Monroe, 1786

Recall the Prior Report

A few days ago I wrote a report “Would Jesus Be a Liberal?” I was inspired to consider this subject when I stumbled onto a “conversation” between Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and columnist Robert Knight. It originally started with a scathing article by Ms. Townsend about Rick Perry’s alleged introduction of religion into the presidential campaign and his position on certain social issues and programs. Mr. Knight had “a thing or two” to say about all that.

In the article “Is Rick Perry as Christian as He Thinks He Is?” – Ms. Townsend asserts that Perry is running an openly religious campaign and that he overlooks the parts of the Bible that do not support his political beliefs? She wrote:

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.”

She seemingly attempts to make the case that legitimate claims to Christianity require one to believe in her version of governmental authority for authorizing and running charity and relief programs – and she uses Biblical references to support her claims.

I received some favorable comments and some questions regarding my previous report, but nothing too critical. Yet, as I thought about what I was hearing, at the risk of repeating myself I decided to clarify what were the most important points (for me) in that report. Maybe this will remove some of the questions that may linger – but perhaps some new questions will pop up.

Bible Passages Used in My Report - Abbreviated

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. – Mathew 22: 39 – NRSV

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: 40 – NRSV

Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. – Mark 12:17 – NIV

The Most Important Points I Want to Make

For me the important points in this debate revolve around:

- Mischaracterization by Ms. Townsend about what is “in the hearts” of most conservatives like me – as relates to compassion, charity and sincere concern for others.
- Since Ms. Townsend brought Jesus’ exhortations into the discussion, it’s important to understand His style of teaching – otherwise it is understood in the wrong context.
- **The role of accountability in the conservative thought process can’t be ignored.**

Consider:

- **Assigning Jesus a political allegiance is a slap in His face – no matter who does it!**
- Ms. Townsend picked the nature of the fight by using Biblical authority and references in a cynically mocking and misleading way.
- The seriousness of conservatives “compassion” is evidenced by the statistics I offered!
- Conservatives take “caring for others” very seriously, and, I would argue, **do so in a much more personal way than do liberals.**
- Jesus was most certainly a “caring” teacher – His ministry was all about caring!
- **Jesus clearly specializes in personal exhortations. It may make some people uncomfortable, but He is consistently very personal in his challenges to individuals. And the response by individuals is also often personal. That is all part of the Judeo Christian tradition I have been taught.**
- Jesus most certainly **does not** state that government can have no role in taking care of “the least of those among us.” But He did not equate government with charity as Ms. Townsend appears to do. (Knight’s point)
- If one truly understands His “give to Caesar” comments, it must follow that conservatives don’t meet the description Ms. Townsend gives them in terms of “concern for others.” **I believe Jesus was saying that there is a difference between the kingdom on earth and the Kingdom of Heaven – that there is secular and there is spiritual.**
- He was stating that “our lives, and how we conduct ourselves,” are our gifts to God.
- Our spiritual and charitable gifts are not to be confused with mere “coin of the realm.”
- When Jesus asks the young man to give to the poor and follow Him, he isn’t implying one should hand everything over to the Roman government.
- Much of my criticism, along with that from other conservatives, regarding 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.
- Jesus didn’t exclude government from a role in charity, **but He certainly didn’t imply we should “rob Peter to pay Paul” with no accountability of results.** (Knights point)
- Maybe Mr. Perry understands very well about caring for “the least of these.” **Perhaps he is motivated to oppose programs that have trapped millions in poverty, dependency, crime – and destroyed families and communities.** The Old and New Testaments admonish us to **care for widows, orphans and the poor – not create more of them.**

That’s it – I’m done with this discussion!