

BARACK AND THE NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST - DON'T DEEMPHASIZE THE INDIVIDUAL - CHRISTIANITY IS NOT A RELIGION OF "PICK AND CHOOSE"!

Stephen L. Bakke – February 8, 2012

Barack Obama's approach to interpreting the Bible tends to be "eisegetical" while I do everything in my power to keep my interpretations entirely "exegetical." (You can look those up!) – renowned international "pretend pundit," Stefano Bakovich, February 2012

On the One Hand but On the Other Hand – Hey! Let's Have it Both Ways!

I don't know why I keep getting into these one-sided discussions with certain liberals and others, some of whom profess and misapply their understanding of Judeo/Christian teaching and traditions. (And some of you have taken me to task for doing so.) On the one hand some liberals mock conservative Christians, while on the other hand professing great theological understanding. It doesn't take one long to see through the shallow attempts at **"having it both ways."** My concern here is primarily with recent "liberal" statements, but in somewhat different ways it can and has happened with conservative politicians and commentators.

Some months ago I "took after" liberal democrat Kathleen Kennedy Townsend who had mocked those who trust too much in the Bible. She wrote: *"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."* Yet in the same article she attempted 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 used (or tried to) Biblical references to support her claims.

In a 2006 Washington, D.C. speech, then Senator Obama seemed to mock 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?"* And then moving to the New Testament, *"Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount - a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application?"*

But Obama's always quick on his feet, and an opportunist to a fault! In a 2008 campaign speech, he cited the Sermon on the Mount to claim that Jesus would support homosexual civil unions (a concept which I support, by the way, but which has little to do with the Sermon on the Mount).

So, which way is it, Kathleen and Barack (to name just a couple)? Do you use the Bible for wisdom about living, or don't you? Or do you get to "pick and choose"?

And Along Came the 2012 National Prayer Breakfast

There is so much more in Obama's recent "Prayer Breakfast" speech than just that one snippet that has been quoted so much in recent days. (Yes I've read through it all.) There was much there that is difficult to criticize, but as with all of Obama's tightly scripted speeches (and with his books, which I have read) there are wonderful words strung together with very little consistent message other than ambitious campaigning. You know the drill. I wrote down some ideas he stated and repeated: fairness, struggling, true to values, citizens, destitute, victims, the golden rule, etc. etc. And a single thread of consciousness that "all things are possible only through progressive government," and "we need to show more mutual respect" (which means agreeing with him, of course). It was a campaign speech in full bloom!

But there was one (now oft' quoted) Biblical quote by Obama, and its use for justifying very specific Obama policies. And with this being a campaign year, etc. etc.... it leads me to respectfully object and say "enough already!"

The use of Bible "snippets" to very directly and specifically defend administration policies and campaign promises is becoming habitual. I don't think I'd like it coming from a conservative either. In the same Prayer Breakfast speech Obama also quoted C.S. Lewis:

Christianity has not, and does not profess to have a detailed political program. It is meant for all men at all times, and the particular program which suited one place or time would not suit another.

I think Obama is speaking out of both sides of his mouth, and trying to "have it both ways by picking and choosing" what applies and what doesn't.

Here is the specific quote from Obama which is the primary focus of the "pundits" and of this report. It was in obvious reference to taxing the rich, fairness, and (of course) class warfare:

But for me as a Christian, it also coincides with Jesus' teaching that "for unto whom much is given, much shall be required." It mirrors the Islamic belief that those who've been blessed have an obligation to use those blessings to help others, or the Jewish doctrine of moderation and consideration for others.

Obama's insistence on subtle political correctness is silly, but so what, I guess. Here is the full biblical quote from Luke 12: 41-48, NIV:

41 Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" 42 The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 "That servant who

*knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. **48** But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. **From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.***

Jesus taught much and often about charity, but this is not one of those sermons. Obama quoted from a small portion of a longer response from Jesus to a question from the disciple Peter. Jesus 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. I have always understood that both Jews and Christians believe there is a very personal relationship between God and each individual.

Obama and Many Liberals Deemphasize the Individual

Traditional Judeo/Christian theology has had an “emphasis on the individual.” This is quite different from the concept of “collective salvation” and “liberation theology” which was part of Obama’s theological training. In any case, it shouldn’t be the defining basis for public policy just because it “seems to fit.” AND, interestingly enough, the emphasis on the **individual** (freedoms, initiative, rights, responsibilities, etc.) **being “endowed by our creator”** is part of the founding principles of this country. For me, Obama is trying way too hard to institute and justify concepts which unfortunately are intended to “fundamentally transform” our country.

This particular bible verse was a personal exhortation by Jesus that dealt with wisdom, preparedness, watchfulness, diligence, and certainly stewardship. I have found very little theological support for the concept that this is about caring for the poor. That concept is dealt with elsewhere, and once again appears as individual (not collective) Christian exhortations. As Mary Beth Brown recently wrote: **“And we too believe in the golden rule. And we wish it animated not the largess of Government but the actions of individuals.”** Again, the emphasis should be on the individual.

Quoting from Dr. Robert Norris, a Presbyterian pastor in Bethesda, Md.: “(Traditional Christianity holds that) **we are held personally responsible by God and not man for what is entrusted to use.**” As Cal Thomas wrote in reflecting on Dr. Norris’ comment: **“The problem comes when government seeks to replace God and this was the attitude conveyed in the President’s remarks.”**

Don’t Get Tangled in Your Panties

In conclusion: DON’T BE TALKIN’ CHRISTIANITY, OR ANY OTHER RELIGION, IF YOU “AIN’T” CONSISTENT – OR IF YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND IT! – CHRISTIANITY IS NOT A RELIGION OF “PICK AND CHOOSE”! **That advice goes for conservatives as well as liberals – for republicans as well as democrats! And I should add that listeners, reporters, and all observers should tread lightly! If “pretend pundits” do too much bloviating about their theological prowess, they just might find themselves very uncomfortable and “all tangled up in their panties!”**