



A Reluctant ‘First Father’

BY KATHLEEN PARKER
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WASHINGTON — One of my great hopes for a Barack Obama administration — and thus one of my personal disappointments — was that he would use his bully pulpit to emphasize the importance of a two-parent family, and especially of fathers, to children’s well-being.

Few understand better than the president the value of a present and involved father. Much of his literary work and his examined life pertains to his own absent father. By his example, he has certainly demonstrated his own commitment to parenting — and his family is a source of pride for all Americans. But the true story of fatherlessness in this country can’t be repeated often or forcefully enough.

This is not a new story. Children who grow up without fathers tend to fall into patterns of destructive behavior — from drug use and truancy to early promiscuity, delinquency and, in too many cases, incarceration. Children raised in fatherless homes are also more likely to grow up in poverty, which is no fault of their mothers but is a fact.

Also well-known is that these pathologies and consequences are more prevalent in the African-American community where, as it happens, most children are born to unwed mothers. Is this the fault of the mothers? Absolutely not. Can a child raised by a single mother prosper? Sure, but it is the exception, including the president, that proves the rule.

Here’s another rule: You can’t solve a problem if you refuse to acknowledge it. Yet in today’s sensitive environment, to even suggest a problem that might feel offensive to some is to risk being labeled an “-ist” of some variety, followed by a public flogging.

Therefore, to suggest, as University of Texas law professor Lino Graglia recently did, that blacks and Hispanics are falling behind in education because they tend to come from single-parent families (largely mothers who are both poor and often uneducated) is pure blasphemy.

Graglia made these remarks to a BBC interviewer who noted that he himself is black and was raised by a single mother. Such personal anecdotes, though interesting, cannot be construed as arguments for single motherhood. I was raised by a single father who was a serial husband (four stepmothers), but only an idiot would argue that a relentlessly dysfunctional



Kathleen PARKER

childhood is the correct path to becoming a healthy adult without overt tics (other than a propensity for adopting homeless, disabled animals).

The simple truth is that it is harder to succeed in life if you are burdened with unnecessary obstacles from the get-go. These would include no father (or no

mother) in the home, not enough money — or books, or aspirational conversation, and a community culture that, as Graglia previously mentioned, does not value academic success.

Graglia’s head is on the block as various offended parties demand that he be punished for his observations. But imagine for a moment if Obama had said the same things. What if Obama had said, you know, African-American kids are as smart as anybody else, but as a group, they are disadvantaged because about 70 percent are born out of wedlock? They are disadvantaged by neighborhoods and a community culture that are often bereft of healthy male role models.

If the president uttered these words, they would be embraced as irrefutable truths. Who knows how he might alter individual destinies through the simple act of articulating these crucial matters of the human experience. It is laudable to model behavior through one’s actions. It can be miraculous to put those actions into words that people can take into their own homes and incorporate into their own hearts.

Words, as Obama knows deeply, are powerful. And the president has taken steps to keep promises related to fatherhood. He created a task force, took a pledge and upgraded a fatherhood website. “The President’s Fatherhood Pledge,” featured on the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, basically renews commitment to family and community.

Not much pain there. This is like saying, “I like dogs and promise not to run over any — on purpose.” A nice gesture, perhaps, but nothing like the power of words: Men, be men. Marry the mother of your children. Be a father to the children you sire. Go home and stay there.

No one could say these things better than Barack Obama. Perhaps in a second term ...

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Religion And The Election

BY WILLIAM MCKENZIE
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An odd thing happened in this year’s presidential election: Religion didn’t play a major role. The diminishing of its place could set an appropriate precedent for the 2016 campaign, which some hopefuls already are considering.

Sure, there was a swirl of debate about religious freedom, mostly about the Obama administration requiring Catholic institutions to provide contraceptive coverage. And Mitt Romney’s faith drew coverage, allowing Mormons to debut nationally the way evangelicals did with Jimmy Carter in 1976.

But religion largely wasn’t onstage like it has been in recent elections. There was little courting of high-profile pastors such as Rick Warren, Jim Wallis and John Hagee. Remember how Warren of California’s Saddleback Church actually hosted a John McCain/Barack Obama forum in 2008?

And issues such as gay marriage, abortion and Islamic extremism didn’t drive the debate. At least not like how the 2004 Bush campaign used gay marriage to win voters in swing states like Ohio. Or how Obama courted young evangelicals in 2008, hoping to winnow down the margin of evangelicals voting Republican.

This shift is a good thing since some voters are getting worn out with all the God talk. In March, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published a survey that showed nearly 40 percent of Americans thought this year’s White House hopefuls were talking too much about God. That was the highest percentage in a decade, up from only 12 percent who thought the candidates were invoking God too much in 2001.

Taking a step back from so much talk about God and politics actually could help voters sort out the natural relationship that exists between religion and politics. These forces always will intersect. They each are about values such as compassion, stewardship and freedom. And policymakers can’t afford to ignore the role religion plays in the world.

Diplomats in the Mideast, Africa and Latin America especially must stay informed about how religious beliefs shape their host countries. Religion influences the culture of those regions, whether through the interplay of the three Abrahamic faiths or the explosive

growth of one or more faiths.

But, as that Pew survey revealed, the God talk has gotten a bit much. So has the manipulation of the religious marketplace by U.S. politicians and their strategists. Candidates’ religious values get trotted out to rev up voters, all while denying that’s the aim. Rick Perry’s Houston prayer rally as he kicked off his presidential bid exemplified the blurring of the religious and political.

Even some believers have grown weary of seeing their brethren closely align their tradition with a party. Jim Denison, a Southern Baptist minister who heads the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, reflected this when he wrote last week on the *Dallas Morning News*’ Texas Faith blog: “If conservative churches would tell our culture what God’s word says about our moral issues, leaving the Republican Party to deal with political challenges through political means, both would be better served.”

JIM DENISON

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Some evangelicals have even started rethinking whether they’ve confused biblical absolutes and political principles. Robert Jeffress, pastor of Dallas’ First Baptist Church, recently wrote: “We must differentiate between biblical absolutes and political preferences. ... Breaking a pledge to Grover Norquist and embracing higher taxes for even higher cuts in expenditures is not tantamount to denouncing Christ. Acknowledging the need for governmental health-care reform does not necessarily pave the way for the rule of the Antichrist.”

To be sure, candidates in 2016 and beyond will speak of their faith. Part of this is to relate to Americans, for whom religion remains important. “There is no indication that there has been a continuous drop in the personal aspect of religion in recent years,” Frank Newport, Gallup’s editor-in-chief, writes of Americans in the “Future of Religion in America: God Is Alive and Well.”

But maybe this rethinking will help both religion and politics. They belong together, but candidates especially need to reconsider how they talk about the intersection.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Filibuster Reform: A Stage For Hypocrisy

LOS ANGELES TIMES (Dec. 12): Nothing exposes partisan hypocrisy quite like the filibuster, that irksome parliamentary rule that allows a minority of U.S. senators to block legislation, judicial appointments and other business by requiring a 60-vote majority to proceed to a vote. Almost invariably, the party in power considers the filibuster to be an enemy of progress that must be squashed, while the minority fights to preserve it at all cost. That the same players often find themselves arguing from opposite sides depending on whether they control the Senate or are in the minority hardly seems to trouble most lawmakers.

So comes now Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) with a campaign to alter the filibuster rule using the so-called nuclear option, which if invoked on the opening day of the new legislative session would allow senators to change the rules by majority vote. Republicans are appalled that he would consider such a ploy, even though they floated the same proposal when they held the majority in 2005. Back then, reform was blocked when a Gang of 14 senators led negotiations that kept the filibuster largely intact, and top Senate Republicans are reportedly reaching out to their Democratic counterparts in an effort to repeat that “success.” We hope they fail.

For the record, we were rooting for the Republicans to go nuclear in 2005, and we feel the same way with Democrats in control. This is not a venerable rule created by the Founding Fathers to protect against the tyranny of the majority, but a procedural nicety that has been altered many times throughout history. In its current incarnation, it goes much too far and has produced gridlock in Congress. ...

Even many Democrats realize that someday they’ll be in the minority, and fret that a future Republican-dominated chamber will use Reid’s precedent to put even stricter limits on filibusters. But that’s no reason not to approve Reid’s proposal. If some future Senate majority wants to go thermonuclear, that’s a debate for another day.

THE VIEWS PAGE

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TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Dec. 13, the 348th day of 2012. There are 18 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History: On Dec. 13, 1862, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside launched futile attacks against entrenched Confederate soldiers during the Civil War Battle of Fredericksburg; the soundly defeated Northern troops withdrew two days later. (It was during this battle that Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee is said to have remarked: “It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it.”)

On this date: In 1642, Dutch navigator Abel Tasman sighted present-day New Zealand.

In 1769, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire received its charter.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson arrived in France, becoming the first chief executive to visit Europe while in office.

In 1928, George Gershwin’s “An American in Paris” had its premiere at Carnegie Hall in New York.

In 1937, the Chinese city of Nanjing fell to Japanese forces; what followed was a massacre of war prisoners, soldiers and citizens. (China maintains as many as 300,000 people died; Japan says the toll was far less.)

In 1944, during World War II, the U.S. cruiser *Nashville* was badly damaged in a Japanese kamikaze attack that claimed more than 130 lives.

In 1962, the United States launched Relay 1, a communications satellite which retransmitted television, telephone and digital signals.

In 1978, the Philadelphia Mint began stamping the Susan B. Anthony dollar, which went into circulation in July 1979.

In 1981, authorities in Poland imposed martial law in a crackdown on the Solidarity labor movement. (Martial law formally ended in 1983.)

In 1994, an American Eagle commuter plane crashed short of Raleigh-Durham International Airport in North Carolina, killing 15 of the 20 people on board.

In 2000, Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore conceded to Republican George W. Bush, a day after the U.S. Supreme Court shut down further recounts in Florida.

In 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. forces while hiding in a hole under a farmhouse in Adwar, Iraq, near his hometown of Tikrit.

Ten years ago: Cardinal Bernard Law resigned as Boston archbishop because of the priest sex abuse scandal. President George W. Bush announced he would take the smallpox vaccine along with U.S. military forces, but was not recommending the potentially risky inoculation for most Americans. The U.N. Security Council condemned “acts of terror” against Israel in Kenya and deplored the claims of respon-

sibility by the al-Qaida terror network. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stepped down as chairman of a panel investigating the Sept. 11 attacks, citing controversy over potential conflicts of interest with his private-sector clients.

Five years ago: Democratic presidential hopefuls meeting in Johnston, Iowa, called for higher taxes on the highest-paid Americans and on big corporations in an unusually cordial debate. Shareholders of Dow Jones & Co., publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*, approved a takeover by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. Major League Baseball’s Mitchell Report was released, identifying 85 names to differing degrees in connection with the alleged use of performance-enhancing drugs.

One year ago: Early sound recordings by Alexander Graham Bell that were packed away at the Smithsonian Institution for more than a century were played publicly for the first time using new technology that read the sound with light and a 3D camera. (In one recording, a man recites part of Hamlet’s Soliloquy; on another, a voice recites the numbers 1 through 6.) In the Penn State child sex abuse scandal, ex-assistant coach Jerry Sandusky waived a preliminary hearing on the charges, which he denied. (Sandusky was later convicted of abusing several boys, some on campus.) In Liege, Belgium, six people were killed when a 33-year-old man threw grenades and fired on a crowd of people in the city’s main square before committing suicide.

Today’s Birthdays: Former Secretary of State George P. Shultz is 92. Actor-comedian Dick Van Dyke is 87. Actor Christopher Plummer is 83. Country singer Buck White is 82. Music/film producer Lou Adler is 79. Singer John Davidson is 71. Actress Kathy Garver (TV: “Family Affair”) is 67. Singer Ted Nugent is 64. Rock musician Jeff “Skunk” Baxter is 64. Country musician Ron Getman is 64. Actor Robert Lindsay is 63. Country singer-musician Randy Owen is 63. Actress Wendie Malick is 62. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is 62. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke is 59. Country singer John Anderson is 58. Singer-songwriter Steve Forbert is 58. Singer-actor Morris Day is 56. Actor Steve Buscemi is 55. Actor Johnny Whitaker is 53. Rock musician John Munson (Semi-sonic; Twilight Hours) is 50. Actress-reality TV star NeNe Leakes is 46. Actor-comedian Jamie Foxx is 45. Actor Bart Johnson is 42. TV personality Debbie Matenopoulos is 38. Rock singer-musician Thomas DeLonge is 37. Actor James Kyson Lee is 37. Actress Chelsea Hertford is 31. Rock singer Amy Lee (Evanescence) is 31. Country singer Taylor Swift is 23.

Thought for Today: “My theory is to enjoy life, but the practice is against it.” — Charles Lamb, English essayist (1775-1834).

FROM THE BIBLE

There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many? John 6:9. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Great Feast

Holiday Feast Committee, Yankton

Thank you to the Yankton Community for all the support of the Community Feast that was held at Calvary Baptist Church on Wednesday, Nov. 21. There were 2,800 people who came and enjoyed a hot turkey dinner.

Thank you so much to all the people that volunteered to drive

and that delivered the meals, helped with serving, greeting people, preparing and working at the feast and the donations we received.

We truly are blessed to live in such a generous and giving community. Without each and every one of you this event would not be possible.

Hope to see you at The Yankton Community Holiday Feast in 2013.

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