



Obama Misses Point on Prayer Breakfast

It is hard to imagine how a National Prayer Breakfast could be controversial, but it has become that. This tradition stretching back through five decades of American political life and including every American president during that period, has become controversial under President Obama. A gathering which has included people as diverse as Tony Blair and Mother Teresa has somehow come to be seen as exclusionary. How?



The National Prayer Breakfast, although very inclusive, does have some framework. The same broad Judeo-Christian values that were recognized early by the Founding Fathers are part of the event. Those values inevitably involve some proscribed actions and beliefs. Atheism, for example, is incompatible with the National Prayer Breakfast. Prayers, after all, are directed at a divine being.

In fact, the National Prayer Breakfast is supported by a Christian organization called the “Fellowship” or the “Family.” Those ideologically on the Left have begun to openly call for political leaders to attend alternative prayer events, with the emphasis on those areas in which traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs are deemed no longer in synch with modern life.

President Obama, when he addressed the National Prayer Breakfast, called for a return to civility in politics. He equated the lack of “civility” with citizens pressing their claim that Obama was not actually born in the United States. Obama also equated the lack of “civility” with those who question the sincerity of Obama’s faith. He also specifically tied “civility” to common efforts by “Americans of faith, and no faith, united around a common purpose.”

The president’s remarks seemed to minimize the importance of the traditional religious faith of Christians and of Jews in favor of a sort of Confucian protocol of manners, a society of communal rather than personal good works, and a religious vessel so hollowed out as to effectively be agnostic or atheistic. Stripping traditional spiritual values, the foundational principles of our nation, out of the National Prayer Breakfast seems part of a broad attack on those parts of religion that place stop signs on immoral behavior. The emphasis of Obama on “civility,” while not wrong per se, appears to make hurt feelings, acceptance at any cost, and the inclusion of every type of behavior as moral behavior always able to trump the idea that there are objective wrongs or sinful behavior, that preachers and prophets (in the tradition of Jews and Christians) condemn such behavior no matter how popular it might be, and that divine forgiveness requires repentance and remorse.

The National Prayer Breakfast, a private event, was never intended to end religious values in the name of tolerance. It was intended instead to celebrate those values that priests, ministers, and rabbis



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 6, 2010

throughout American history have championed and preserved. Although those values are broad, like America, the values are not infinitely malleable or subject to political or popular modification.

Photo of Obama at National Prayer Breakfast: AP Images



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