Avoiding Phony Religiosity: The Rhetorical Theology of Obama's 2012 National Prayer Breakfast Address

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While scholarship of presidential rhetoric fill the landscape of rhetorical criticism, only recently has scholars given much attention to the use of religious rhetoric in presidential discourse. Moreover, while this scholarship is growing, scholars have not paid much attention to the National Prayer Breakfast. In this essay, I examine President Barack Obama's 2012 National Prayer Breakfast Address as an example of rhetorical theology. I argue that during this address, Obama does more than fulfill a sacred obligation; he constructs a theology that challenges the prevailing public and political theology. Obama's theology is not systematic, but profoundly rhetorical as he invites his audience to see and do faith differently. It is Obama's framing of faith, grounded in religious values, that allows him to offer his policies—not as liberal ideology, but ones grounded in the faith.

Keywords: Barack Obama, National Prayer Breakfast, Presidential Rhetoric, Theology

Presidential rhetoric has always been a topic of study for students and scholars of rhetoric. Just a cursory examination of our journals would show that studies on presidential rhetoric and the examination of speeches dot the rhetorical criticism landscape and these studies have created a rich legacy for all interested in presidential rhetorical discourse. However, one area that scholars have not examined as much is how presidents invoke religious rhetorical appeals or use religious rhetoric to persuade and move an audience. This is even more surprising because since the founding of America, religion and politics have co-mingled together, with the president many times acting as theologian in chief.

This is not to say there has not been any work done in this area. Starting in 1980, when Keith Erickson and Dan Hahn published essays on the religious rhetoric of Jimmy Carter, and through the past decade scholars began to publish works that examined the use of religious rhetorical appeals from American presidents. Much of this work focused on the use of presidential religious rhetoric in inaugural addresses, foreign policy, pres-

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¹ See Keith V. Erickson, "Jimmy Carter: The Rhetoric of Private and Civic Piety," Western Journal of Speech Communication 44, no. 3 (1980): 221-35; Dan F. Hahn, "One's Reborn Every Minute: Carter's Religious Appeals in 1976," Communication Quarterly 28, no. 3 (1980): 56-62.

² David A. Frank, "Obama's Rhetorical Signature: Cosmopolitan Civil Religion in the Presidential Inaugural Address January 20, 2009." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no.4 (2011): 605-30.

³ William F. Harlow, "Nixon's Use of Civil Religion to Justify Economic Treaty Violation." *American Communication Journal* 12, no. 1 (2010): http://ac-journal.org/journal/pubs/2010/Harlow.pdf.

idential campaigns,⁴ or throughout the presidential administration.⁵ In addition, while scholars have examined different types of speeches and artifacts for the religious rhetoric of presidents, one type of speech has gone noticeably absent from examination—the National Presidential Prayer Breakfast Address. This is worth noting because while some scholars of presidential rhetoric now see religious rhetoric and religion as valid topics of examination, we still overlook the Prayer Breakfast Addresses—the one speech that gives audiences a glimpse of the president's faith and how faith and religion may shape the president's decisions. While there have not been any published essays that rhetorically examine the National Prayer Breakfast speeches, there has been one that focused on a Prayer Breakfast Address.

In her essay, *President Clinton and the White House Breakfast*, Nneka Ifeoma Ofulue suggested that Clinton's White House Prayer Breakfasts featured three characteristics. First, the President "expressed the vision that framed his administration's policy agenda," second, he "encouraged unity and cooperation between political and religious opponents," and finally, he "invited public and spiritual support from religious leaders and their faith-based organizations." She also mentioned that Clinton's White House Prayer Breakfasts offered the president a "unique opportunity to both affirm and undertake the symbolic responsibilities laid upon the office of the Presidency." In this, the President performs two major functions. First, "the ecumenical nature of the event transformed the White House into a symbolic temple of the nation's civil religion" and second, the prayer breakfast speeches invited audiences to "support the president" as he leads the nation as "symbolic priest." However, the focus of her rhetorical analysis centered on the speech Clinton gave at the prayer breakfast after the revelation that he was not truthful about his "inappropriate relationship" with Monica Lewinsky. For the rest of the essay, Ofulue examined how Clinton represented himself as symbolic priest.

In this essay, I would like to build on Ofulue's work on prayer breakfast addresses. I find useful her characteristics of prayer breakfast addresses and the way the president creates ethos by adopting a religious persona. However, my aim here is not to examine previous prayer breakfast speeches to extrapolate characteristics leading to the formation of another presidential genre of speeches, but to examine one particular speech as an example of what some have called *rhetorical theology*. As I discuss later, a rhetorical theology is not a systematic or scientific theology, but a theology that focuses on the rhetorical. As Mark Jordan notes, (Christian) theology did not start as "text-book systems," but as "persuasive schools, historical schools constituted by relations of students to teachers, by common practices of ways of life, by the handing on of certain texts that had the pow-

⁴ David C. Bailey, "Enacting Transformation: George W. Bush and the Pauline Conversion Narrative in a Charge to Keep," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2008): 215-41; David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice and the Face of the Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union' Address, March 18, 2008." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 2 (2009): 167-94; Laurinda W. Porter, "Religion and Politics: Protestant Beliefs in the Presidential Campaign of 1980," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 13, no. 2 (1990): 24-29.

⁵ Paul H. Boase, "Moving the Mercy Seat into the White House," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 12, no. 2 (1989): 1-9.

⁶ Nneka Ifeoma Ofulue, "President Clinton and the White House Prayer Breakfast," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 25, no 1 (2002): 53-54.

⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁸ Ibid.

er to call and correct." In short, theology started as a collection of communal arguments, grounded in contextual concerns of everyday life and navigated by a group's collective consensus on texts that spoke volumes on healing the souls of the people, which makes theology at its core a rhetorical act.

In the reminder of this essay, I offer a brief history of the National Prayer Breakfast followed by a brief examination of president Obama's faith language. Afterwards, I offer a close reading of Obama's 2012 National Prayer Breakfast speech that focuses on his use of religious rhetoric and the construction of a rhetorical theology. Finally, I offer some implications of my findings.

National Prayer Breakfast

Started in Seattle, Washington in the throes of the Depression by Abraham Vereide in the 1930's, the Prayer Breakfast relocated to Washington, D.C. in the 1940's. While in Washington, Vereide started prayer and fellowship groups with members of Congress. This led to Vereide, members of Congress and the Rev. Billy Graham in 1953 to ask then President Eisenhower to join them for a "prayer breakfast hosted by members of Congress." This started what we now know as the National Prayer Breakfast. ¹⁰

A group called "the Fellowship" or "the Family" holds the National Prayer Breakfast on the first Thursday in February. According to Lindsay, "approximately 3000 people attend the National Prayer Breakfast every year" and the event boasts of being a "great Washington tradition." C-Span provides live coverage of the event and national media report the event in nightly newscasts and newspapers. Even in the "Blogosphere" and "Twitterverse," one can find a plethora of material on the Prayer Breakfast. According to Lindsay, the invitation to the event, which is sent by "Members of Congress of the United States of America," says that the Breakfast is a chance to "seek the Lord's guidance and strength as well as to reaffirm our faith and to renew the dedication of our Nation and ourselves to God and His purposes." 13

Since the National Prayer Breakfast is religious theatre, the president's role, one that every sitting president has performed since Eisenhower, is critical. Not only does the president give a speech at the event, the president also usually comes an hour early to meet and greet with other heads of state. This highly political nature of the event is not lost on any of the participants. According to Lindsay's interview with an insider of the event, "Not a single informant mentioned the spiritual or religious benefits of the Breakfast, but many refer to it as quite 'political." While some see this event as highly political, Obama has used this forum as an opportunity to demonstrate or perform his faith.

For many, Obama's faith has always been in question, and despite the many times he has declared himself Christian, many Americans, especially those in the South, still be-

⁹ Mark Jordan, "Christian Rhetoric: Scraps for a Manifesto," Cross Currents 56, no. 3 (2006): 328.

¹⁰ D. Michael Lindsay, "Is the National Prayer Breakfast Surrounded by a 'Christian Mafia'? Religious Publicity and Secrecy within the Corridors of Power," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006): 391.

¹¹ For more information on the "Fellowship" or "Family," see Lindsay, "National Prayer Breakfast."

¹² Ibid., 392.

¹³ Ibid., 393.

¹⁴ Ibid.

lieve he is a Muslim or do not know his religious affiliation. While campaigning for office in 2008, Obama, understanding that faith was important both personally and politically, made it a priority of his campaign. He interjected faith language throughout the campaign, set up discussion centers where people talked about and shared their faith, and reminded people of his own journey in becoming a Christian. He repeated a central narrative as he talked about his faith—growing up in a non-religious household, wrestling with his own identity and personhood, feeling lost and abandon at times during his young adult years, and then finally "walking down the aisle to accept Jesus" at Trinity United Church of Christ. It was during the campaign that Obama, through his use of testimony, engaged the public on a discussion of faith, while at the same time reframing and reclaiming the debate on what faith is and how faithful people should act.

Obama's faith talk continued after the American people elected him president. For instance, he tackled the subject of abortion and suggested a faith(ful) response in his Notre Dame Commencement speech. He struggled with his faith in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize while acknowledging that he was a "wartime president" during his Nobel acceptance speech. He revisited a commonly used trope in the campaign—the "Joshua Generation"—at the King Day speech in 2010. Some have even argued that Obama has engaged in some of the most poignant faith talk ever by a president. 16

However, it is in his speeches at the National Prayer Breakfast that his rhetorical theology is on full display. While in other speeches, Obama must create the space for faith language, the National Prayer Breakfast comes as an "always already" constructed and completed space and place for religious rhetoric. Many already assume that the president will talk about her or his faith and become what I call "theologian in chief"—and while Obama fulfils those obligations to this "sacred" event, he at times uses the event to challenge, critique and charge his audience to realize the "better angels of our nature."

Rhetorical Analysis of Obama's 2012 National Prayer Breakfast Address¹⁷

Introduction

After extending thanks to those in attendance, Obama started his address by noting that attending the prayer breakfast has always been an "opportunity" that he has cherished, because it is a chance "to step back for a moment, for us to come together as brothers and sisters and seek God's face together." Obama's three-point reasoning for the prayer breakfast and his delight in being there were two-fold. First, Obama reminded his audience that despite what others may believe about his faith or his aversion to prayer and all things religious, he looks forward to this event. He came as a senator and now attends as president.

Second, his reasoning for the breakfast lays the foundation for the rest of the speech. The aim of the breakfast is for people to "step back," "come together as brothers and sis-

¹⁵ See the Public Policy Polling Poll, March 12, 2012, available at http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf /2011/PPP Release SouthernSwing 312.pdf.

¹⁶ Mitchell Landsberg, "Obama Praised and Pummeled on Matters of Faith," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2012. Accessed May 22, 2012 from http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-obama-religion-20120408,0,355391.story.

One can find the speech text at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/02/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast

ters," and "seek God's face together." In constructing a reason and rationale for the breakfast, Obama then can juxtapose the prayer breakfast next to the "noise and rancor that too often passes as politics today." Instead of the "noise and rancor," for Obama, prayer "slows us down" and "humbles us." It also does something else—prayer reminds his audience that "no matter how much responsibility we have, how fancy our titles, how much power we think we hold, we are imperfect vessels."

However, for Obama, prayer is more than just talking and asking the Creator for things. Prayer is listening to "our Creator," listening to "Him." Obama's framing of prayer is instructive here because he again juxtaposes it against the "noise and rancor" of politics. What Obama invites his audience to do is to not only see prayer differently, but also practice more listening. This listening has a double meaning: first listening to the Creator and then listening to each other. For Obama, by not listening and participating in the "noise and rancor" of what "passes as politics today," one practices a "phony religiosity." It will be from this foundation that Obama launches his rhetorical theology.

Faith and Values

In the next part of the address, Obama suggests that prayer (listening) is important right now because "we are facing some big challenges as a nation." Obama reminds his audience that though "our economy is making progress," many still struggle to "find work," "make the mortgage," "pay for college," or even "buy food." Further Obama laments that "our men and women in uniform have made us safer," but they too find after they return home, that "when it comes to finding a job or getting the kind of care that they need, we are not there the way we need to be."

Obama's framing of the issue could lead him to adopt a prophetic persona and launch a jeremiad. We are not there for those who are suffering or those coming back from war as "we need to be." However, Obama does not take that route—he instead launches into personal testimony about his own prayer life. After acknowledging, "meeting these challenges requires sound decision making" and "smart policies," Obama returns to prayer.

But in my moments of prayer, I'm reminded that faith and values play an enormous role in motivating us to solve some of our most urgent problems, in keeping us going when we suffer setbacks, and opening our minds and our hearts to the needs of others.

For Obama, "faith and values," in addition to "sound decision making" and "smart policies," are important in addressing the aforementioned issues and problems. However, faith and values do more—they motivate people to solve some of the problems in the first place. Moreover, "faith and values" keep people "going" when setbacks occur and they open "minds and hearts" to the needs of others. Therefore, "faith and values" for Obama can do the work that the "noise and rancor" of politics cannot and this, for Obama, only comes by revelation in "moments of prayer." It is with this revelation that Obama can look back in history and notice that the

[M]ajority of great reformers in American history did their work not just because it was sound policy, or they had done good analysis, or understood how to exercise good politics, but because their faith and their values dictated it, and called for bold action—sometimes in the face of indifference, sometimes in the face of resistance.

Then he closes this part of his address with "this is no different today for millions of Americans, and its certainty not for me."

What Obama does here is not only highlight the importance of faith and values in tackling some of the problems Americans face, but he also, because of the way, for him, that faith and values shape the American landscape, he places himself as a reformer. As the reformers (Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Jane Addams, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day and Abraham Heschel) called for "bold action" even in the face of "indifference" and "resistance," Obama sets up the rest of the address taking on the role of reformer, guided by his "faith and values" that come out of his moments of prayer.

After sharing how he wakes up each morning in prayer and devotion and how he cannot limit his values to "personal moments of prayer," or just "private conversations with pastors and friends," Obama then provides a framework on how the values he practices and maintains motivate him as a leader.

First, Obama addresses unfair practices from institutions (financial and insurance companies)

And so when I talk about our financial institutions playing by the same rules as folks on Main Street, when I talk about making sure insurance companies aren't discriminating against those who are already sick, or making sure that unscrupulous lenders aren't taking advantage of the most vulnerable among us, I do so because I genuinely believe it will make the economy stronger for everybody. But I also do it because I know that far too many neighbors in our country have been hurt and treated unfairly over the last few years, and I believe in God's command to "love thy neighbor as thyself." I know the version of that Golden Rule is found in every major religion and every set of beliefs—from Hinduism to Islam to Judaism to the writings of Plato.

Next Obama addresses shared responsibility:

And when I talk about shared responsibility, it's because I genuinely believe that in a time when many folks are struggling, at a time when we have enormous deficits, it's hard for me to ask seniors on a fixed income, or young people with student loans, or middle-class families who can barely pay the bills to shoulder the burden alone. And I think to myself, if I'm willing to give something up as somebody who's been extraordinarily blessed, and give up some of the tax breaks that I enjoy, I actually think that's going to make economic sense.

But for me as a Christian, it also coincides with Jesus's 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.

Next Obama addresses opportunity:

When I talk about giving every American a fair shot at opportunity, it's because I believe that when a young person can afford a college education, or someone who's been unemployed suddenly has a chance to retrain for a job and regain that sense of dignity and pride, and contributing to the community as well as supporting their families—that helps us all prosper.

It means maybe that research lab on the cusp of a lifesaving discovery, or the company looking for skilled workers is going to do a little bit better, and we'll all do better as a consequence. It makes economic sense. But part of that belief comes from my faith in the idea that I am my brother's keeper and I am my sister's keeper; that as a country, we rise and fall together. I'm not an island. I'm not alone in my success. I succeed because others succeed with me.

Finally, Obama addresses foreign affairs:

And when I decide to stand up for foreign aid, or prevent atrocities in places like Uganda, or take on issues like human trafficking, it's not just about strengthening alliances, or promoting democratic values, or projecting American leadership around the world, although it does all those things and it will make us safer and more secure. It's also about the biblical call to care for the least of these — for the poor; for those at the margins of our society.

To answer the responsibility we're given in Proverbs to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." And for others, it may reflect the Jewish belief that the highest form of charity is to do our part to help others stand on their own.

In closing, Obama recaps the "values"—"treating others as you want to be treated"; "requiring much from those who have been given so much"; "living by the principle that we are our brother's keeper"; and "caring for the poor and those in need." Moreover, he calls these "values" old and explains that they are found in many "denominations and many faiths—among many believers and non-believers." For Obama, these values have made the country "great"— only when we "live up to them" and not just "give lip service to them. For the challenges that America face, for Obama, these are the values, which he believes that Americans must return to in hopes that "God will buttress our efforts."

Obama's Rhetorical Theology

Recently, religious scholars and theologians have examined the role that rhetoric plays in theology. For example, David Cunningham, in his book *Faithful Persuasion* claims, "Christian theology is best understood as persuasive argument, and theologians, "are always seeking to persuade others—and to persuade themselves—of a particular understanding of the Christian faith." Cunningham would later argue that rhetorical theology is concerned about the "practical implications of doctrine" that does not "inquire to the truth of a doctrine in a purely abstract sense; instead attention is given to contexts and outcomes." ¹⁹

Whereas theologians have found rhetoric significant in their research, rhetoricians also have found significance in examining theology for rhetorical strategies. For example, Jason Moyer, in his dissertation on presidential rhetoric was interested in how presidents use "historically specific theological discourses as 'available means of persuasion' as

¹⁸ David Cunningham, *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1991), 5.

¹⁹ David Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 15.

they construct messages to the American public."²⁰ For him, rhetorical theology is "public discourse written in, and contributing to, a particular rhetorical situation."²¹ Further, Moyer wrote, "theologies are especially rhetorical when they prescribe a relationship between God and God's people that implies a mode of moral action that should be followed."²²

In my own work on theologian James Cone, I argued that rhetorical theology "maintains that all theology is at its core argument; argument that seeks to persuade its hearers to a certain position." Rhetorical theology understands that "rhetoric is a contextual art; meaning that rhetoric finds its home within a particular situation and context." Moreover, "rhetoric at its best is not a list of theoretical concepts in search of the perfect text that demonstrates rhetoric's vitality. Conversely, rhetoric is a study of the rhetorical situations that gave rise to the response, and is an examination of how the speaker/writer invited the audience to respond." ²⁵

Examining Obama's address as rhetorical theology, one notices that his rhetorical problem is two-fold. First, Obama wants to tout some important policies that would create a platform for him heading into the fall 2012 election, but many perceive the venue as not being conducive to campaign politics. Second, Obama has a theological problem. Obama's faith and theological outlook stands against the prevailing public theological paradigm. So how does Obama address these two problems?

First, Obama personalizes his beliefs when he starts each theological statement by saying "And so when I talk," or "when I talk, or "when I stand up for." This allows Obama to discuss his policies while at the same time explain to his audience why these policies are important to him. For example, when he talks about financial institutions and insurance companies, this is important for Obama not only because he argues, "they will make the economy stronger," but also because he believes in "God's command to love thy neighbor as thyself." When he mentions, "shared responsibility," he connects that with Jesus' command, "to whom much is given, much is required." When he mentions that everyone should get a "fair shot at opportunity," he connects that to being my "brother and sisters keeper." When he mentions foreign aid and his goal to prevent atrocities around the world, he connects it to the biblical injunction to "care for the least of these." These policies are important, Obama reminds his audience, not only because they are sound policies, but also because they connect directly to his faith and faithful witness.

In several ways, this was a departure of sorts for Obama from previous prayer breakfasts. In previous years, Obama used this platform to reassure his audiences that he was, in fact, a Christian and a person of faith. He also used the platform to promote civil discourse and dialogue. However, in this speech, he focused on demonstrating his faith by the policies his advocated.

Obama's faith however, does not line up with the standard political narrative regarding faith. If one decides to tie faith to policy, the prevailing narrative has been a faith fo-

²⁰ Jason Ray Moyer, "Not Just Civil Religion: Theology in the Cases of Woodrow Wilson, John Kennedy, and Barack Obama." (Phd Diss., University of Iowa, 2011), 3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 201 note 6.

²³ Andre E. Johnson, "The Prophetic Persona of James Cone and the Rhetorical Theology of Black Theology," *Black Theology Journal* 8, no. 3 (2010): 282.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

cusing on birth control, abortion, gay marriage and the like. This faith narrative—what it means to be politically faithful in public—permeates political discourse. In this address Obama speaks against the prevailing narrative while advocating his policies. In short, he offers his audience an opportunity to see faith act differently from what is customary. Obama's faith helps shapes his overall theology.

Obama's theology is more than just a "liberal version," as some would argue of politics and religion. It is a theology that grounds itself in being concerned about the poor and marginalized. Obama's theology is one that finds resonance in relationships—an action-oriented faith emphasizing love and the ethical treatment of one's neighbor, buttressed by the Golden Rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Obama's theology also emphasizes responsibility upon those who have means. It is more than the opportunity to give back selectively or simply to do some charitable giving; it is a responsibility required from people of faith. Moreover, how Obama frames Jesus' teaching of required responsibility also denotes an element of shared sacrifice. When Obama talks about the "folks who are struggling"—seniors on fixed incomes, "young people with student loans," or middle class families who can barely pay bills—shouldering the burden alone, he is also indicting ones who enjoy tax breaks without anyone requiring anything of them. In short, the ones who are "blessed" with means and wealth have not given their fair share in proportion to others "who are struggling."

Responsibility for Obama would lead to "every American" having a "fair shot at opportunity." However, for Obama, opportunity only arises when we are able to recognize our place in relationship with others in the world. The theological dictum, "I am my brother's and sister's keeper" sees others as profoundly human and in that regard we have a responsibility to one another. Contrary to widely held beliefs that one's own actions without help from others guarantee success, Obama suggests that success comes together in community when we receive and acknowledge help from each other.

Lastly, for Obama, his theology stands on the margins of society and gives voice to the voiceless—the "least of these"—the poor. Here Obama moves outward in scope. Instead of focusing on America and issues germane directly to the American people, he emphases that spending money in foreign aid, preventing atrocities in Uganda or tackling issues surrounding human trafficking finds resonance in his belief that the faithful person "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves." By including in his speech these world issues, Obama constructs a theology that is concerned with and inclusive of all peoples.

In closing, Obama's theology grounds itself not necessarily in dogma or doctrines, but in what Obama emphasizes throughout the speech as values. By focusing his theology in the terms of values, Obama can then create a space for all people, including non-believers, to adopt his theological perspective. By inviting his audience to view faith in this way, Obama constructs a theological paradigm different from the prevailing political and public one—one that is relational, empathetic, cares for the poor, and one that stands with those of the margins of society.

Conclusion and Implications

My work with rhetorical theology and the study of National Prayer Breakfast addresses by presidents are at the embryonic stage. However, I do believe that scholars of both rhetoric and religion would do themselves a huge favor by examining these speeches again. Scholars of rhetoric can examine these speeches to see how the president constructs faith, values and religion in the public arena. Moreover, scholars of religion can examine these speeches to see how the president constructs a public theology that speaks to people of faith (and non-believers). We do ourselves a huge disservice when we do not believe that the president's words, when acting as pastor, prophet or priest, helps shape the national dialogue and debate in regards to theology.²⁶

At the time of this writing, Obama provided a good example of the President using the presidency as a "moral pulpit" when he became the first president to affirm same sex marriage. While a risky move politically, the way he presented his "evolution" towards same sex marriage as one of prayer, listening, witnessing, and struggle helped others to reexamine their own faith commitments. While early polls show no change on whether people will support Obama or not after his announcement, early polls show that for the first time, a majority of Americans now affirm some sort of marriage and/or civil unions for same sex couples. See Scott Clement and Sandhya Somashekhar, "After President Obama's announcement, opposition to same-sex marriage hits record low," *Washington Post*, May 22, 2012. Available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-president-obamas-announcement-opposition-to-gay-marriage-hits-record-low/2012/05/22/gIQAlAYRjU_story.html.