

SPECTRUM

Metanoia

Quayle versus Murphy Brown revisited

MORAL VALUES/ Quayle is willing to talk about them, but is his party supporting them within their governmental policies?

by John Valk

U.S. Vice-President Dan Quayle is not often portrayed as an expounder of great wisdom and knowledge. His gaffes have occasionally provided good fodder for the media's cannons. Recently Quayle again saw media prominence. What was of interest this time was not only what Quayle stated, but also the reaction of a large, powerful and influential force in America.

Speaking to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, Quayle encouraged his audience to re-think current moral values in light of massive poverty among children in the U.S.:

The failure of our families is hurting America deeply. When families fall, society falls. The anarchy and lack of structure in our inner cities are testament to how quickly civilization falls apart when the family foundation cracks. Children need love and discipline. They need mothers and fathers. A welfare cheque is not a husband. The state

is not a father. It is from parents that children come to understand values and themselves as men, women, mothers and fathers.

Quayle pointed out that "33.4% of families headed by a single mother are in poverty today". On the other hand, "among families headed by married couples, there is a poverty rate of 5.7 percent". He then suggested that "marriage is probably the best anti-poverty program of all".

Quayle did not stop there. He clearly recognized the issue to be a moral one in need of public support:

Ultimately, however, marriage is a moral issue that requires cultural consensus, and the use of social sanctions. Bearing babies irresponsibly is, simply, wrong. Failure to support children one had fathered is wrong. We must be unequivocal about this.

How much of this the entertain-

ment industry heard or read is not clear. In any event, they offered little comment. What enraged them was the following:

It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown — a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman — mocking the importance of a father, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice'.

At this point the entertainment industry, clearly on the defensive, launched its powerful arsenal, and browbeat Quayle into a public apology and reversal. His gift of a stuffed elephant — symbol of the Republican party — to Murphy Brown's baby was unfortunately little more than a capitulation to media pressure.

If Hollywood disliked Quayle's insinuations, polls indicated, however, that most Americans who either heard or bothered to read his

speech did not. Most agreed that Quayle's suggestion indeed might go a long way in eliminating poverty. I too am not in disagreement with this conventional wisdom.

Yet, I am not entirely happy with Quayle, but more so with what he didn't say. That the entertainment industry cares little about supporting traditional family values is clear enough. Their bottom line motive betrays them. But what of Dan Quayle? Is his support of the traditional family limited merely to moral encouragement?

Quayle correctly points to the gross irresponsibility of many men who love to make babies but hate to provide a family environment to properly nurture them. But do Quayle's statements, or lack thereof, not contain some of their own irresponsibility? The record of the Bush Administration in regard to the family gives certain hollow ring to Quayle's own moral words. In other words, one ought to be careful in taking the moral high road if one is less careful in supporting it with adequate and just social and economic policies. That

is, with policies which enhance rather than hinder the family.

Having said that, however, Quayle did, nonetheless, stick his neck out, and suffered the consequences. The snide remarks from the entertainment industry clearly reveal one thing. There is a great reluctance, if not an aversion, to include moral judgments in any public discourse.

In this country also we are unwilling to publicly distinguish moral right from wrong. We too speak only of personal preferences and lifestyles. Morals, values and religious beliefs are deemed private. Beliefs in economic progress and material advancement, on the other hand, are not. They are publicly endorsed, if not preached.

It is here that Quayle and many others reveal their true colours and, unfortunately, their true inconsistencies. These ingrained (capitalist) beliefs forcibly shape public policy, and at the expense of most everything else, including the family. Sunday shopping, for example, has

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