

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

The Moral Logic of the Pro-Life Movement

In November, the voters of Mississippi voted down a human personhood amendment by a 58% majority. Similar efforts have failed in other states as well. This amendment was a frontal assault on the legal and moral logic of *Roe v. Wade*. Associate Justice Harry Blackman in 1973 wrote the majority opinion for the US Supreme Court in this case. Theologian Albert Mohler summarizes the opinion: “. . . [it] effectively declares an unborn child in the first three months of a woman’s pregnancy to be of no moral or legal consequence. Within the second trimester, there is the recognition of potential personhood. Within the last trimester, the state may intervene with restrictions on abortion, but with clear allowances for stated reasons of the woman’s health—which can include mental health.” The human personhood amendment, recently defeated in Mississippi, contained the ethical foundation of the pro-life movement—namely, that life begins at conception. It rejected the claim of some in the medical community that conception is the successful implantation of the fertilized egg in the uterine wall: The ethical status and value of the fertilized egg is the same, no matter where the egg is located. Further, either legally or morally, it is arbitrary to identify a moment along the line of development from fertilization to live birth when personhood is understood to be achieved. “Unless the unborn child is recognized as a person at every point in its development, we are just negotiating our own arbitrary definition of human personhood and human life.” Indeed, as a leading medical textbook on human embryology argues, “Human development begins at fertilization, the process during which a male. . . sperm unites with a female [egg] to form a single cell called a *zygote*. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marked the beginning of each of us as a unique individual. [A *zygote* is defined] “as the beginning of a new human being. . . Although most developmental changes occur during the embryonic and fetal periods, some important changes occur during later periods of development: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Although it is customary to divide human development into *prenatal* (before birth) and *postnatal* (after birth) periods, birth is merely a dramatic event during development resulting in a change in environment. Development does not stop at birth.” [See Moore, Keith L. and Persaud, T.V.N. *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*. 6th edition. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1998, pp. 2 and 18.]

Mohler captures the seriousness of the defeat of this amendment in Mississippi: “voters. . . overwhelmingly voted down a statement that declared personhood for every human being from the moment of fertilization onward. . . The bitter lesson of Mississippi’s defeat of the human personhood amendment is this: When it comes to moral reasoning concerning the unborn child, far too many just adopt Harry Blackman’s moral framework and want to tweak it. Many in the pro-life movement want to shift his lines of moral judgment, but not to repudiate his deadly logic. We may think we are pro-life, but if we do not affirm the personhood of every human

being at every point of development, from fertilization onward, we are not really so pro-life as we think.”

Lest we forget the basis for this true pro-life position, let me offer a refresher on what the Bible says about prenatal life: A cluster of verses in the Bible clearly establish God’s view of prenatal life:

- Exodus 21:22-24--Whatever these difficult verses exactly mean, God views life in the womb as of great value. Whether by accident or by intent, to cause a woman to miscarry demands accountability on the part of the one who caused it. The Law did not treat the fetus frivolously.
- Isaiah 49:1, 5--Referring to Messiah, God called Him for his mission *from the womb*. Life that is prenatal is precious to God.
- Jeremiah 1:5 and Luke 1:15--As with Isaiah, God viewed Jeremiah and John the Baptist from the womb as of infinite value. He even filled John with the Holy Spirit when he was in Elizabeth’s womb.

No other passage deals with the question of prenatal life so powerfully and conclusively than Psalm 139. In this wonderful psalm, David reviews four phenomenal attributes of God--His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence and His holiness. In reviewing God’s omnipotence, David reviews God’s power in creating life which he compares to God “weaving” him in his mother’s womb. God made his “frame,” his skeleton. Then, in verse 16, he writes, “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance. . .” Undoubtedly, David is referring to the embryo. If correct, then the divine perspective on life is that it begins at conception. So awesome is God’s omniscience and His omnipotence, that he knew all about David even when he was an embryo! This is God’s view of life—and it should be ours as well.

See James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 27-31 and www.albertmohler.com (17 November 2011).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

President Obama’s Speech and the Welfare State

Last Tuesday, 6 December 2011, President Obama delivered an important speech at Osawatomie, Kansas, site of the famous 1910 Teddy Roosevelt speech. The speech echoed of 21st century Populism, blaming the rich for the economic situation of the nation and calling on the nation to reject the Republican Party’s position and embrace his. The economic situation of the US is not due to his policies, he argues, but to the rich, which the Republican Party represents. His speech reflected the imagery of the Occupy Wall Street movement—the 99% vs. the 1%. The president stands with the middle class, he says, and his policies are best suited to care for the needs of the middle class. In this *Perspective*, I hope to not so much evaluate his speech but focus on the much larger issue of the role of the welfare state, with all its entitlement programs, in our lives. Is there a connection between the situation in Europe and Obama’s vision for the US?

- First of all, the crisis in Europe is not really about the euro and the currency structure of the European Union. It is really about the welfare state. The expansion of the state was one of the great transformations of the 20th century. At the beginning of that century in Europe, public spending was virtually non-existent. But then the wealthy nations of Europe adopted programs for education, health care, unemployment insurance, old-age assistance, public housing and income redistribution. The United States, during the administrations of FDR and LBJ, joined this transformation. The economist, Robert Samuelson, reports on the statics of this transformation: “In 1870, all government spending was 7.3% of national income in the US, 9.4% in Britain, 10% in Germany and 12.6% in France. By 2007, the figures were 36.6% for the US, 44.6% for Britain, 43.9% for Germany and 52.6% for France. Military costs once dominated budgets; now, social spending does.” As even the financial novice knows, two factors are necessary for this expansion of the welfare state to work: favorable economics and demographics—rapid economic growth to pay for the benefits and young populations to support the old. But as everyone also now knows, neither of these factors currently obtain. The rapid and expansive growth has slowed significantly (about 2.1% on average) and demographics are in crisis, with the 65+ age level in the population growing at exponential rates. And there are simply not enough young workers to support the older population with Social Security and health care. In the US, the great expansion of the welfare state occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, with the creation of Medicare, Medicaid and food stamps. In 1960, Samuelson reports, 26% of federal spending represented payments to individuals; in 2010, that figure was 66%. Economic growth in the US has settled in from 2000 to 2007 to an average of 2.4% and, by 2050, 20% of the population will be elderly. As Samuelson argues, “The modern welfare state has reached a historic reckoning . . . Vast populations in Europe and America expect promised benefits and, understandably, resent any hint that they will be cut. Elected politicians respond accordingly. But the resulting inertia poses an economic threat, one already realized in Europe. As deficits or taxes rise, the risk is that economic stability will increase, growth will decline, or both. Paying promised benefits becomes harder. Or austerity becomes unavoidable. The paradox is that the welfare state, designed to improve security and dampen social conflicts, now looms as an engine for insecurity, conflict and disappointment. Facing the hard questions of finding a sustainable balance between individual protections and better economic growth, the Europeans have spent years dawdling. The parallel with our situation [in the US] is all too obvious.”
- Second, during the first term of his presidency, President Obama has largely ignored these systemic problems of the US welfare state. He sponsored a massive stimulus package that will add nearly \$1 trillion to the national debt. His reorganization of the health care system created an entirely new entitlement in a nation already hemorrhaging from unsustainable entitlements. This act alone has added an enormous amount of uncertainty into an already stagnant economy. In addition, the president completely ignored the profoundly sensible recommendations of his own deficit reduction commission—the Simpson-Bowles Commission. Further, he has ignored recommendations as well for a complete and fundamental reform of the “corrosive and corrupted tax code that misdirects capital and promoted unfairness.” Following these recommendations alone would have stabilized the US economy and benefited the middle class far more than anything intimated in his Osawatomie speech. If you really want to see the effect of bad government policy on the character of a nation, simply look at what has happened in Greece. There you see civil

servants, who are victimizers behaving like victims. The Greek government and its policies have made them what they are. We are seeing the same thing occurring in Italy and to some extent Spain. I would not be surprised to see similar things occurring in the United States in 2012. Instead of leading, our president has been coddling the middle class with the focus of blame on “the rich.” Nothing could be further from the truth. The systemic problems of the US are due to our welfare state, which he has actually expanded quite incredibly. He is presiding over an ugly situation—creating greater dependency of US citizens on its government. What is occurring in Greece will soon occur in the US. It is really quite a sad thing to observe. But, in the final analysis, we are perhaps getting the leaders we actually deserve as a nation.

See Robert Samuelson in the *Washington Post* (5 December 2011); Charles Krauthammer in the *Washington Post* (9 December 2011); and Phil Gramm in *Imprimis* (November 2011), p. 3.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

The Dark Side of Human Nature

We live in a curious culture! Scandals abound—the Penn State mess surrounding Jerry Sandusky; Bernie Madoff of a few years ago; the Wall Street follies that produced the collapse of Lehman brothers; pedophilia in the Roman Catholic Church; and multiple scandals among our political leaders. (I choose to not even name those.) But what we seem to ignore as a culture is that we all have the same problem—the Bible calls it sin. As a people, we are really quite good at self-deception. We inflate our own personal virtues, while are quite quick to sit in judgment of others who have failed. We criticize others but refuse to hold the same mirror we use to evaluate up to our own lives. In some ways, we have become a nation of victims. The columnist David Brooks eloquently summarizes our situation in American culture: “In centuries past, people built moral systems that acknowledged this weakness. These systems emphasized our sinfulness. They reminded people of the evil within themselves. Life was seen as an inner struggle against the selfish forces inside. These vocabularies made people aware of how their weaknesses manifested themselves and how to exercise discipline over them. These systems gave people categories with which to process savagery and scripts to follow when they confronted it. They helped people make moral judgments and hold people responsible amid our frailties . . . (Now) we live in a society oriented around our inner wonderfulness.” One of the clichés one used to hear when there was personal failure was “there but by the grace of God go I.” We do not hear that much anymore. God is not in the picture much anymore in our culture. Furthermore, if I have a problem, it really is someone else’s fault, not mine! The problem of humanity is that we do have a dark side and we are all capable of horrific and despicable actions. Our fundamental problem is spiritual and the fundamental solution is also spiritual—in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He cleanses the dark side and declares us righteous when we place our faith in Him and His finished work. There is no other solution to our dark side. This Christmas season, may we find refreshment and renewal in Him.

See Brooks’s essay in *The Oregonian* (16 November 2011).