

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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POSTMODERN NOTHINGNESS

On *Issues in Perspective* over the last decade or so, I have argued that American culture is now Postmodern in its orientation and worldview. Among other things, Postmodernism means that truth is defined personally, as what works for you. There are no universal truths and the test of “truth” is a pragmatic one—does it work, and does it work for me. The end result of this insanity is that as a culture, both individually and collectively, we really do not believe in anything. Personal autonomy trumps all other standards and beliefs. Two recent developments highlight this thesis.

- First is the recent death of Helen Gurley Brown, the “Cosmo Girl”—the editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Columnist Kathleen Parker notes that “In Brown’s estimation, the things that mattered were money, career and sex, not necessarily in that order. These were the goals she promoted in a long, successful career based on advancing stereotypical female characteristics and behaviors: manipulation, vanity and vapidty.” Brown epitomized a branch of the feminist movement that encompassed goals framed around terms such as empowerment, liberation and “woman can have it all.” Brown’s contribution was that she focused almost exclusively on sex. Her book, *Sex and the Single Girl*, championed a type of sexual liberation that argued women can enjoy sex without marriage and use their wiles (e.g., manipulation, vanity and vapidty) to enjoy the benefits of work and a successful career. In other words, single women can have money, enjoy sex to its fullest and have the power that goes with both. Or as Parker puts it, women can “get men to relinquish the keys to the kingdom.” Brown proudly displayed a Mae West quote in her office: “Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere.” For centuries, Western Civilization resisted and condemned the idea that women are merely sex objects. Brown turned this conviction on its head: She institutionalized the idea that women-as-sex-objects is an idea and a practice that should be exploited!! That is how women can have it all.

Parker observes that Brown’s version of feminism was much different than that of Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem: “Men will always be men, she seemed to be suggesting, so you might as well use their weaknesses to your advantage. [Her] magazine cover headlines [would] tout 50 ways to please your man [which] were really Brown’s way of saying ‘and get what you want.’” *Cosmopolitan* magazine was *Playboy* for girls! Brown personified a Postmodern version of sexuality: It is all about me, my desires and my pleasures. As a woman, she argued, “I deserve the pleasure, the money and the career, and I will use any means to get it all.” Most interestingly, Helen Gurley Brown was once asked why she never had children. Her answer: “I didn’t want to give up the time, the love, the money.” All of these will pass away, the Bible says, and Helen Gurley Brown exemplifies the results of a life that, in the end, really counted for nothing. She modeled a version of feminism that is ultimately self-destructive and one that lacks, from the eternity’s perspective, purpose,

meaning and significance. Her life is a tragic example of a life of Postmodern nothingness. She had enormous gifts—God-given gifts—and potential. She used those not for God’s glory but for her own, autonomous ends. One would be hard pressed to characterize such a life as a success.

- Second, the current presidential campaign is shaping up to be one of the most bitter, personal and obnoxious in years. It will be a long fall!! But there is one TV commercial that personifies our culture’s acceptance of the Postmodern worldview. It is a commercial run by the Obama campaign. The spot features a Missouri steelworker called Joe Soptic, who recounts how Bain Capital, the company once led by Mitt Romney, bought his plant and eventually closed it, costing him his job and health benefits. He says: “A short time after that,” his wife, Ilyona Soptic, died of cancer. “I don’t know how long she was sick and I think maybe she didn’t say anything because she knew we couldn’t afford the insurance. . . There was nothing they could do for her. And she passed away in 22 days. I do not think Mitt Romney realizes what he’s done to anyone, and furthermore I do not think Mitt Romney is concerned.” This TV commercial is a product of Obama’s super PAC, Priorities USA Action. The message of the commercial is clear: Mitt Romney caused Ilyona Soptic’s death.

What are the facts, however? The *Wall Street Journal* recently published a most helpful editorial on the facts of this man’s life and the tragic death of his wife. Bain bought the struggling company GST Steel in 1993 and held the investment in a turnaround bid throughout Romney’s tenure as CEO, which ended in 1999. He had been gone from Bain for two years when the mill went bankrupt, in 2001, amid a larger competitive upheaval that reshaped the US steel industry. Soptic’s wife died five years later—in 2006. In an interview with CNN, Soptic revealed that when he worked at GST, his wife had her own health insurance policy through a thrift store job, which she lost after an injury in 2002 or 2003. By then he had been hired somewhere else, but that plan did not cover spouses. Therefore, Soptic blames Romney for his wife’s death in 2006? What is especially outrageous is that neither President Obama nor anyone in his campaign has condemned, renounced or declared this TV commercial to be what it truly is—a series of lies personally attacking candidate Romney, who had absolutely nothing to do with the tragic death of Joe Soptic’s wife. The cynicism of this unbelievable TV commercial confirms that President Obama and so much of our nation have bought the Postmodern worldview. This commercial creates a reality that is blatantly false—but presented as truth! Obama has not condemned it and neither has his staff. Apparently, his Party supports it, as do Democratic leaders in Congress.

Presidential campaigns in the past have been ugly. One thinks, for example, of the 1824 campaign in which Andrew Jackson first ran. Scurrilous attacks on his wife, Rachel, were filled with lies and very personal attacks about her person and her character. But through much of the 20th century, our nation has avoided this kind of personal attack. But, as many have observed, President Obama is finding it difficult to persuade the American people that he deserves another four years as president because of his philosophy, his record or his positive vision for the nation. The message of President Obama and of his Party is that Obama should be president because Romney is worse. Their strategy seems to be that if we tell the American people something often enough they will believe it. This TV commercial is a perfect example of that strategy. The death of Joe Soptic’s wife is sad and horrible, but

Mitt Romney had nothing to do with that tragedy. The Democratic Party has created its own reality about Joe Sopic's wife and it is false and it is cynical. But that does not matter; what matters is, does it work. In so many ways, then, President Obama is our first Postmodern President. He crafts his own reality, declares it to be true and then asks the nation to believe his version of reality. It does not particularly matter whether this commercial is true, only that it attains his end—his reelection as president. Postmodernism is a dastardly worldview that undermines everything that is important and necessary in building a wholesome, virtuous civilization. One can, therefore, only pray for God's mercy and His grace.

See Kathleen Parker in the *Washington Post* (15 August 2012); Peggy Noonan in the *Wall Street Journal* (11-12 August 2012); and an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (10 August 2012).