

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President Emeritus
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska

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Abortion, Politics and Other Life Issues

Because of the economic crisis facing America, many were surprised at how strident the abortion issue was during the recent campaign and election. President Obama ran an aggressively pro-abortion reelection campaign, and, as columnist Michael Gerson argues, was “seeking culture-war advantage on an issue he seldom mentioned four years ago.” This blatant thrust of abortion into his campaign followed on the heels of an equally aggressive first-term crusade against religious institutions. His Justice Department, in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case, argued against the existence of any “ministerial exception” to employment rules. Further, Obama sought to mandate that Catholic schools, hospitals and charities offer insurance coverage for contraceptives and abortifacients. Gerson concludes as well that “His revised policy still asserts a federal power to declare some religious institutions secular in purpose, reducing them to second-rate status under the First Amendment.” Further, in two senatorial campaigns, candidates made most unwise statements about abortion, which most analysts agree resulted in their loss. Specifically, Todd Aiken, running for the US senate in Missouri, during an interview in which he tried to defend the sanctity of life, said that there is something known as “legitimate rape.” As he explained his comment, it became clear what his real intent was, but the damage was done. In addition, Richard Mourdock, Republican nominee for the US Senate in Indiana, during a debate with his opponent, affirmed that life begins at conception and then added, “. . . even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape that it is something that God intended to happen.” Both of these men articulated a position with words that were reckless and catastrophic. Both President Obama and his Party leveraged these comments to their political advantage. Especially at the local level when it came to political advertising, Obama and his on-the-ground representatives used Aiken and Mourdock as part of their effort to paint the image of Mitt Romney and his Party as a threat to women and a threat to their reproductive health and well-being. Evidence from the election returns indicates that it worked. With his reelection, there is little to stop President Obama’s relentless attack on religious freedom and freedom of conscience and his rigorous defense of abortion on demand as a right, to the total exclusion of any concern for the rights of the baby. Several thoughts on these two complicated topics:

- First, how should we think about the matter of exceptions to defending sanctity of life position? As theologian Albert Mohler contends, “The issue of exceptions that might justify an abortion cannot be discussed carelessly. Furthermore, any reference to rape must start with a clear affirmation of the horrifying evil of rape and an equal affirmation of concern for any woman or girl victimized by rape. At this point, the defender of the unborn should point to the fact that every single human life is sacred at every point of its development and without regard to the context of that life’s conception. No one would deny that this is true of a six-year old child conceived in the horror of a rape. Those who defend the unborn know that it was equally true when that child was in the womb. . . We must then make the argument that the unborn child that has resulted from such a heinous act should not be added

to the list of victims. The child possesses no less dignity than a child conceived in any other context.” This would also be true of a child conceived as a result of incest. If the mother’s health is in jeopardy because of the pregnancy, ethically there must be no active intention to kill the baby. Further, a medical procedure or treatment that seeks to save the life of the mother but as a secondary effect terminates the life of the unborn child is ethically well-established and acceptable, yet terribly tragic.

- Second, with the current administration and Party in power, how do we represent the sacredness-of-all-human-life position? How do we affirm the innate value, worth and dignity of every human being from conception through each stage of human development? According to the Gallup organization, there is a consistent point held by a significant majority of Americans when it comes to abortion: They will accept increased restrictions on abortion if the exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the mother are preserved. This is not ideal but it would save the lives of over a million babies aborted each year. A number of years ago, Steven Monsma, then US representative of a district from Michigan, argued that as an evangelical Christian in Congress, he never took an all-or-nothing position when he voted or negotiated for a piece of legislation. Instead, he “grabbed for as much justice and righteousness as he could.” Perhaps in a fallen world and in the current political climate, this is the best we can do in the abortion debate. This seems wise and prudent. May we seek to support candidates and platforms which affirm this position.
- Third, both vice presidential candidates (Joe Biden and Paul Ryan) during the recent campaign were Roman Catholics. During their only debate, both were asked about the role faith played in their respective public lives. Biden recognized his church’s position on life issues, especially abortion, but he said he did not agree with it and could not force that view on women. Biden does argue that his faith informs his views on economics and the aggressive role government must have in redistributing wealth and caring for the poor and the sick. Ryan responded by saying, “I don’t see how a person can separate their public life from their private life or from their faith. Our faith informs everything we do.” Writing in the *New Yorker* magazine, Adam Gopnik accused Ryan of arguing like a mullah who rejected any distinction between church and state; that Ryan was really interested in establishing some kind of theocracy. Of course, Ryan was not arguing that. In fact, Gopnik’s inconsistency can be seen if one studies Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His Christian faith directly informed his position and actions against the sins of segregation and discrimination. King was not a mullah; his Christian faith led to his challenge of sinful public policies. Gopnik also vehemently criticized Ryan’s defense of the rights of the unborn. In effect, he mocked Ryan and his wife for naming their first unborn child, “Bean”—because that was its shape on the ultrasound. Gopnik wrote quite unbelievably that “It is conscious, thinking life that counts, and where and exactly how it begins (and ends) is so complex a judgment that wise men and women, including some on the Supreme Court, have decided that it is best left, at least at its moment of maximum ambiguity, to the individual conscience (and the individual conscience’s doctor).” Human value, worth and dignity, in the logic of Adam Gopnik, is restricted to “conscious, thinking life.” As theologian Albert Mohler demonstrates, Gopnik’s logic manifests “the Culture of Death, and it is an assault upon the dignity and worth of every human being.” Arguably, Adam Gopnik represents an extreme on the spectrum of debate on this issue, but without an anchor and

without acknowledging that faith should inform public policy, the US has no foundation for deciding the value, worth and dignity of human life, including life in the womb. Adam Gopnik's position is frightening, scary and is the same logic that produced a Josef Mengele. In the US, we must allow reasoned discussion about the value of life, even in the womb, and we must allow personal faith to be a part of the discussion on issues that strike at the very heart of dignity and worth. To make such an argument does not make one a mullah calling for a theocracy.

See Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (16 November 2012); Albert Mohler in www.albertmohler.com (17 and 26 October 2012).