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Is the Abortion Argument Changing?

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Election cycles serve to confuse as well as to reveal. Reading voting patterns is not quite like reading a CAT-scan, but something does appear to be happening among some parts of the electorate that had been solidly pro-life in voting patterns.

The Boston Globe reports on developments that now appear among at least some Roman Catholic and Evangelical voters.

As the paper reports, the argument now takes a form something like this:

That the legislative battle to outlaw abortion is hopeless and that antiabortion groups would be better off devoting themselves to preventing unwanted pregnancies and persuading pregnant women to carry their fetuses to term rather than trying to change the laws of the land.



For several months now, some have argued that pro-life voters might plausibly vote for a pro-abortion rights candidate, because the pro-abortion rights candidate might lead to social effects that might lead to some reduction in abortion rates.

As the Boston paper points out, this was the very argument put forth by former President Bill Clinton, who argued that he would make abortion “safe, legal, and rare.”

Now, similar arguments are being promoted by backers of Sen. Barack Obama, who is the most extreme proponent of abortion rights ever to gain a major party’s nomination for President. This line of argument has attracted both Roman Catholics like Pepperdine University law professor Doug Kmiec and some evangelical voices as well.

Nicholas Cafardi, a legal scholar at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, wrote last month: “While I have never swayed in my conviction that abortion is an unspeakable evil, I believe that we have lost the abortion battle - permanently.”

That is quite an argument — that the abortion battle has been lost permanently. There is good cause to wonder if he is right. Thirty-five years after *Roe v. Wade*, abortion on demand is now an ingrained part of American culture. Many Americans are willing to consider it a “right” even as they would never consider an abortion for themselves. *Roe* is now a precedent protected by a wall of other precedents in the law. If *Roe* were to be overturned tomorrow, we would be in for a battle on a state-by-state basis that might take decades — and might not turn out as we hope.

I can understand the fatigue and the sense of frustration. On the other hand, we have witnessed a growing respect for life as ultrasound technologies have opened the womb to view. We have seen the Supreme Court allow that some abortion procedures can be ruled outside the law. We see pro-life convictions growing among the young. This is a moral conflict that might take a century or more to run its course.

I can understand the desire to reset the equation, to transcend the tired divisions. I can even understand the desire to move on, to go on to other issues of great and grave concern. I can sense excitement about a candidate who represents

generational hope, and whose election could do so much to heal racial lines of division.

But I just cannot get past one crucial, irreducible, and central issue — the moral status of those unborn lives. They are not mine to negotiate. If abortion were a matter of concern for anything less than this, I would gladly negotiate. But abortion is a matter of life and death, and how can we negotiate with death? What moral sense does it make to settle for death as “safe, legal, and rare?” How safe? How rare?

Our considerations of these questions will reveal what we really think of those millions of unborn lives. Do we consider the battle for their lives permanently lost?

Those fighting for the abolition of slavery pressed on against obstacles and set backs worse than these because, after all, these were human lives they were defending. What if they had listened to those who, after *Dred Scott* and the Missouri Compromise, said that the battle was “permanently” lost? What if they had been intimidated by critics accusing them of “single-issue” voting?

If every single fetus is an unborn child made in the image of God, there is no moral justification for settling for a vague hope of some reduction in the number of fetal homicides. If the abortion fight is “permanently lost,” it will be lost first among those who claim to be defenders of life — those who tell us that the argument is merely changing.

For a powerful message on this issue, listen to this word from Dr. Russell Moore, senior vice president and dean of the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. His message, “Joseph of Nazareth is a Single-Issue Evangelical,” can be heard [here](#). The full manuscript of his message is available [here](#).

An excerpt:

And isn't it true that everywhere throughout Scripture and the history of the world there is present a hostility towards life and particularly towards children? This is because the serpent sees what many of us fail to see in the birth of children—blessing, and life. The serpent sees in the birth of children the kind of dependent faith that Jesus says images the Kingdom of God. Most of all, the serpent sees among “the least of these” the brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus.



Today is no different. There is, yet again, hostility coming towards human babies, and it is happening in exactly the same way—by the Prince of the Power of the Air exciting evil passions. Satan uses Pharaoh's lust for military stability that says, “I don't want another king,” in exactly the same way he uses a Southern Baptist deacon's lust to maintain his reputation to load his teenage daughter into a car and drive her under the dark of night to a clinic in a nearby city so no one will ever know she was ever pregnant.

The blood of children flows. And the text gives us an unlikely demon-wrestler: a day-laborer from the hick town of Galilee of Nazareth, someone who stands against the dark rage against life and rescues this child—Joseph. You see, Herod's day is not much different than our own. Right now, as you and I gather in this place, there are babies without names labeled as “medical waste” just miles from where we sit. As we sit comfortably in this room, there are little girls across the world in Asia who are waiting on the knock of a door and an American businessman to whom they have just been sold.

