

# Grappling with the Cosmic “Single Issue”

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ABSTRACT: Advocates who defend the lives of the unborn are constantly accused of narrow-minded focus on one “single issue.” Critics pose as more mature, judicious citizens, able to balance and prioritize among a broad spectrum of more important economic, social, political, and cultural concerns. But what if the national practice of wholesale abortion inflicts serious damage on our community, culture, and national soul? This article explores the multi-faceted impacts of the abortion epidemic. It asserts that abortion is, in fact, a “cosmic” concern, affecting all of us in the body politic in a variety of ways. Moreover, biblical history and revelation indicate that it can lead to divine judgment and ruin. If so, this “single issue” must be understood not as one of several policy options but as a meta-factor in determining the future of our civilization.

**Y**EARS AGO MY DELIGHTFUL MOTHER-IN-LAW gave me an immensely valuable gift that keeps on giving: a year’s subscription to *Touchstone Magazine*. After receiving a couple of issues, I had become a lifelong customer, and now dozens of the magazines lie happily scattered around our house – disorganized, but randomly available for enrichment of mind and soul any time. Its February 2013 issue was especially profound. Its fifty-six pages of wisdom were dedicated to the idea of “The One-Flesh Union of Marriage.” Almost every page is relevant to our commitment to protect human life.

In this issue W. Ross Blackburn, who serves as rector of an Anglican Fellowship in North Carolina, asks a provocative question that deserves sustained attention: “What if abortion is connected to everything else? What if...America’s national security, economy, health care and the many other things about which we are rightly concerned, are inseparable from abortion?”<sup>1</sup> This mega-question encompasses and

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<sup>1</sup>Ross Blackburn, “The Destroyer of Peace,” *Touchstone* (2013), p. 10.

transcends all of our concerns in the City of Man.

Pastor Blackburn derives his investigation from a passage in the book of *Jeremiah*. Jeremiah had received from the Lord a heart-breaking assignment: to inform the nation of Judah that God had withdrawn His protection and blessing from their covenant community. Previous prophets had warned again and again that this would happen unless Judah repented of its rampant idolatry and spiritual adultery. In his early ministry Jeremiah had also trumpeted the message of repentance. Speaking through Jeremiah, God had exhorted the king and the people, “Return to me! Return to me!”

But as that message fell on permanently closed ears, God issued a shocking new instruction to Jeremiah: “Do not pray for the welfare of this people.... I will consume them by the sword, by pestilence, by famine.”<sup>2</sup> Judah had crossed a boundary of no return. Its doom was sealed. Blackburn continues: “What would warrant such determined and irreversible judgment?” He answers from a following verse. “I will make them a horror to all the nations of the earth because of what Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.”<sup>3</sup> God had been brooding over the extraordinary crimes of Manasseh for roughly a hundred years. What had this wicked king done? He had launched Judah’s final decline by introducing a host of abominable practices in the capital. One stood out as most despicable. “Manasseh...shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end-to-end.”<sup>4</sup> Manasseh had drenched the city in innocent blood. Not so incidentally, “He sacrificed his own son in the fire....”<sup>5</sup> This act from the cult of Moloch required placing an infant on the red-hot hollow metallic arms of a fired idol, to fry alive, screaming in unspeakable torment. Contempt for God and His moral law. Rivers of innocent blood. Barbaric infant sacrifice. These brought the nation to ruin. They obliterated the economy, the government, the health care system – everything that matters to us in the City of Man.

Blackburn reminds us that Mother Teresa tried to show us how

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 14:11-12 (NIV).

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 15:4 (NIV).

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 21:16 (NIV).

<sup>5</sup> 2 Kings 21:6 (NIV).

abortion poisons both community and culture. The mother kills her child. The father abandons all his parental responsibilities. Moreover he is likely to go out and carelessly impregnate other women and expect them to destroy another child and another and another. Says Blackburn, "Abortion is not a single issue but gets to the very heart of what it means to be human and to live with one another. It touches everything else."<sup>6</sup> The single issue is cosmic, not just confined to the atrocities of the abortuary. Abortion is one symptom of pervasive moral cancer spreading its tentacles through the body politic, destroying the higher functions of the human spirit.

Let's consider a simple, obvious fact that leads to further understanding of our disease. Who goes into the abortuary? Who thinks of pregnancy as a so-called "crisis," instead of a cause for joyous celebration? Unmarried women obtain almost 84% of the 1.2 million annual abortions in the U. S.<sup>7</sup> That leaves 16.2% for married women. So-called "abortion rights" or "reproductive rights" were created out of nowhere for women and men who demand sex without marriage, sex without responsibility, sex for recreation, sex that won't interfere with one's fun or career. That's what abortion is all about. We all know that. It flows from minds and bodies corrupted by sexual immorality and disrespect of marriage. Our task involves energetically exalting the beauty and fulfilment of marriage. The forces of darkness know that, so they wage continuous war on the institutions of marriage and family.

You can see the war live and in color every day on Jerry Springer or Maury Povich. It's a sickening display. The screaming participants are drenched in degradation. These pitiful beings may seem freakish, but are they really so unusual? One might argue they represent those Americans who click on porn sites two trillion times a year, more than one in eight online searches. According to *Covenant Eyes*, a respected Christian ministry, 56% of divorce cases involve one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites. The first exposure to pornography among men is age 12. By age 18, nine of ten boys have

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<sup>6</sup> Blackburn, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> [www.abort73.com/abortion\\_facts/us\\_abortion\\_statistics](http://www.abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics), citing the Center for Disease Control, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

viewed pornography and six of ten girls.<sup>8</sup> Among that universe, 83% of boys and 57% of girls have seen group sex online, 69% of boys and 55% of girls have seen same-sex intercourse online, 32% of boys and 18% of girls have seen bestiality online, and 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen sexual bondage online. The content is not just about raw sex. Some 88% of porn films include acts of physical aggression. Women are often depicted as welcoming rape as a blessing for body and soul. What is the purpose of the principalities and powers behind this war on our psyche? To dissolve the image of God in us. To devastate our ability to love and serve one another in a marriage and family.

### Historical Context

The current cultural collapse is partly connected to ideological events of a hundred years ago. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson took his inaugural oath as the incoming 28<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. Dr. Wilson, a former president of Princeton University, was highly regarded as a distinguished intellectual – a professor, a historian, a political philosopher and theorist, as well as a leader of considerable ability. He was a man of both ideas and action, one of the elite inner circle of the self-proclaimed “Progressive Movement.”

As he took office, Wilson imagined himself somewhat like a philosopher-king, blessed by history with ruling power for a most strategic opportunity to transform the charter, the character, and the social arrangements of the American experiment. He regarded our original political system as archaic and defective. He intended to lead sweeping change. He and his colleagues would design a new kind of society, a twentieth-century republic guided by sophisticated intelligence and animated by his own magnanimous spirit. A few years earlier he had described his sense of mission: “We are architects...and our architects are also engineers.”<sup>9</sup> He and his associates saw themselves as benevolent engineers who would dismantle the obsolete Constitutional system the

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<sup>8</sup> [www.covenanteyes.com/ebooks](http://www.covenanteyes.com/ebooks). “Pornography Statistics: 250+ Facts, Quotes, and Statistics about Pornography Use (2013 Edition).

<sup>9</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “What is Progress?” in *The New Freedom* (New York NY: Doubleday, 1913), pp. 33-54. Reproduced in *American Progressivism*, ed. Ronald Pestritto and William Atto (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), p. 52.

Founders had installed and replace it with a superior, more pragmatic design. The new republic would be all-inclusive, highly organized, and technically efficient in satisfying the needs of the public. “We are rearranging the structures,” he declared. With almost boundless, utopian optimism he estimated that his project would take a while. But not to worry. It would be well worth the wait. He assured his audience:

Finally, a generation or two from now, the scaffolding will be taken away and there will be the family in a great building whose noble architecture will at last be disclosed, where men can live as a single community, cooperative as in a perfected coordinated beehive.<sup>10</sup>

The prospect of the beehive thrilled Wilson. He was sure that eventually all would happily fit into this perfected cooperative of unanimous good will. He was puzzled that there was resistance to his vision. He lugubriously acknowledged, “But there are a great many...who don’t like the idea.” To his detractors he offered this assurance: “We are good fellows, we are good company; we are not going to do [you] any harm.... We shall see at last that we have fulfilled our promise to mankind.”<sup>11</sup>

It barely occurred to him that a beehive consists of mindless drones. Nor did he seem to appreciate that many independently minded individuals might desire to pursue happiness for themselves within a culture of spacious, principled liberty. He found it difficult to accept those independent, self-initiating, happiness-pursuing dissenters who would dare to be different. He dismissed his detractors as “stand-patters” because they clung to the confining doctrines of the American Founders. Beneath the surface of his happy communal rhetoric lurked the specter of heavy-handed coercion and control.

Wilson looked back on the birth of the nation with considerable disdain, the disdain of a modern man who seeks to escape the stifling past and forge bravely forward where no man has gone before. His opinion of the Declaration of Independence is instructive. In the Declaration’s preface we find a document that announces to all humanity the intention to separate from England and become an independent, sovereign nation. But the Founders do not simply state this

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<sup>10</sup> Wilson, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, p. 53.

fact. They justify their act by appealing to the highest of authorities: “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” Thomas Jefferson, writing for America, founds the new nation on God’s will and God’s justice.

This is an amazing claim. Because it is audacious, Jefferson hastens to explain why we, the people, are justified in making it. So he seeks to present our declaration as a divinely inspired act, and therefore rational and virtuous, rather than a mere rebellion by a bunch of defiant adolescents. In words now immortal, he proclaims: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Moreover, Jefferson argues, the chief purpose of government is to secure and protect those God-given rights for the citizens. A government that willfully and blatantly fails to do so becomes morally illegitimate, condemned by “The Supreme Judge of the Earth.” A tyrant might boast of the divine right of kings, but every ordinary citizen could counter with a more muscular boast: I am endowed by my Creator with greater rights – life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness within the moral order of the Creator’s universe. Even though Jefferson did not specifically refer to it, the first chapter of *Genesis* provides the understanding of our exalted status. There we learn that God places his own image, his own likeness in the nature of the first man and woman. The Declaration founds government on that magnificent biblical premise.

Woodrow Wilson – scholar and gentleman that he was thought to be – rejected this axiom. In a 1911 speech in Los Angeles, he told his audience: “If you want to understand the real Declaration of Independence, do not repeat the preface.”<sup>12</sup> In this brief spasm of Gnosticism he cuts the heart out of the founding document. He replaces it with some mystical, other-worldly kingdom utterly alien to the text and the biblical insight of the Founders. To change metaphors, he seeks to remove the cornerstone of the republic, the *sine qua non* of the American experiment. He expressly intends to divorce Americans from their unique transcendent heritage.

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<sup>12</sup> An Address to the Jefferson Club of Los Angeles” (May 13 1911) in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966-1993), Vol. 23: 34. Cited by Pestritto and Atto, p. 4.

A few years earlier he had written, “We are not bound to adhere to the doctrines held by the signers of the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, we do not have to believe that human beings are created in the image of God, or that the Creator has imparted unto us the right to life, or that our right of liberty is fundamental. Wilson argues that life and liberty are contingent on pragmatic calculations that may set the individual aside. Thus, he condescendingly devalues the core American creed:

No doubt a great deal of nonsense has been talked about the inalienable rights of the individual, and a great deal that was mere vague sentiment and pleasing speculation has been put forward as fundamental principle. The rights of man are easy to discourse of, may be very pleasingly magnified in the sentences of...constitutions...but they are infinitely hard to translate into practice. *Such theories are never ‘law’; no matter what the name or the formal authority of the document in which they are embodied.*<sup>14</sup>

Wilson becomes, I believe, the first president to repudiate our endowment by the Creator of unalienable rights. His alleged “progressivism” regresses back toward Machiavelli and his devious, often cruel Prince.

Likewise, Wilson rejected the Constitution. Ronald Pestritto of Hillsdale College and William Atto of the University of Dallas have edited a most illuminating book, *American Progressivism*, which gathers twenty-five speeches and essays by key leaders of the movement in the early 1900s. Wilson accounts for a quarter of the documents.

In their introductory essay, the editors profile the basic principles of progressivism. First and foremost they argue that “the backbone of the entire movement” was “open and direct criticism of the Constitution.”<sup>15</sup> The progressives understood very well that the Constitution, with its carefully defined checks and balances, stood squarely in the way of their legislative, regulatory, and redistributive agenda. The Constitution, if interpreted literally, would prevent the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government in the United States* (New York NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961 [1908]), p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Pestritto and Atta, p. 3.

social engineers from erecting even one chamber of the communal beehive.

Wilson urged a Darwinian interpretation of a “living Constitution,” continually adjusting and adapting to ever-changing circumstances. It would discard checks and balances and would cede abundant power to the president, viewed as the voice and incarnation of the public interest. In his amplified role of avatar, his power would trump any notion of individual rights. Nor would he hesitate to intervene in once-private sectors, should he deem it necessary. Wilson believed that all spheres of society – economic, social, political, legal, educational, and religious – inherently involve the public interest and are therefore subject to executive scrutiny and action. So, it seems that Wilson did not take his presidential oath in good faith. He did not intend to protect and defend the Constitution; he intended to displace it with progressive theory.

What happens when the government rejects our divine endowment of God’s image, with all the rights and privileges and worth pertaining thereto? What happens when the founding charter is cast aside? When the stewards of public trust trump human rights with their own ideological predilections? Sixty years later their descendants feel quite comfortable legalizing the extermination of inconvenient beings. After a hundred years, professors such as Peter Singer of Princeton vigorously promote expanding the category of the inconvenient to include children already born.

We now have a president who, as a state senator, voted against a bill that asserted: “A live child born as a result of an abortion shall be fully recognized as a human person and accorded immediate protection under the law.”<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein one could also mention of John Dewey, the premier philosopher of pragmatism in the first half of the twentieth century. Dewey, an atheist, was one of the most dogged architects of the envisioned secular utopia. As a professor of psychology and education, first at the University of Chicago, then Columbia University Teachers College, Dewey infused his reconstructive

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<sup>16</sup> Illinois State Senator Barack Obama voted “No” or “Present” on a number of bills with this language, first on March 30, 2001; March 6, 2002; April 4, 2002; and as a U. S. Senator. <http://www.jillstaneck.com/2008/02/links-to-barack-obamas-votes-on-illinois-born-alive-infant-protection-act>.



educational philosophy into the souls of 20,000 future teachers and administrators who then proceeded to radically change the nature of American schooling. Moreover, Dewey's voluminous writings reached millions more professors, jurists, bureaucrats, politicians, pundits, and other members of the knowledge class. The indefatigable Dewey also spearheaded the founding of a new religion that adopted the name of Humanism. He wrote the first *Humanist Manifesto*, which calls for the government to completely take over and direct all religious institutions in society.

Although Dewey totally rejected God, he still confidently assumed that subsequent generations would retain the character qualities that protect and nourish civic order. He was wrong. In 1921, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats in his poem "The Second Coming" saw a more ominous future: "Things fall apart. The center cannot hold." The right to life did not hold, and liberty is ebbing away.

Instead, in our time there has arisen the religion of lifestyle libertarianism with its panting pursuit of total personal autonomy. Academia abetted the descent by embracing postmodernism and the death of truth. Not only did the Progressives of a hundred years ago not foresee this outcome. They produced offspring and descendants who easily forgot the quaint customs of moral restraint that their ancestors thought were permanent and basic to civilized people.

America, like Judah, has committed many individual and corporate sins. So far, God exercises immense grace and tolerance; He puts up with a lot of depravity. But biblical history reminds us that God's tolerance has its limits. In Noah's day, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."<sup>17</sup> The Flood cleansed the earth. Sodom and Gomorrah sank to the depths of abomination until God could not find ten righteous citizens. The fires of judgment purified the desecrated grounds.

The pagans of Canaan aroused the Lord God to expel them from their homeland. On what grounds did God judge the Canaanites? In *Leviticus* 18, God recounts their plunge into wickedness. He names fourteen kinds of incest that they practiced. He indicts them for

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 6:5 (NIV).

sacrificing their children to Moloch. He condemns their perversion – male homosexuality, bestiality, and lesbianism. He concludes with a stern, graphic warning to Israel: “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways because this is how the nations that I will drive out before you became defiled.... And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out.”<sup>18</sup> Their decadence eventually destroyed their civilization. From these cases we learn that all our social concerns gradually coalesce into one huge question: will we cross the invisible line that irrevocably obliterates our republic?

#### CONCLUSION

The late Richard John Neuhaus, the founder and editor-in-chief of *First Things*, was often asked to explain the meaning of the publication’s title. What are “First Things?” Neuhaus offered a three-tiered response.<sup>19</sup> Although the articles of that journal often dealt with political issues and theory, he kept politics a secondary or tertiary focus. We should not neglect the political arena but practice good stewardship of our political privileges. He urged us to find our optimal usefulness in the political process.

But politics reflects the trends and moods of the culture it inhabits. To exert more lasting influence, we must engage the culture, joining with others in causes that lift the general quality of life. I trust you already support pro-life pregnancy centers with your money. In our small town we have a dynamic group of pro-lifers who founded and operate a home for unmarried pregnant women called Great Expectations, usually filled to capacity. At GE, as we affectionately refer to it, young women receive TLC and firm, loving guidance, both before the birth, and a while afterward. My wife has served on the board for about twelve years, and our church contributes some monthly support. By joining UFL you are partially fulfilling the cultural mandate that God assigns us as members of the human community.

Ultimately the First Thing is our Christian faith and mission. The Apostle Peter reminds us that we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may

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<sup>18</sup> Leviticus 18:24, 28 (NIV).

<sup>19</sup> Personal interview, January 9, 1998, New York.

declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”<sup>20</sup> We have a glorious identity in Christ and a holy purpose in Christ. The First Thing, the prime directive, is to declare his praises to our immediate corner of the world. How can we combat the religions that threaten to destroy: the hedonism, the postmodernism, the secularism, the worship of self and its insatiable quest for godlike autonomy? By being who we are and doing what we’re meant do – showing forth Christ, publicly and joyfully.

When the imaginations and thoughts of the world sink to the sewer, we must stand out as a beautiful, visible contradiction to those imaginations. The ultimate strategy and hope for renewal is spiritual – a hearty, exuberant, corporate life in Christ that shines glaring light into the darkest places. Our Leader who is the Way, the Truth and the Life has not left us to scramble for paltry man-made solutions. He brings us His Word, and He brings Himself.

In chapters two and three of the book of *Revelation* we find seven letters to seven churches in seven various difficult situations. All these churches wrestled with outside enemies. Some compounded their woes by compromise and outright sin inside the camp. Two or three had severely deteriorated in faithfulness. The most vibrant churches underwent persecution. Jesus speaks to each with pastoral love – and sometimes firm, corrective counsel. For the sake of brevity here, I have taken some liberty to condense and paraphrase:

To those eroding in devotion he urged “Rekindle your first love. Refresh your adoration and enthusiasm for Christ Himself. There is no greater priority (2:4).

To those grieving over pervasive immorality both inside the church and out in the community He implores, “Stand strong against sin. Don’t be afraid. Hold on (2:10, 25).

To those who had polluted the Gospel with alien doctrine, He warned, “Purify yourselves. Repent” (2:14-16).

To those who had backslidden far from righteousness, he called, “Wake up! Strengthen what remains. If you don’t, I will personally deal with you” (3:2, 3).

To the noble, excellent body of believers: “Good job! I’m with you with all my blessing and power. I have granted you an open door no one can shut.

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<sup>20</sup> I Peter 2:9, 10 (NIV).

Rely on me and watch me use you for my glory” (3:8).

To the most lukewarm Church: “Because you are lukewarm I am about to spew you out of my mouth. Be earnest and repent.” Open your heart to me. I long for your fellowship” (3:15, 16, 19, and 20).

In all these situations Jesus promises that He will get involved directly, sometimes to empower, sometimes to discipline. He rewards the faithful but sometimes only after much suffering and martyrdom. Time and again, by courageous example, believers who died for Christ inspired pagans to leave the world and follow Him. Almost all the apostles were executed for their faith, but the kingdom of God spread steadily outward. As Tertullian famously observed, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.” That may or may not be fulfilled in a post-Christian culture. Regardless, if necessary, we have one more order from our commander: “Be faithful unto...death and I will give you the crown of life.”

For times like these, there is no place for the half-hearted believer. The lukewarm will not endure. Let us lay aside the sin that easily besets us and run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.<sup>21</sup> No matter what the future holds, may the global nation of the redeemed so conduct itself that our Lord will be able to say that this was one of its finest hours.

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<sup>21</sup> See Hebrews 12:1 and 2.