

# The Gospel according to Jane Roe: Abortion Rights and the Reshaping of Evangelical Theology

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The corner abortion clinic may have done more to define contemporary evangelical theology than has the community Bible church down the street. After all, orthodox Christian theology, from Pentecost onward, has sharpened itself against the counter-arguments of heretical movements.<sup>1</sup> In the first century, incipient Gnosticism forced the apostolic church to articulate clearly the holistic nature of creation, sin, and resurrection. The onslaught of heretical proposals on the identity of Jesus led to the clarity of the Trinitarian ecumenical councils. The indulgence peddling of the medieval Catholic Church led to the forceful Reformation pronouncements on justification through faith in Christ alone. In a similar way, the United States Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision has confronted global evangelicalism with a challenge that is no less daunting and no less doctrinal—namely, the American social theology of personal and sexual autonomy.

It is virtually beyond dispute that *Roe v. Wade* energized American evangelicals from their political isolationism, driving them into the public square.<sup>2</sup> But *Roe* did more than prompt evangelical political action. Against the spirit of *Roe*, evangelicals were forced to rethink their biblical priorities and their theological assumptions. Thirty years after *Roe v. Wade*, evangelical theology is, in many ways, transformed. This doctrinal development, however, remains static. The challenges of *Roe* are mutating and accelerating, forcing

evangelicals to rethink further how the Spirit would have them to live as pro-life exiles in pro-choice America. While the past thirty years have been pivotal in evangelical applied theology, the next thirty years may be even more crucial to the future of evangelical theology.

## **Roe and Evangelical Theology: The Past Thirty Years**

The roots of *Roe v. Wade* reach back to a pastor's study. Sarah Weddington was more than simply the attorney who successfully argued the landmark case before the United States Supreme Court. She was a driving philosophical force behind the abortion rights movement, combing Texas for potential litigants who could help overturn abortion restrictions. In her autobiography Weddington attributes her passion for abortion rights to the theology she inherited from her father, a Texas Methodist minister. Weddington describes her father's ministry as "not the fire-and-brimstone variety;" but rather "the gospel of 'Christian social concern' exemplified in the United Methodist Church's pro-choice stance on abortion rights."<sup>3</sup> After hearing that she had won the *Roe* case, Weddington writes that her father was elated since "he was pleased that the principles he personally held and which I had represented had been approved by the Supreme Court; and he was glad that women be no longer in back alleys but rather in safe surroundings under the watchful eyes of trained profes-

sionals.”<sup>4</sup> When later Weddington, as a White House lawyer, attempted to convince President Jimmy Carter of the moral rightness of Medicaid funding of abortion, she appealed to their common “religious heritage” and to her father’s ministry.<sup>5</sup> Weddington’s link between American religion and abortion rights is not incidental. Indeed, before the Supreme Court she noted American Protestantism’s support for legalized abortion, a position noted by Justice Harry Blackmun in the *Roe* decision.<sup>6</sup>

These Protestant underpinnings of the early abortion arguments are ironic, given the ambivalent initial reaction of evangelicals to *Roe v. Wade*. *Christianity Today* magazine, for example, greeted *Roe* by blankly reporting that the decision “brought, as expected, immediate response from the nation’s Roman Catholic leaders.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the perception that pro-life concern was “a Catholic issue” was not merely a perception, but a too seldom lamented fact. Nearly five years before *Roe*, evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry, then editor of *Christianity Today*, arranged a symposium on abortion and contraception with the Christian Medical Society. The symposium produced a document, “A Protestant Affirmation on the Control of Human Reproduction,” which was said to represent the consensus of the twenty-five evangelical scholars who participated in the event. “The Bible does not expressly prohibit either contraception or abortion but it does set forth certain governing principles such as the sanctity of life, the command to multiply, and the apostolic injunction for husband and wife to satisfy each other’s sexual needs,” the evangelicals noted.<sup>8</sup> With this the case, the evangelicals offered a strikingly “pro-choice” stance on both contraception and abortion rights.

“Whether or not the performance of an induced abortion is sinful we are not agreed, but about the necessity and permissibility for it under certain circumstances we are in accord,” the document states. “The Christian physician who is asked to perform an abortion will seek to discover the will of God in this as in every other area of life.” Thus, the statement affirms the physician must exercise “great caution in prescribing an abortion” since the fetus is “at the least, a potential and developing human life.” The evangelical doctor must, therefore, the document notes, “advise induced abortion only to safeguard greater values sanctioned by Scripture. These values may be individual, familial or societal.” This appeal to “greater values” is fully in accord with the principles outlined later in *Roe v. Wade*. Furthermore, the *Christianity Today* manifesto located personhood at birth—precisely where the Supreme Court would find it in 1973: “From the moment of birth, the infant is a human being with all the rights which Holy Scripture accords to all human beings; therefore infanticide under any name should be condemned.”<sup>9</sup> The manifesto therefore endorsed the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists’ statement on therapeutic abortion—a statement that supports legal abortion for rape, incest, genetic deformity, and the life or “health” of the mother—with “health” taking into consideration “the patient’s total environment, actual or reasonably foreseeable.”<sup>10</sup> With such ambiguity even among conservative evangelicals, it is not difficult to see why American culture evolved to the point of accepting *Roe v. Wade* without a sense of overwhelming outrage.

Thus, for the evangelicals who lead the crusade to awaken evangelicals to the hor-

rors of the abortion culture, one of the foremost items on the agenda was a revision to defective elements of evangelical theology—elements that had permitted evangelical Protestantism to yawn in the face of the culture of death. Evangelical theology was forced to reconsider a pessimistic eschatology—driven by classical dispensationalism—which saw little use for social engagement.<sup>11</sup> It was forced to reconsider an ecclesiology of the “spirituality of the church”—driven by some forms of Reformed confessionality—that severed the “spiritual” concerns of the church from the “temporal” concerns of the secular city.<sup>12</sup> But, perhaps even more significantly, evangelical theology has been forced by *Roe* to rethink the relationship between creation and redemption—a relationship that makes sense of the biblical value on human life, especially at its most vulnerable stages. Francis Schaeffer, an early voice of pro-life evangelicalism, was among the first to sound this alarm. As Schaeffer saw it, evangelicals lagged behind Roman Catholics in denouncing abortion rights because of “the prison of their platonic spirituality,” which failed to see that imperiled human life is not at the periphery of the gospel.<sup>13</sup> Schaeffer believed that the evangelical doctrinal consensus on creation and salvation did not offer the theological resources to address the questions raised by *Roe*.

Schaeffer was proven right by the public scrambling of American evangelicalism in the months following the Supreme Court edict, as many of them seemed to ask, “What hath the revival tent to do with the abortion clinic?” For example, at the announcement of *Roe v. Wade*, *Christianity Today* quoted Southern Baptist conservative patriarch W. A. Criswell, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, as

affirming *Roe* based on his theological position on the distinction between soul and body: “I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had life separate from its mother that it became an individual person, and it has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and for the future should be allowed.”<sup>14</sup>

While Criswell would later embrace the pro-life cause, a younger Baptist who came of age politically during the *Roe* era would appeal to the same theological basis for legalized abortion. Vetoing anti-abortion legislation, President Bill Clinton pointed to the body/soul distinction he said he learned from a Southern Baptist pastor—namely, that life begins with breath rather than conception.<sup>15</sup> Former Southern Seminary ethicist Paul D. Simmons, now active in the theologically liberal Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, continues to make such a soul/body distinction, arguing that the fetus is not a “person” since he or she has not yet received the “breath of life” spoken of in Genesis 2:7.<sup>16</sup> Simmons further argues that a libertarian view of providence likewise demands legalized abortion since human beings are sometimes called “to make godlike decisions regarding their stewardship of their procreative powers, as in abortion.”<sup>17</sup> With the shift of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) toward biblical inerrancy and evangelical confessionality, Southern Baptist churches and the agencies they fund rebuffed Simmons’s arguments. Indeed, such arguments have been repudiated decisively by virtually the entire spectrum of conservative evangelical theology in the years since 1973.

Ironically, on the abortion issue, evangelicals have been driven to *sola scriptura* by the arguments of Roman

Catholics. The abortion debate has sparked an evangelical theological renaissance on the question of human dignity and the implications of the *imago Dei*. As such, evangelical theology has stressed the uniqueness of humanity in the created order. The creation mandate of Genesis grants the primeval humans as the vice-regents of God dominion over nature in all of its forms (Gen 1:26; Psalm 8)—but it does not grant them “godlike” dominion over human life. Indeed, evangelical theology in its interface with the “theology” of abortion rights has marshaled a compelling biblical case against such views of human autonomy in life-and-death decision-making, views that are essential to the case of *Roe*.<sup>18</sup> Instead, evangelical theology has reasserted the biblical concept that the *imago Dei* that establishes the uniqueness of humanity is itself that which renders the murder of innocent human life unthinkable (Gen 9:6).<sup>19</sup> With such the case, evangelical theology has countered the “culture of death” with a view of human life that makes better sense of the singular uniqueness of the human being—an understanding that has been essential to evangelical evaluation of other, related issues such as the accelerating calls for “animal rights,” euthanasia of the disabled, and assisted suicide for the terminally ill. Questions such as those raised in the abortion debate have prompted evangelical theology to affirm—with the witness of biblical revelation—that the *imago Dei* is not merely functional, but is an ontological reality inherent in every being that is human.<sup>20</sup> A strictly “functional” view of human personhood is the metaphysical culprit not only in the secular theology of abortion rights, but also in the arguments of its apologists within the fold of mainline Protestantism.<sup>21</sup> The evangelical emphasis on

the *imago Dei* has further equipped evangelical theology to offer biblically-informed worldview decisions on issues much more complicated than the abortion of an unborn infant—“therapeutic” human cloning, for instance, or embryonic stem cell research, issues the first generation of post-*Roe* evangelicals might never have dreamed would become the focus of debate.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, evangelical theology has developed a more coherent view of the relationship between the “soul” and the body. Unlike the arguments of abortion rights activists, Scripture will not allow Christian theology to assign “personhood” to a human being at some point subsequent to the formation of his body. For the psalmist, the fetus knit together in the womb is “me” (Ps 139:14-16). The incarnation of the eternal *Logos* does not take place with the first breath in the Bethlehem stable, but in the hidden depths of the Nazarene virgin’s womb (Luke 1:31-35, 41-44). This focus, illuminated by the abortion debate, has returned evangelical theology to a key tenet of Scripture. We do not “have” souls; we *are* souls. We do not *have* bodies; we *are* embodied beings.<sup>23</sup>

This affirmation stands in stark contrast to the “gospel” of *Roe*, rooted as it is in Enlightenment anthropology and in the libertarian frenzy of the sexual revolution. Agrarian essayist Wendell Berry, while at variance with evangelical Protestantism on a host of issues, recognizes what is at stake in this debate—whether we will see humanity as one more “machine” to be dominated by technological progress.<sup>24</sup> Berry identifies an unbiblical dualism as the heart of this contemporary “gospel”:

For many centuries there have been people who looked upon the body, as upon the natural world, as an encumbrance of the soul, and so have hated the body, as they have

hated the natural world, and longed to be free of it. They have seen the body as intolerably imperfect by spiritual standards. More recently, since the beginning of the technological revolution, more and more people have looked upon the body, along with the rest of the natural creation, as intolerably imperfect by mechanical standards. They see the body as an encumbrance of the mind—the mind, that is, as reduced to a set of mechanical ideas that can be implemented in machines—and so they hate it and long to be free of it.<sup>25</sup>

Berry therefore recognizes the anti-creational and anti-material bent of the sexual revolution. The current *Zeitgeist* of sexual libertarianism, Berry contends, “is mostly an industrial phenomenon, in which the body is used as an idea of pleasure or a pleasure machine with the aim of ‘freeing’ natural pleasure from natural consequence.”<sup>26</sup> The result, he warns, is that “industrial sexuality seeks to conquer nature by exploiting it and ignoring the consequences, by denying any connection between nature and spirit or body and soul, and by evading social responsibility.”<sup>27</sup> Nothing could be further from the creation-affirming cultural mandate of Genesis, a mandate seen reflected most clearly in the New Man—Jesus the Messiah (Heb 2:5-10).

With this the case, Princeton University law professor, Robert George, rightly identifies the “personhood” arguments of abortion rights advocates as the “last refuge of those who are bent on justifying destructive research on embryonic human beings, but wish to avoid the collapse into utilitarianism.”<sup>28</sup> George appeals to natural law theory at this point, but he identifies an often-neglected truth grounded in the revealed anthropology of Scripture:

You and I are essentially human,  
physical organisms. We do not

“have” organisms that we (considered as conscious and desiring agents) possess and use; rather, we *are* rational-animal organisms. Therefore we—that is, the *persons* we are—come to be precisely as and when the animal-organisms we are come to be. One does not become a person only sometime after one comes to be. The human person is a bodily entity—not a mere consciousness inhabiting and using a body—so all human beings, including embryonic human beings, retarded human beings, and frail, demented, and dying human beings, are “persons” whose rights deserve respect and protection.<sup>29</sup>

With this emphasis, evangelical theology has reclaimed a more biblical portrait of the holistic and cosmic nature of redemption. Evangelicals do not have biblical warrant to disengage from the life-and-death issues of the public square in order to pursue an “other-worldly” and “wholly spiritual” endeavor of rescuing souls from the created order. The Christian doctrine of salvation is rooted in the creation purposes of God, as well as in the eschatological *telos* of creation in the restoration of the image of God (Rom 8:29) and the regeneration of the entire cosmos (Eph 1:10). The two come together in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the decisive act of redemptive history that confirms the Kingdom purposes of God for the whole of humanity, body and soul, as well as for the whole of the created order. The resurrection of Jesus, as the righteous human firstborn of the new creation (Col 1:18; Heb 5:7-9) along with the future resurrection of the Messiah’s joint-heirs is a resounding confirmation that God still deems His cosmos—including His justified image-bearers—as “good” (Rom 8:19-23). This informs evangelical engagement on issues such as abortion because, as ethicist Oliver O’Donovan observes, the resurrection does

away with any notion that Christian theology mandates a negation of the bodily and material aspects of created reality.<sup>30</sup>

A creational understanding of the gospel as revealed in the new creation begun in the resurrection, therefore, demands that Christians embrace a holistic concern for humanity. By refusing to bifurcate the body from the soul, a Kingdom-oriented soteriology might have well served an evangelical theology taken off-guard by *Roe*. By envisioning the mission of the Kingdom as encompassing concern for both body and soul, and by seeing Kingdom priorities as including both the justification of the wicked and justice for the innocent, evangelical theology might have been better prepared for the cultural upheaval that led to the debate over abortion rights. This holistic interrelationship between creation and salvation would also serve as an impetus for evangelical theology to engage vigorously other matters of human dignity, which are mounting as reproductive and human cloning technologies proliferate.

The theological emphases recovered by an evangelical theology challenged by *Roe* have resulted in a more biblically comprehensive doctrinal worldview. Moreover, because of the populist nature of the “pro-life” argument, this theological development has not been relegated to the evangelical academy, but has filtered through the grassroots of evangelical church members. This doctrinal concern has been reinforced by “Sanctity of Human Life” Sundays promoted by evangelical denominations and parachurch organizations to fall around each anniversary of the *Roe* decision. Evangelicals who picket abortion clinics with signs proclaiming, “I’m a Child, Not a Choice” do so because they, like their Roman Catholic co-belligerents,

have a theologically informed understanding of human nature. Evangelicals who staff crisis-pregnancy centers and adoption agencies see more clearly now the Kingdom nature of their labors. In caring for the least of the “brothers” of the exalted Christ (Matt 25:40), they are making a claim about the priorities of the messianic Kingdom (James 1:27). In opposing the gospel of *Roe*, evangelical theology, in many ways, has found the face of Jesus reflected in faces they may never see until the resurrection—those of the vulnerable unborn. Such is much more than cultural activism. It is all part of contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

### ***Roe* and Evangelical Theology: The Next Thirty Years**

Even so, the next thirty years of post-*Roe* America may offer an even more daunting challenge for evangelical theology. While evangelical theology has corrected some of the doctrinal deficiencies present in the mid-twentieth century, there are other theological fissures that may imperil a prolonged biblically informed pro-life witness from conservative evangelical Protestantism. Evangelicals first must learn to see the abortion culture within a biblical philosophy of history—namely, one that takes seriously the pervasive effects of human sin on individuals and social structures. While dispensationalist “pessimism” may have driven earlier forms of conservative Protestantism to an unbiblical despair of any success in the public arena, the triumphalism of the post-*Roe* Christian Right may lead to the opposite—and equally unbiblical—extreme. Some evangelicals—and others in the pro-life coalition—believe that the abortion battle is being “won” by the pro-life movement. As evidence of this, they point

to declining abortion rates, the stigma still associated with abortion, incremental gains in regulating some kinds of abortion, and a resurgence of pro-life conviction among the younger generation.<sup>31</sup>

The optimists are partially right. Many of these indicators do point to genuine cultural victories. Polling data does suggest that younger citizens—especially young women—are much more likely to identify as “pro-life” than those of their mothers’ generation.<sup>32</sup> It would be naïve, however, to read into this shift a wholesale cultural rejection of the abortion culture. Could it be that describing one’s ideology as “pro-life” is much easier in an era in which the abortion issue seems forever “settled” to most of the American population? With abortion seen less and less as a political issue, might it be that the “pro-life” versus “pro-choice” debate is akin to contemporary debates over the relative merits of the Union versus the Confederacy? One’s loyalties might reveal something about other values and convictions, but little is at stake in terms of the outcome of the Civil War. Can it really be said that the pro-life side is winning the day when almost no one in either camp ever expects to see legal protection for the unborn in his or her lifetime? After all, even if a more conservative Supreme Court were finally to overturn *Roe*, does anyone—on either side—expect any state—with the possible exceptions of Utah and Louisiana—to enact any meaningful restrictions on abortion? The pro-life movement has seen real victories, but the culture war is far from over. Pro-family activist James Dobson is correct to argue that pro-life progress is endangered by a “purism” that rejects any incremental legislation short of a Human Life Amendment to the United States Constitution.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, pro-life evangelicals should not

allow incremental gains to mitigate our understanding of the enormity of the task before us. An evangelical realism must see therefore that the abortion battle must be fought on two fronts—that of the culture and that of the law. A narrow focus on incremental progress must be joined with a broad focus on the ultimate goal—the legal and societal protection of the unborn.

In so doing, evangelical theology must remind us that abortion has never been—and never will be—a stand-alone issue. It is part of a much larger and much more ominous cultural downgrade. As pro-life liberal atheist Nat Hentoff contends: “There is more to abortion than abortion.”<sup>34</sup> Between the two sides of the abortion debate there is a yawning ideological chasm—a fundamental clash over two differing visions of reality.<sup>35</sup> This is more than a couple of presidential elections can change—although presidential elections are one place to start.

Evangelical theology can clarify a pro-life vision by explaining the ancient, cosmic roots of the abortion debate. The murder of innocent human life is seen as an evil in Scripture spanning the thousands of years of redemptive history. The primeval Fall is followed immediately by human violence against humans (Gen 4:8-16, 23-24). The Noahic covenant begins with a warning to the new humanity not to follow the path of bloodshed, a path forged by Cain and Lamech (Gen 9:6-7).<sup>36</sup> Yahweh forbids the Israelites from pursuing Canaanite idolatry, and specifically denounces by name the god Molech, who demands the violent sacrifice of human babies (Lev 20:1-8). Indeed, Yahweh warns that he will cut off from the people of God not only the one who practices such sacrifice, but also all those who “at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech” (Lev

20:4 ESV). This same spirit is at work at the dawning of the new covenant when another king seeks to destroy innocent infant life in an assault on the messianic prerogatives of the newly born Davidic ruler (Matt 2:1-18).

This thread through Scripture is not incidental, however. It is not just Herod who is assaulting Christ through the slaughter of the innocents. The apostle John writes that the gospel is opposed by an ongoing spirit of antichrist (1 John 2:18), birthed in the very nature of Satan in opposition to the Christ of God (1 John 3:8). This anti-gospel rage is revealed in the murderous spirit of Cain (1 John 3:11-15). Indeed, John warns, the one who remains outside of Christ “abides in death” and becomes identified as a “murderer” (1 John 3:14-15 ESV). John likewise records Jesus’ teaching that unregenerate humanity shares a nature with the Serpent of Eden, the nature of one who “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44 ESV). The ascended Christ explains this historical trail of blood metaphorically to the exiled apostle John as an ongoing cosmic warfare between the Serpent and the people of the Messiah (Rev 12:1-12). Thus, it should not surprise the church that fallen human appetites can turn murderous (James 4:1-2)—especially against the most helpless among us.

Abortion is therefore more than simply one more issue on a voter’s scorecard—somewhere between a Balanced Budget Amendment and congressional term limits. The contemporary clamor for “reproductive freedom” is part of an ongoing clash between the Christ and the powers of this age. As C. S. Lewis observes:

One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked so much

about a Dark Power in the universe—a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death and disease, and sin. The difference is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong. Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel. Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is.<sup>37</sup>

The reclamation of the “warfare worldview” is essential for an evangelical engagement that is consonant with the Christological grid through which Scripture understands the present age.<sup>38</sup> The revolt against creation seen in the abortion culture is at root a moral revolt against the Creator (Rom 1:18-32). Those who rebel against Christ, the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24) will find that “all who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:36 ESV).

This cosmic warfare emphasis can temper the utopian temptation of American evangelicalism by distinguishing between the “already” of the Kingdom and the “not yet” of its final consummation. If articulated through a biblical understanding of redemptive history, this theology repudiates such egregious (and almost universally condemned by pro-life Christians) acts such as the vigilante murder of abortionists. After all, in the present epoch, the powers are not to be confronted by the sword of the church—but by the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17—the preaching of the gospel) and the sword of the state (Rom 13:4—the responsibility of legitimate civil authority to restrain evil and provide legal protection for its citizenry).<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, however, an evangelical philosophy of history can fuel an even

more sustained activism against the “culture of death” as the church sees its place in the outworking of the ultimate triumph of Christ. As an outpost of the Kingdom, the Body of the ascended Messiah, the church must share the priorities of the Anointed One. Advocacy for the helpless is thus a non-negotiable for a Kingdom colony of the Christ. Solomon, for example, sings of the justice that exemplifies the Anointed One of Yahweh: “For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight” (Ps 72:12-14 ESV). With such the case, pro-life advocacy cannot be left to parachurch political activist organizations, as important as these are. Advocacy for the unborn is an ecclesiological issue even before it is a sociopolitical one.

The church must appeal to rulers outside its walls to render justice for the unborn. But the church must also theologically shape the consciences of its members through the preaching of the whole counsel of God—proclamation that directly impacts our understanding of the abortion issue. The church must challenge the cry of “reproductive freedom,” but the church must also pay heed to the ways in which our people are growing unconsciously more “pro-choice” right along with the secular culture. While some have criticized evangelical Protestantism for concentrating too much on theological discourse among our own constituency on this issue—to the exclusion of “natural law” appeals to the outside world—the church must not forget that addressing the people of God is part of its biblical mandate.<sup>40</sup> When churches value the same cult of consumer success as the rest of the culture, the

church has already conceded some of the core assumptions of post-*Roe* America.<sup>41</sup> As natural law theorist J. Budziszewski notes: “It is difficult to explain the wrong of abortion to someone who thinks it is better for Johnny to have a trip to Disney World than a baby sister, difficult to explain the wrong of euthanasia to one who thinks he will be more blessed learning to take than learning to sacrifice for a lady who needs mercy.”<sup>42</sup> As the spirit of *Roe* preaches a “gospel” of personal autonomy, the church must respond with the only freedom that rescues fallen humanity from the tyranny of its own enslaving passions (2 Pet 2:19). This means that the church must proclaim more than existentialized appeals to internal piety or moralistic character sketches from Scripture. The church must be called to a warfare that began in the prehistoric heavens and continues in the “culture wars” all around us.<sup>43</sup>

The pro-life nature of the gospel must also be present in the makeup and activity of the church itself. This will necessitate the revival of redemptive church discipline as the *Roe* culture more and more democratizes bioethical decision-making through reproductive technologies, pharmacological innovations, and the proliferation of abortion techniques.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, a theological counter-assault on the culture of *Roe* will mean an increased evangelical passion for the adoption of unwanted infants, both in the United States and abroad. Even as sexual libertarianism seeks to redefine the family by advocating homosexual or single parent adoption, evangelical churches should encourage and empower Christian families to expand through adoption.<sup>45</sup> Not only are such efforts consonant with the biblical mandate to care for the fatherless (James 1:27), but also they testify to the gospel itself—in the glorious adoption of

believers as the “sons of God” (Deut 32:9-12; Hos 2:23; Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-6).<sup>46</sup> An energetic apologetic for adoption must also counter the (often unnoticed) theoretical foundations of the “need” for ethically problematic technological “solutions” for infertility—including reproductive cloning. Many are arguing that such advances are ethically superior to adoption because of the insights of contemporary evolutionary psychology. Thus, there is an innate and biologically determined need for the human to “complete his life cycle” through the continuation of his DNA—a need which only reproductive technology can meet. Evangelical advocacy of adoption challenges this worldview from a theological perspective that challenges Darwinian concepts of the family at their very core.<sup>47</sup> In the pro-life commitment to adoption, evangelical theology can point Christian families to a biblical vision that sees beyond the stilted utopianism of “designer children” and genetic idolatry—a vision that explains the multinational makeup of the church itself.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

Evangelical theology is different after *Roe v. Wade* than it was before. Because the abortion debate is more than a social issue or a political issue, it could not be otherwise. Evangelical theology recognized that the “pro-choice” worldview articulated in *Roe v. Wade* and omnipresent in American culture is, at its heart, a theological claim that must be confronted with a coherent, biblical theological defense of the goodness of life. When faced with the challenge of abortion, the evangelical movement commendably refused to stand silently before atrocity. In so doing, evangelical theology identified and reworked doctrinal flaws that could not withstand

the scrutiny of Scripture.

The next thirty years may offer even more arduous challenges—this time not just for a “movement” but instead for the churches. With such the case, the abortion issue will test the doctrinal fortitude of the evangelical churches in ways not seen since the “culture wars” of slavery and segregation—wars in which too many conservative Protestants were on the wrong side of the Kingdom of Christ. As Walker Percy noted of his home region during the days of the civil rights movement: “It is surely not too much to say that if Southern Christendom does not soon demonstrate the relevance of its theology to the single great burning social issue in American life, it runs the risk of becoming ever more what it in fact to a degree already is, the pleasant Sunday lodge of conservative Southern businessmen which offends no one and which no one takes seriously.”<sup>49</sup> What is at stake in the “gospel” of Jane Roe is what was at stake in the “gospel” of Jim Crow. The next generation of evangelicals must discern the voice of the Serpent, even as we long for the One who will one day crush his head.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For an excellent historical sketch of the various heretical movements within Christianity, see Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed account of the theological basis behind this engagement—and the theological opportunities and perils it brings with it—see Russell D. Moore, “Kingdom Theology and the American Evangelical Consensus: Emerging Implications for Sociopolitical

Engagement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>Sarah Weddington, *A Question of Choice* (New York: Penguin, 1993) 46.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 192-193.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>7</sup>“Abortion Decision: A Death Blow?” *Christianity Today*, 16 February 1972, 48.

<sup>8</sup>“A Protestant Affirmation on the Control of Human Reproduction,” *Christianity Today*, 8 November 1968, 18.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>11</sup>Newer forms of the tradition have significantly altered this emphasis of dispensationalism. See, for instance, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 284-301.

<sup>12</sup>The debates over a biblical response to *Roe* within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, for example, centered on this notion. While a small minority of conservative Presbyterians believed *Roe* was an issue best left to the civil sphere, the majority took a pro-life stance for compelling exegetical and theological reasons. The “spirituality of the church” stance on Christian political engagement—though not explicitly on the issue of abortion—still has proponents, most notably D. G. Hart, *The Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002) and *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*

(Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

<sup>13</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982) 68-69.

<sup>14</sup>“Abortion Decision: A Death Blow?” 18.

<sup>15</sup>Kenneth Woodward, “Sex, Sin, and Salvation,” *Newsweek*, 2 November 1998, 37. President Clinton further pointed to Southern Baptist Convention resolutions in the 1970s affirming a pro-choice stance on abortion rights. Clinton’s arguments were challenged by the SBC Christian Life Commission’s James A. Smith, Sr., who noted that these resolutions pointed to the need for doctrinal reformation in the SBC—a reformation that began with the election of conservative Adrian Rogers to the denomination’s presidency in 1979. As Smith contended, the SBC’s shift toward biblical inerrancy also led to a clear pro-life stance on abortion.

<sup>16</sup>Paul D. Simmons, “Personhood, the Bible, and the Abortion Debate,” a brochure published by the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, 3. See also Paul D. Simmons, *Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

<sup>17</sup>Simmons, “Personhood, the Bible, and the Abortion Debate,” 8.

<sup>18</sup>This is true not only in the constitutional “penumbra” argument of a “right to privacy,” but also in subsequent defenses of abortion rights. See, for instance, the Supreme Court’s majority opinion in the 1992 *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* case. The opinion, offered by Justices O’Connor, Kennedy, and Souter, argued that the “heart of liberty” is

“the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Robert P. Casey*, No. 91-744, Supreme Court of the United States, 505 U.S. 833, 29 June 1992.

<sup>19</sup>The mandate for capital punishment in the Noahic covenant renders fallacious the “seamless garment” arguments that suggest that a pro-life stance on abortion necessitates a “seamless web” of opposition to the death penalty and to a robust military defense. For the “seamless garment” view from an evangelical perspective, see Ronald J. Sider, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance on Abortion, the Family, Nuclear Weapons, the Poor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987).

<sup>20</sup>Carl F. H. Henry rightly notes the implications of an ontological v. functional understanding of the image. “If the forms of reason and morality do not in fact belong to the *imago Dei* but are environmentally derived, then no final reason can be given why dominion may not as legitimately be expressed in non-benevolent and in benevolent ways,” Henry observes. “Indeed, precisely the Pharaoh-like domino—man in the role of ‘trampler’—may be expected if man by creation is not bound by the criteria of logic and morality.” Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco: Word, 1976) 2:142.

<sup>21</sup>See, for instance, Simmons’s discussion of personhood: “There can be no doubt about the personhood of

the woman. Her rights to bodily integrity, conscientious belief, and family planning decisions should be unequivocally supported, though women often have been ignored in the debate. Notions of fetal personhood are, at best, problematic. Certainly where a conceptus (fertilized ovum) is concerned, it is metaphysical speculation to declare it a person." Paul D. Simmons, "The Pastor as Prophet: How Naked the Public Square," *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989) 528.

<sup>22</sup>See, for instance, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Brave New World of Cloning: A Christian Worldview Perspective," in *Human Cloning: Religious Responses*, ed. Ronald Cole-Turner (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1997) 91-105. For the panorama of viewpoints offered on questions of therapeutic and reproductive cloning, see Leon R. Kass, ed., *Human Cloning and Human Dignity: The Report of the President's Council on Bioethics* (New York: Perseus, 2002) 279-350.

<sup>23</sup>As Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema notes: "Man, then, exists in a state of psychosomatic unity. So we were created, so we are now, and so we shall be after the resurrection of the body. For full redemption must include the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 15:12-57), since man is not complete without the body. The glorious future of human beings in Christ includes both the resurrection of the body and a purified, perfected new earth." Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 218. This personal unity

explains the horror with which Scripture speaks of physical death (1 Cor 15:26). Even Augustine, as influenced as he was by Platonic notions of spirituality, reflects this biblical view of death: "Mere physical death, the separation of body and soul that the dying must endure, is not good for anyone. For there is something harsh and unnatural in the violent sundering of what, in a living person, were so closely linked and interwoven; and the experience lasts until there is a complete loss of all feeling that depends on the union of soul and body." Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Doubleday, 1958) 275.

<sup>24</sup>Wendell Berry, *Life Is a Miracle: An Essay against Modern Superstition* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 2000).

<sup>25</sup>Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (New York: North Point, 1990) 190-191.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001) 322.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 322-323. While agreeing with George's general thesis, many conservative evangelicals would want to qualify George's use of "animal" as a description of the human organism, in order to distinguish further the ontological difference between humanity and the animal kingdom on the basis of the *imago Dei*.

<sup>30</sup>O'Donovan rightly observes that the resurrection of Jesus is the "sign that God has stood by his created

order," implying that "this order with mankind in its proper place within it, is to be totally restored at the last." Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 15. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright makes a similar point regarding the New Testament's Christ/Caesar dichotomy in light of the resurrection. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 568-583.

<sup>31</sup>Frederica Mathewes-Green, "Abortion in the Tides of Culture," *First Things* 128 (2002) 16-18.

<sup>32</sup>See, for instance, Elizabeth Hayt, "Surprise, Mom: I'm Against Abortion," *New York Times*, 30 March 2003, 9.1 and 9.9.

<sup>33</sup>James C. Dobson, "Letter to the Troops: The Grassroots of the Pro-Life Movement," in *Back to the Drawing Board: The Future of the Pro-Life Movement*, ed. Teresa R. Wagner (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2003) 210.

<sup>34</sup>Nat Hentoff, "The Liberal Voice Beyond the Base: There's More to Abortion than Abortion," in *Back to the Drawing Board*, 220.

<sup>35</sup>Both sides of the "culture war" have noted this "worldview" collision. See conservative Thomas Sowell's *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) and liberal George Lakoff's *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>36</sup>See the explanation of the Cain-

Lamech connection in Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 70.

<sup>37</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 36.

<sup>38</sup>The “warfare worldview” concept can be found in Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997). While Boyd helpfully recognizes the warfare motif in the Old and New Testaments, he is not persuasive in wedding this motif to a revisionist theology of open theism, libertarian human free will, inclusivism, and a rejection of penal substitutionary atonement in favor of a “Christus Victor” model. For a critique of Boyd, see D. A. Carson, “God, the Bible, and Spiritual Warfare: A Review Article,” *JETS* 42 (1999): 251-70. The warfare motif of Scripture is analyzed further in Daniel G. Reid and Tremper Longman III, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>39</sup>Even with a common recognition of Romans 13, however, there is no guarantee of consensus among evangelicals and other Christians. See, for instance, the ongoing discussion of whether the United States constitutional democracy has been “usurped” by the illegitimate authority of the judiciary. Mitchell S. Muncy, ed., *The End of Democracy? The Celebrated First Things Debate, with Arguments Pro and Con* (Dallas: Spence, 1997).

<sup>40</sup>One scholar notes, for instance, that the pro-life activity of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has been less successful than the National

Conference of Catholic Bishops in addressing the outside world on the abortion issue since “the SBC’s primary reliance on biblical authority confined it to a culturally more restricted discourse.” Michele Dillon, “Religion and Culture in Tension: The Abortion Discourses of the U.S. Catholic Bishops and the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Religion and American Culture* 5 (1995) 172.

<sup>41</sup>Some of the ways in which we capitulate to the spirit of the age are less than obvious. See, for instance, the provocative and thought-provoking essay by Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Let’s Have More Teen Pregnancy,” *National Review Online*, 20 September 2002, <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-mathewes-green092002>. Mathewes-Green argues that the contemporary assumptions that marriage and children should wait until “life goals” have been accomplished have infected even the most well-intentioned evangelical campaigns for teenage sexual morality.

<sup>42</sup>J. Budziszewski, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man* (Dallas: Spence, 1999) 133.

<sup>43</sup>For an excellent survey of what is at stake in replacing the Kingdom warfare concept of the Christian life with a sentimental or interiorized pietism, see Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas: Spence, 1999) 201-204.

<sup>44</sup>For a thorough treatment of formative church discipline and the abortion issue, see Terry Schlossberg and

Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Not My Own: Abortion and the Marks of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>45</sup>Some evangelical churches are leading the way on such endeavors. One model is Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which provides financial and other assistance to families seeking to adopt abandoned children from orphanages around the world.

<sup>46</sup>For a contemporary treatment of the doctrine of adoption, see Robert A. Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001).

<sup>47</sup>Biological determinism and evolutionary psychology are growing more prevalent in the secular academy. See, for instance, Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002).

<sup>48</sup>The apostle Paul grounds the unity of the Jew-Gentile church in a common adoption—an adoption that silences any claim to tribal boasting from any contingent within the Body (Eph 1:5; 2:11-22).

<sup>49</sup>Walker Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991) 338.