

abortion is, in my view, the touchstone. Get this one wrong and your moral compass can guide you in nothing else.

There are complications. Does it really matter, for example, if a county supervisor is pro-life? Maybe so. Years ago the late-term abortionist George Tiller expanded his murderous facility in Wichita, Kan., with little trouble, even as local authorities harassed pro-life groups. The battle over abortion is being waged locally, and it makes all the difference in the world whether officials welcome abortionists with open arms, gutlessly tolerate them for fear of legal trouble, or actually get down to the business of scrutinizing their activities with a fine-toothed comb.

Even worse in the Wichita case, the city's mayor during this period advertised himself as pro-life. Hence an additional problem for the single-minded voter: Many candidates claim this label, yet they have no intention of taking action. The ones who will act, meanwhile, may be far less electable. Voters who don't care about abortion can tolerate a candidate who pays lip-service to the Bible-thumpers. But there's a danger they'll write him off as a nut if he devotes significant energy to the cause once in office.

There's also the challenge that a genuine and committed opponent of abortion may win office, work to end this abomination, and simultaneously arm regimes that slaughter innocents in other countries. If we oppose the murder of unborn infants not because they are cute, but because the execution of innocents is evil, then we have to apply this standard throughout our politics. I always thought the single-issue voter didn't have to think, but maybe that's not the case. There are indeed complications.

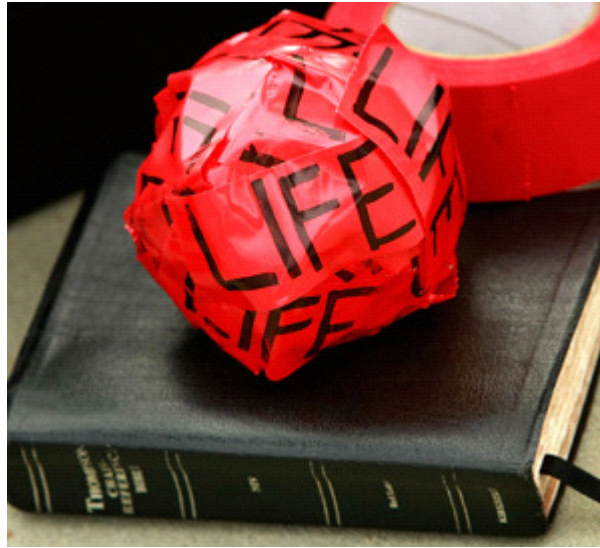
Yet there is also painful clarity that comes with single-mindedness. Jobs, highways, schools, economic growth—none of these matter if we're willing to sanction murder to get them. Perhaps my mentality is a recipe for political isolation for Christians, for the losing of elections, and maybe even a loss of national greatness. I worry that the alternative, however, is to lose something far greater, which is our ability to discern good from evil, and to act accordingly.

■ **THOUGHTS** | "Not over till it's over" November 01, 2008

In praise of single-issue voting

Perhaps less compromise on my part will yield more commitment on theirs |

Tony Woodlief



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I have become something I once reviled: a single-issue voter. I used to think that a wise voter tries to discern each candidate's intentions on major issues, and then casts his vote based on an assessment of who will do the greatest overall good—or the least evil. I thought those voters who support a candidate based on a single issue—whether he will increase school funding, say, or lower taxes—were shirking their duty to consider the full ramifications of putting someone in office. What good is electing someone who is "right" on one thing, I thought, if he gets everything else disastrously wrong? This was the reasoning I used as I congratulated myself for wisely apportioning my votes based on utilitarian calculations.

Now I suspect this sort of calculation misses something. I've become convinced that a nation which sanctions the extinguishing of unborn children, and further, the outright execution of near-term infants, doesn't deserve admiration even if it gets every other policy right.

I used to include abortion as part of my voting calculus, mind you, but only a part. What if a candidate is pro-life, for example, but favors disastrous tax and trade policies that would consign people to lower living standards? Or what if he wants to use our military in pursuit of ill-defined foreign policy goals? Shouldn't these things factor into my equation?

Those other issues certainly affect a country's safety, prosperity, and greatness. But I've come to believe that a nation that tolerates destruction of innocents deserves neither safety nor prosperity nor greatness. We've descended into barbarism, and it poisons how we treat the elderly, the incapacitated, even ourselves. We shouldn't be surprised, having made life a utilitarian calculation, that more and more humans become inconvenient.

It's certainly true that there are other issues that ought to concern Christians, like the sanctity of marriage, and how we treat the mentally ill, the elderly, and children who have been born. But