

# ISSA Proceedings 2002 - William Wilberforce And The Abortion Controversy



In 1990, as she “decodes” abortion rhetoric, Celeste Condit (44-49) notes two primary pro-life argument strategies focused on history. The first develops a history of abortion framed to show it as “An Almost Absolute Value in History.” Condit dissects this carefully framed history. Established as authoritative for its religious (basically Catholic) audience, it is necessarily selective. A focus on the sanctity of life gives this history its argumentative strength. The second strategy presents the strand of evil in history as pro-life writers develop “analogies between slavery, the holocaust, and abortion” (49). Ronald Reagan’s essay, “Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation,” a text that still appears on pro-life web sites, provides the typical comparisons of slavery and abortion. Condit (50) notes Reagan, like many rhetors, shapes history to suit his needs, focusing on a shaped sense of the meaning of events rather than a precise historical record. The linkage across time for Reagan and others exploring these analogies is “villainy.” The audience is expected to join in the struggle against the newest evil attacking the sanctity of life. Condit concludes the unified history has enough value appeal to be broadly persuasive, but also enough “evident partisanship” to limit “its legitimacy” (52). In the 1990s a new historical analogy gains a central place in pro-life argument. The subject of this analogy is less well known than the earlier comparisons, but also better suited to the multi-faceted needs of contemporary pro-life discourse.

William Wilberforce, the “conscience of the nation” who spearheaded the long fight to abolish the profitable and socially acceptable slave trade in Great Britain, has become a source of inspiration and argument for a new generation and a new cause.

When William Wilberforce entered Parliament in 1780, slavery seemed an inextricable part of the British economy. Slaves were viewed as necessary in some of the colonies, The slave trade itself was profitable for the merchant marine, and the ships involved in the slave trade provided a training and recruiting ground for the British Navy. Religion and religious appeals were of relatively little

importance in that pre-Victorian society, but all of these things would change as the influence of the Wesleys took hold in the country and Wilberforce and the Clapham group promoted a transformation of “manners” and values in the social and political realm. Wilberforce had been a close friend of Pitt, was seen as one of the wittiest and most eloquent members of Parliament, and was understood to be at the center of power, when he determined to devote his life to the abolition of slavery and the transformation of manners of his time. He saw these two things as the causes God had set for him. The life events, political strategies, legislative efforts, personal manner, and writings of this man provide a rich source of argument for contemporary Christian pro-life activists whether they are seeking to motivate their adherents or to explain their cause to those outside the group. Charles Colson dubs Wilberforce “A special inspiration for today’s politically incorrect, ‘religious right activists’: To stay in the public square, to keep fighting the battles despite debasement, derision, and defeat, as long as we believe that’s where God wants us” (Colson, 1996, xxvi). Wilberforce serves as an exemplar of an activist who succeeded against the odds. Slavery was the galvanizing social evil for evangelicals of Wilberforce’s day; today for many evangelicals and conservatives the issue is abortion and the pro-life activists have claimed Wilberforce. For example, on a pro-life web site of Life and Liberty Ministries, in an announcement of the “Face the Truth Tour,” a Wilberforce statement appears under a photograph of a protest line of graphic abortion photos: “Never, never will we...extinguish every trace of this bloody traffic (slavery), of which our posterity, looking back to the history of those enlightened times, will scarce believe that it has been suffered to exist so long a disgrace and dishonor to this country” (2001). By implication the analogy is drawn here as elsewhere between slavery and abortion, between Wilberforce’s struggle for social change and what is required of current activists. In this case the focus is on social action against a perceived evil rather than religious justification. This Wilberforce reference provides the committed viewer with analogous, successful social action against a past pervasive, but accepted social ill.

Kenneth Burke (1954/1984, 97) claims the “danger of analogy is that a *similarity* is taken as evidence of an *identity*. Because two things are found to possess a certain trait in common which our point of view considers notable, we take the common notable trait to indicate identity of character.” This understood, argument by analogy is a natural way to establish persuasive identification with an audience. At the simplest level the speaker relates an experience or

perspective the audience shares, there is a sense of identity, of commonality between speaker and audience and so the group is more persuasible. At another level, the speaker demonstrates that one commonly held belief or “piety” (74) is like another less familiar, less accepted belief, and so, on the strength of analogy the new belief or piety may become part of the audience’s sense of what is right and appropriate. In these ways, on this basis, argument by analogy, based on the struggle of William Wilberforce in his efforts to abolish slavery in Great Britain becomes a valuable tool for pro-life rhetors. Using a Burkean approach, drawing on terministic screens, pieties, identification, and perspective by incongruity, this paper will explore how a selection of pro-life related web sites use Wilberforce to develop argument by analogy to support their actions and motivate their adherents.

A quick Google web search for “William Wilberforce Abortion” reveals over four hundred potentially relevant sites. After eliminating duplications, resource lists, and sites where the terms both appear but not in significant relationship, the remaining sites (under sixty) all refer to William Wilberforce as they make implicit or explicit analogous links between slavery and abortion. These texts comprise the document sample for this study.

### *1. Analogy and Context: The War between Good and Evil*

“All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing;” the Conservative Christian Fellowship, a British group associated with the Conservative party, opens their mission statement page with this paraphrase of Edmund Burke, then mentions William Wilberforce’s fight against slavery as they call for contemporary Christians to act. After relating the current abortion rate in Maine, and summarizing Wilberforce’s “attack” on “his enemy, slavery,” an Issues Summary of the Christian Civic League of Maine (2002) asserts, “Battles for truth and righteousness are always raging, everywhere.” The context for the pro-life use of the Wilberforce analogy is clear. Such language is unmistakable. This is an ongoing war against good and evil with pro-life advocates as the soldiers in the battle. The assumption of that context is basic to the analogy.

At times the evil and any reluctant champions are portrayed in harshly abrasive terms. The “Lincoln letters” contend the nation is “guilty before God; and the Christian church has a heavy account to answer for” because of “the monstrous institutionalized evil of the ‘abortion industry’.... Not by continuing to permit the willful, premeditated murder of generations of precious preborn human beings,

and the grievously rapacious exploitation of their mothers is this Union to endure..." (The Lovejoy, Greeley, Jay, Adams, Wilberforce-memorial press: The Lincoln letters). The analogy is weakened by the suggestion that civil war is imminent Burke (1954/1984) classes argument by analogy as a form of perspective by incongruity, i.e. things are explored on the basis of their common traits, things are classified according to our interests, but one person's classification patterns might differ from another and so classifications can become "heuristic by reason of the fact that through the processes of abstraction and analogy, they dictate new groupings, hence new discoveries" (103). New links may bring new and unexpected ways of seeing things, or they may fail by taking the audience too far outside their own "sense of what properly goes with what" (74).

The Lincoln letter, with its tone of zealous certainty seems written by someone who too vested in their own classifications to be able to shape their argument to identify with those outside their group. The language is too strident and the analogical pairing too strained to be persuasive for those outside the group.

Getting the public outside the faithful adherents of the cause to understand, from the pro-life perspective, the nature of the enemy is the greatest challenge for pro-life. The emotion-laden language that has traditionally surrounded the abortion controversy and the often-polarized positions of the constituencies make the task all the more difficult. In explaining the attitudinal and hortatory nature of language, Kenneth Burke (1965/1973, 45) introduces the concept of the "terministic screen." He contends that while "any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality." In short, words as labels serve to direct or shape what we see. In the case of the loaded, but polarizing terms basic to the discourse of the abortion controversy, such screens become critical. Some pro-life groups contend that the very word "abortion has lost practically all its meaning" (Face the truth tour, 2002).

They contend the word has been emptied of its impact and hence has become a terministic screen which must be shattered if the pro-life message is to be heard: "People have no interest in stopping this killing of preborn children because they do not see the act or the results of the killing; therefore, it ceases to exist in their comfortable worlds." In short, they argue that the term "abortion" cannot evoke the context of the pro-life battle with evil (though pro-choice advocates would undoubtedly argue that the term certainly evokes another battle with evil from

their perspective). Recognizing that “we live in a visual society,” pro-life proponents respond with “awful photos to convey the “ugly truth.” They argue that just as Wilberforce needed to take “local clergy to the docks where men, women and children were being sold as so much chattel” for people to understand the context of the battle, so they must use visual imagery to make the evil real. The strategic use of visual imagery within the pro-life movement undoubtedly predates their strategic use of Wilberforce, but by linking their action to Wilberforce’s early strategies they provide justification for a sometimes questioned method. Addressing the Pro-Life caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives, Fr. Frank Pavone (*Priests for life newsletter*, 1996) focused on Wilberforce’s use of verbal print imagery in *The Book of Evidence* to break down screens of misunderstanding. Pavone called Congress to provide a similar book of evidence on what abortion does to babies and women.” Pro-life adherents would seek to shatter what they see as the devalued terministic screen, “abortion,” and fill it with attitudinal and hortatory meaning through vivid example. In that way they set the context of the battle and the nature of their enemy.

Calling slavery and abortion each the “moral outrage” of their time, the Unborn Children’s Pro-Life web page provides extended development of the slavery: abortion analogy. The site begins by paralleling the arguments used to justify each:

The unborn child is not a human being/the African is not a human being. The unborn child does not feel pain and distress/The African does not feel pain and distress. Keep abortion safe, keep it legal, because if we don’t do it, unsavoury abortionists will; at least our abortion clinics are clean./Keep slavery safe, keep it legal, because if we don’t do it, smugglers will; at least our slave ships are clean (Renault).

The opening parallels are clear and somewhat startling when juxtaposed. The Burkean (1954/1984, 111) sense of perspective by incongruity is at work; pairings made “in accordance with a new schematization” reveal new meanings. The unexpected similarities foster a revised understanding of the elements of the pairing. The analogy provides heuristic insight into the context as the evil to be battled is established. The parallels then progress to the reasoning behind the Dred Scott decision (which legitimised slavery) and the Roe vs. Wade decision: the pro-life advocates here contend that both are based on the understanding that Blacks or unborn children were not to be considered as persons, but as something

which can be owned or disposed of by another. This is the familiar territory of Condit's analysis; the evil is the same. The new subject, Wilberforce, appears midway in the comparison as the "courageous man not blinded by the prejudices of his day" who lead "the battle against slavery." Warfare has been joined and "The pro-life movement is here to champion that cause [the 'preborn'] and accomplish what the anti-slavery movement finally did - return a fundamental, precious human right to every human being.... We are and will remain today's William Wilberforce!"

Some sites extend the analogy comparing slavery, the holocaust of WWII and abortion, the very pattern of evil Condit traced earlier, but now the Wilberforce struggle joins or even replaces the American abolition movement in the analogy sequence. A statement by the Christian Action Council reiterates the three evils using a quick linking of Wilberforce's fight against slavery, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's opposition to Hitler, and the current opposition to abortion. The focus shifts slightly from the three battles, to the champions in the fight. The nature of the enemy is clearly detailed:

"while we still cringe at the horrors committed in Nazi Germany, we should equally cringe at the extermination of over 4000 unborn children per day in the United States" Burke (1954/1984, 71-74) calls "piety" our sense of what "ought to be," our sense of "what properly goes with what."

This vivid comparison of Nazi atrocities and abortion attempts to identify with and stretch the established pieties of a broader audience by clarifying the context. The pious and the evil are potentially reclassified; the familiar champions of the past - Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer - fought evil in a pious cause; as will the champions of the fight against abortion according to the pious pairings of the analogy. This has the potential to sway Christians who are not already committed to the pro-life cause, but the chosen historical champions lack the same ready appeal for a secular audience and are thus less apt to reach them.

Some websites use the analogy to contextualize the social challenges faced by the two movements: "The slave trade, like abortion today, was a money-making industry. Few people wanted to give it up. We need to exhibit the same determination and faith of Wilberforce and Wesley" (DeMar,1999). The speaker uses the analogy to establish a sense of shared difficulties and to demand a sense of equally shared responsibility to face those difficulties. Other sites (e.g. Sarfati, 2001) focus on the recurring argument about public space and private morality.

“Wilberforce... had to battle prevailing attitudes like, ‘Humanity is a private feeling, not a public principle to act upon’ (Earl of Abingdon) and “Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life'” (Lord Melbourne). Pro-life supporters are quick to recognize the similarities in the arguments raised by current and past opponents of social changes they support. The telling quotation by Lord Melbourne is used elsewhere by Charles Colson (2001, May 3). In delineating the similarity for their audience the activists seek to win their claim that abortion, like slavery, is not a private issue. Current social piety disapproves of slavery and cannot accept Melbourne’s critique of Wilberforce’s aims. In identifying their own quest with the earlier one, the proponents of pro-life suggest that social standards can change again as they have changed in the past, that society can learn a new set of social pieties, a new sense of what is appropriate: evil can be exposed.

There are predictable arguments within the movement over how the war with evil is to be waged – by direct involvement in political action or by changing the hearts of society through evangelization. Both methods suit the context and challenge evil, but the nature of the warfare is necessarily different. Notably, Wilberforce used both methods and so can be applied in diverse ways. Salina Bible Church uses this as they attempt to resolve the dispute between Cal Thomas, who claims that “Christians have become over-involved” and have lost the power to witness for their faith by focusing on political issues, and James Dobson, who warns that Christians cannot neglect the political process if they are “to defend family and religious rights.”

Salina Bible contends that both men want the same thing, to confront the evil they perceive in society, but they are emphasizing different methods to reach their goal. That assessment seems an oversimplification of the differences, but their almost throw-away one line reference to Wilberforce as the English Christian legislator who “fought” slavery, helps them build their case. A pro-life Canadian MP who had avoided politics “believing that morality and politics are mutually exclusive,” (Kunz, 2000) would later claim Wilberforce as one of his models and a source of inspiration in the long pro-life struggle. The Wilberforce pattern of faith and action challenges those nervous about entering the muddy realm of politics. For some pro-life activists there are no questions about the appropriateness of direct Christian political action.

Randall Terry (1999), founder of the radical pro-life group – Operation Rescue,

not surprisingly decries the Cal Thomas perspective, calling Thomas's book "more dangerous than... child pornography... and certainly more deplorable (in content and aim) than some of the most villainous books of history." He rejects the book's call for pastoral political neutrality and its assertion that "the main purpose of government is to promote an ordered society." Challenging evil and reforming society may disrupt order, but for Terry the context requires the direct fight by the champions of right. Wilberforce showed the way, even though that way could be longer than anyone wished. Terry rebukes Thomas for his demands that the pro-life movement should have made significant strides already if it was going to succeed: "Can you imagine if Cal Thomas has been advising William Wilberforce? It took Wilberforce fifty years of parliamentary labor to finally make slavery illegal....He would have told Wilberforce to throw in the towel." The context of the war with evil calls forth champions to emulate Wilberforce and carry on the long fight.

## *2. Analogy and Argument Issues: Strategic Choices*

Ronald Nugent's discussion of the similar lack of human status argument provides a sharp contrast with the Lincoln letter discussed above. The imagery is just as vivid, but the language is more restrained, and the choice of analogic focus makes the criticism persuasive. He cites the case of the slave ship whose captain threw over a hundred slaves overboard. A suit brought against the ship's owners failed when the "Attorney general argued that it was 'a case of goods and chattels' and the Chief Justice stated that it was "exactly as if horses had been thrown overboard.'"

Nugent pairs this with a quotation from a book on Abortion law: "Medically and legally the embryo and the foetus are merely parts of the mother's body, and not yet human." The linkage is jarring, but the classifications seem more appropriate than the threats of civil war in the Lincoln letter. This is perspective by incongruity achieving its heuristic Burkean end.

Strategic choices in the use of the analogy also shape the way pro-life adherents address issues of action strategy. There is conflict within the pro-life movement over whether groups should advocate simply for a complete ban on abortion or they should support compromise legislation such as bills opposing partial birth abortions. Groups from both sides appeal to the Wilberforce analogy for support, Wilberforce's pattern of action and behavior is a type for the in group to emulate; Wilberforce is made the model for evangelical action and therefore his behavior



becomes a proof for them. In discussing “When compromising is not a compromise,” Scott Klusendorf carefully develops the Wilberforce analogy to show that an incremental approach to the abortion campaign is appropriate and practical rather than a moral compromise. He notes Wilberforce’s “first move was not to end slavery outright – a goal he simply could not achieve... – but to end state-sponsored slave trade in Great Britain. Like partial-birth legislation today, Wilberforce’s bill went down to defeat” repeatedly. The bill ending the trade finally passed in 1807 and a bill abolishing slavery came eighteen years later. Klusendorf sees this not as “compromise” but “good moral thinking.”

Matt Trehwella, writing for *Missionaries to the Preborn*, looks to Wilberforce to justify “a complete abolition strategy.” He contends that Wilberforce never advocated the half-measure strategy....He constantly had to combat his allies in the abolition movement who wanted gradual reforms. He said....to introduce half-measures against this ‘man-stealing,’ would lead the public to no longer view it as raw evil, but rather, just a bad thing which needed to be regulated.

Different sets of are used to justify different perspectives. The source of the analogy, Wilberforce’s abolition campaign, remains the same, but the content of the analogy shifts according to the needs and interest of the arguer.

Congressman Chris Smith (2000), needing to justify a politically and religiously sound approach to fighting abortion carefully sets Wilberforce up as part of “a vibrant, talented group of believers who fasted, prayed and worked in the cause.” His suffering for the cause is deftly stressed as we are told Wilberforce was “reviled....vilified... [and] twice physically assaulted.” Only then, with the credentials of the exemplar firmly in place, does Smith dare to apply the language of slow compromise to Wilberforce: “Incremental victory by incremental victory, in 1807 the slave trade was finally totally abolished. It had taken 20 long years to win this world-changing reform....Wilberforce then went after slavery itself.” Smith continues his argument by citing the “vitally important incremental victories” that pro-life activists have won. For Smith the Wilberforce analogy serves to legitimize his own course of action regarding abortion and to motivate the audience to maintain their efforts.

In an update on Colorado pro-life legislation, Carrie Gordon (1997, April) cites State Representative Barry Arrington’s use of the Wilberforce history of repeated efforts and legislative defeats as a source of consolation after Arrington’s bill criminalizing partial-birth abortions was defeated. Gordon reminds her readers

that Wilberforce suffered years of defeats, not just one, and then she shows how even that one defeat served a purpose: “the bill presents voters a rare opportunity to determine how all 65 members of the Colorado House feel about abortion.” The analogy implies incremental progress in the midst of defeat; the advocates are thus motivated to continue the struggle.

The clearest extended discussion of Wilberforce’s own use of the incremental approach is found in the conclusion of an analysis of The Canadian Pro-Life Movement in the 21st Century. Having stated “one does not have to sacrifice one’s morality to gain politically,” thus attacking the charges that politics and political compromise are necessarily immoral, the conclusion details Wilberforce’s incremental successes:

... Wilberforce urged his supporters not to attack the ownership of slaves directly, but to first fight against the trade in slaves. Moreover, even as he presented legislation to end the slave trade, he would often vote for and sometimes introduced bills that recognized slavery and slave owner’s rights. One law he supported... banned ship owners from throwing slaves overboard.... [T]he bill technically recognized the rights of slave owners to transport their property. Wilberforce...supported the law because he knew it would force society to recognize the personhood of slaves and so in the long run, help their cause. Though he never wavered from his commitment to end slavery, Wilberforce always fought for what was politically possible, knowing that it was often the only moral thing he could do at that time.... As William Hazlitt warned after Wilberforce’s death, “A man must make his choice not only between virtue and vice, but between different virtue.”

The precise detail in the use of the analogy undercuts hasty opposing argument efforts like Trewhella’s. Careful, strategic use of the analogy proves the case completely.

### *3. Analogy and Group Identity: Manipulating Pieties*

Discourse of any social movement may be directed to members of the group to reinforce their commitment to the goals of the group or to an audience outside the group in an effort to convert them to the group’s perspective or to draw them into the group. The manipulation of pieties, the reaffirming or reordering of one’s sense of what goes with what is a primary method for accomplishing these aims. References to Wilberforce serve both functions.

The Wilberforce analogy is used to build a sense of group identity, to establish for

each member of the pro-life group who they are as soldiers in the fight against evil. Such identification building sometimes comes in entertainment. John Eldredge's one-man show portraying William Wilberforce served as dinner entertainment at meetings of Oregon Right to Life (ORTL Conference Schedule) and Presbyterian s Pro-Life (Committee to review implementation). Wilberforce is clearly the group hero: his story has been identified as their story; his pieties are their pieties. For a pro-life audience to see an enactment of Wilberforce's trials and his ultimate success is to be affirmed in the piety of their own beliefs and actions, and reassured that the long struggle is also to be expected. Fitting within the piety structure of the analogy, the multiple failures, the societal rejection are all normal. The continuation of the analogy promises the pious member a hopeful resolution to the pro-life struggles. To demand immediate success, as Randall Terry accused Cal Thomas of doing in the example discussed above, would be impious. It would break the ordered structure of the analogy.

Addressing another pro-life audience, Congressman Chris Smith's (2000) use of the Wilberforce /slavery analogy begins with pieties common to people both in and out of the movement – the desire to be understood and respected, and a hatred of slavery: "We have much in common with those equally misunderstood and belittled members of the movement to abolish another grotesque human rights abuse – slavery."

The relatively unemotional, yet sympathetic linkage of the two causes through the identification of the treatment of the adherents and the root description of the causes could begin to pull in a larger audience, but as Smith develops his argument he is clearly focused on the committed pro-life supporters. He suggests Wilberforce 's example "can offer fresh inspiration, direction, and a much-needed historical perspective." This is to be a motivational speech appealing to the pieties and addressing the needs of a group that has faced many setbacks. He introduces Wilberforce as a politician who "underwent a 'great change' conversion... which revolutionized his priorities." Wilberforce is thus a "born again" politician apparently like the speaker. We are told Wilberforce anticipated "quick success" as Smith's "Sound familiar?" aside suggests some in the audience may have done, but Wilberforce is warned by John Wesley, "Unless god has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you?" As Wilberforce was warned and motivated by Wesley's analysis of the pious system, even so the contemporary pro-life supporter comes to understand quick success is not part of the way things are or

can piously be expected to be.

Charles Colson argues the moral issue at the heart of Wilberforce's fight against slavery and the current evangelical Christian objections to abortion is the same: "the sanctity and dignity of human life" (The Lieberman effect: Awakening the religious left?). The piety is basic to contemporary society, though the application of that piety to the abortion issue is contentious. Colson thus goes further in his efforts to motivate broader society. He adds Wesley and Shaftsbury's efforts for labor reform and modern Christians' objections to Communism. By linking the familiar, broader examples of the social piety - pro-labor/ anti Communism - with a less accepted example of piety, he seems to be seeking identification with a larger audience.

#### *4. Analogy and the Potential for Success: Motivating Continuance*

In presenting a "Biblical perspective on the abortion battle," George Robertson used Wilberforce's decades of effort to call his readers to be faithful in the struggle even in the face of constant failure: "[Wilberforce] heard the news on his deathbed that the slaves were emancipated. It is hard for a culture accustomed to instant everything to be persistent in even a good cause for a long period of time ... we may not ever see abortion reversed; but that does not mean our labor is in vain. Little victories will be won; lives will still be saved; and there is reward in just being "John Wesley's letter of encouragement to Wilberforce reminding him "not to be weary in well-doing" for God who had "guided" him from youth would "continue to strengthen him in this and all things." The Wilberforce analogy becomes an argument for endurance, a motivating appeal to a discouraged and conflicted group. Robertson notes that he is addressing the group after the "assassination by Paul Hill of the abortionist and his bodyguard." Robertson says the group has "lost our focus" and needs to be reminded of what we must really be about and how the victory will come." He affirms "that the battle, the weapons, and the strategy are primarily spiritual." Wilberforce is presented at the close of the text. Robertson's presentation of the story is terse, but the details are sufficient to make his point. If his audience was familiar with the details of the story, as they may well have been given the number of articles and books by and about Wilberforce which have appeared in Christian magazines and bookstores in recent years, then Robertson's anecdote would serve to evoke the full power of the Wilberforce analogy. Wilberforce was known not only for his persistence and his political strategies, but also for his deep faith and spiritual discipline.

Robertson does not make that point explicit, but it could easily have been evoked by what he did say for the more informed of his audience.

The Wilberforce example reinforces commitment in group members who are discouraged by their lack of immediate success. Graham Capill (2001) tells members of the Christian Heritage party of New Zealand to “Thank again of Wilberforce. Can you think of a greater example of patience and determination?” Capill quickly details the importance of slavery in the economy of 18th century Britain and the decades of struggle with repeated failures that Wilberforce went through in his effort to abolish slavery. He then makes the link clear and issues the motivating challenge: “We face a similar evil: abortion – the slaughter of the innocent. But do we have the determination to fight it year after year for 20 plus years? Does the Christian church have the fortitude to stand by politicians despite failure? In my experience it hasn’t! the church has swallowed the world’s emphasis on success and when something is not instantly successful, too often we conclude that God isn’t in it. If this is your approach, you will never influence the nation for righteousness.” If Wilberforce could fight for decades against a socially entrenched evil, then Capill suggests that surely the Christian activists of today can do no less. In a statement from the British Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, Wilberforce is included in the “cloud of witnesses” who watch current Christians battle, witnesses who “opposed with vigour the evils of their own day....even though their vision of final vindication was seen only dimly.” With these examples, the activists are told that their hope need not be “fixed ...on the successes of the pro-life movement to date” but on “the living God” (“The unborn child and obedience to God”).

Harder uses his review of Wilberforce’s long struggle against the odds as a threat to group membership: “Like Wilberforce, I may die, never seeing the realization of the wonderful dreams that God has put in my heart for the unborn. But nevertheless, dying content in the knowledge that Eugene Harder, to the day of his death, was the salt of the earth and the light of the world.... I have this burning conviction that if I am not light and salt, then [I] am not a disciple of Jesus the Light of the World [.]” (Harder, 1995). The argument of similarity of conditions, similarity of challenges, can be used to inspire action or to require action. The analogy proves a valuable tool for motivating pro-life adherents.

## *5. Conclusion*

The argument base provided by the Wilberforce vs. slavery analogy is potentially

stronger than the simple appeals to the American abolition movement made earlier and dissected by Celeste Condit. The same moral focus on the sanctity and dignity of human life prevails, but the extended timeline of Wilberforce's efforts, the careful emphasis on faith and activism which he exemplified, and the rich parallels in contemporary attitudes for the movements gives a richness to the possibilities of argument. Potential strategic uses of the analogy are enriched by the shift to Wilberforce. The context of war between good and evil was evident in the discourse critiqued by Condit. The shift toward the Wilberforce analogy and away from the American abolition movement, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, might initially seem to weaken that context of war, but it actually enhances the argument options. With Wilberforce, pro-life rhetors can avoid the issue of violent change and focus on the less bloody, but equally contested political struggle. Violent change violates the society sense of the pious; slow and steady reform, with time to shape the pieties of society incrementally along the way, arouses less animosity. The shift to Wilberforce would seem to enhance pro-life opportunities to sway a broader audience. The shift offers a further advantage in efforts to reach beyond the pro-life in group: the Wilberforce material is less familiar to the general audience. This gives the analogy the appeal of newness; arguments rooted in it have the potential to sound fresh. If carefully worded they can perhaps more easily avoid the heavy-handed emotional assumptions of some pro-life in group discourse.

The Wilberforce analogy comprises a significant argument base for pro-life advocates. It aids in breaking down the terministic screen posed by the loaded term, "abortion," and legitimizing movement aims through identification with shared pieties. Once identification is assumed, then the analogy suggests and justifies persuasive strategies to be employed. When the group is conflicted over appropriate methodology the analogy becomes a touchstone authority for what is or should be acceptable and expected.

Given the duration of the abortion controversy and the minimal successes garnered by the pro-life movement, the shift to the Wilberforce analogy serves a valuable motivational function by providing the audience with an example of a success whose struggle was equally contentious in his time, fraught with similar setbacks, and carried on for decades. The shift is the Wilberforce analogy is a recognition that the pro-life struggle will be a marathon rather than a sprint; the soldiers in the battle need to be prepared accordingly and they need suitable

heroes. Wilberforce meets the need admirably. He exemplifies persistent, faithful endurance. When the group is disheartened, the analogy provides a base for motivation; the challenges faced by Wilberforce and his cohort are easily seen as similar to those faced by pro-life forces; if Wilberforce could work with faith and determination for nearly fifty years, then it is easy for a leader to convince pro-life adherents that they should be willing to do the same: "Wilberforce succeeded because he and his allies committed their way to the Lord, fasted, prayed, worked diligently within the political process, and did good. We need do nothing more, but by no means, nothing less." (Smith, 2000)

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