

~Other Speakers G-L: Sermon Illustrations II:

BreakPoint Commentary - September 16, 1998 "I Was Wrong" Making the Pro-Life Case by Charles W. Colson "When pigs fly!" That's what people say when they hear a claim they believe to be utterly impossible. And it's what you might say if someone suggested to you that America's most committed secularist and abortion advocate were to admit he was wrong. But that's exactly what happened last week. On Labor Day weekend, the American Political Science Association (APSA) held its annual convention in Boston. During the panel discussions, political scientists debate important issues. One panel took up this question: Can we debate important moral issues when people proceed from deeply divergent starting points? Among the panelists were two scholars whose own worldviews could not be further apart: Stanley Fish of Duke University and Robert George of Princeton. Fish, whose liberal views have made him a hero in academic circles, is perhaps the best known proponent of deconstructionism in America, a philosophy that claims there are no such things as universal truths. By contrast, Robert George is a young, brilliant Princeton political philosopher whose classes are often over-subscribed because of his winsome ways. George is my good friend, and also a conservative Catholic Christian whose worldview is shaped, in his words, by "Scripture and sacred tradition." Prior to the convention, the panelists exchanged their papers. George's paper focused on Fish's liberal views on abortion. Fish has written that reason is useless in settling disputes especially controversial ones like abortion. Why? Because different viewpoints make it impossible to find common starting points for debate. There is no truth so all that's left, Fish says, are unarguable assumptions that can be neither proven nor disproven. For Fish, the abortion debate provided the perfect illustration. As he saw it, the claim that the fetus has a right to life is a purely religious assertion. So, if you're religious, you buy it. If you're not, you don't. George's answer was, in effect, "Not so fast!" You can defend the right to life without even mentioning religion. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that what's inside the pregnant womb is a distinct and unique person every bit as human as you or I. George made a brilliant case and then sent his paper to Fish in advance of the convention. During the panel discussion, attended by 200 people, Fish rose to respond to George by saying, amazingly "Professor George is right, and he is right to correct me." It was an astonishing admission, and the next sound in the room was that of 200 jaws hitting the floor at once. Fish not only repudiated his previous pro-choice position on abortion; he chastised abortion rights advocates for ignoring what science has to say about the fetus' humanity. This change of mind has repercussions far beyond ivory towers. It exposes the essential lie that the pro-choicer's advance: That is, that pro-lifers are trying to cram a particular sectarian view down everyone's throat. Not so, as Fish amazingly admitted. Well, pigs can't really fly -- but we Christians ought to be thrilled by this amazing turnaround. And we ought to be thrilled as well, that there are young and articulate Christian scholars invading the secular bastion. With men like Robby George in the fight, who says we can't win back the hearts and minds of even our secular critics.