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INTERNET GIANTS CENSOR NATIONAL ABORTION DEBATE

SYMPOSIUM: WHERE DO WE GO FROM *DOBBS*?

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THE INADVERTENT PRO-LIFE GENIUS OF GEORGE CARLIN

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. . . As I write, legislative battles over abortion once again travel to and from the Supreme Court, this time over the “safety” of the so-called abortion pill mifepristone. We continually report on fast-changing developments on our website (www.humanlifereview.com) where senior editor William Murchison recently viewed the latest controversy with dismay: “The politicization of the ‘choice’ issue means you strive to put into power those who promise to work for your cause. It’s warfare” And yet “Abortion as a moral issue,” he notes, “too infrequently comes into view in our time: which suggests, in place of *guerre à outrance*, as we’re accustomed to observing all around us, the need for meetings, frequent ones, of minds and hearts” (“Go to the Mattresses?” p. 78).

Meetings of minds and hearts instead of war—yes!—this is our mission. George McKenna’s essay “Getting There” and the symposium that follows (“Where Do We Go from *Dobbs*?” p. 21) are a shining example: a meeting of the great minds of several of the Human Life Foundation’s Great Defenders of Life! We are thrilled that Professor McKenna will be joining them as our honoree at our gala in October, along with Thomas Brejcha, founder and chief counsel of the Thomas More Society—the organization responsible for defending the legal and civil rights of scores of pro-life and religious leaders (see p. 75 for more information).

Persevering after *Dobbs* means being open to new partnerships, says Thomas Clark in our lead essay (“The Myth of *Dobbs* Losing the Midterms”). “Imagine an election,” he writes, “where, with all due thanks for the past alliances that brought about the needed demise of *Roe*, new alliances are struck up by pro-life forces. . . . drawn by a shared respect for the needs of the vulnerable, including, most immediately, the needs of women in difficult pregnancies. Credible proposals to support women in crisis pregnancies and to hold fathers accountable must also be a part of this political program.”

Well, how about starting with the pro-life movement itself? In “A Joint Statement” (Appendix B), Jonathan Van Marsen, Eric Scheidler, Charles Camosy, and Josh Braham announce: “We are pro-life conservatives, moderates, and liberals united in our conviction that every human life has value—including the lives of both the unborn child and that child’s mother. We believe that our society should prioritize the needs of both, and that ultimately this can only be achieved by significant changes in public policy.” Read what they propose (p. 91) and perhaps you will want your name among the many who have signed their statement.

Our thanks go to *National Review* and *First Things* for permission to reprint Michael J. New’s encouraging report “New Data Show a Large Decline in Abortions Post-*Dobbs*” and John Murdock’s sorrowful “Sing Your Abortion” (Appendices C & D.) Finally, we reprint “We Shall Not Weary, We Shall Not Rest,” the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus’s immortal speech to the 2008 National Right to Life Convention (Appendix A). His words give us renewed purpose: “We contend, and we contend relentlessly, for the dignity of the human person, of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God.”

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INTRODUCTION

Where to begin? Since the *Dobbs* decision last June, abortion has dominated the news and even made a brief return to the Supreme Court. As I write, the justices have just issued an order overturning lower-court restrictions on the abortion drug mifepristone. While this case is largely procedural—Do the plaintiffs have standing? Do statute of limitation laws apply?—eventually other cases, ones posing constitutional questions—Does the word “person” in the 14th Amendment include unborn children? Does the U.S. Constitution supersede state constitutions?—could make their way to the Court. But for now, the action is in the states, and the question on many minds is: Are pro-life defeats in elections since *Dobbs* evidence of a mounting backlash?

Not really, argues Thomas Clark in “The Myth of *Dobbs* Losing the Midterms,” our lead article. “What was most clearly shown,” he writes, “was that what abortion restrictions (or any political cause) cannot easily withstand is exposure to \$5 billion in unanswered media attacks.” That’s right. *Five billion*. “It is estimated,” he goes on, “that Republicans and Democrats spent about \$10 billion in political advertising in the midterm elections, more than in the 2020 election.” And while “Democrats went all in on abortion, spending by some estimates *twenty times more* than they spent on abortion in 2020,” Republicans chose “in effect to concede the field and focus on other issues” (e.g., inflation, crime, and immigration). True to form, abortion advocates flooded the airwaves with factually deceptive and emotionally charged messages, giving voters the impression that jail was just around the corner for anyone seeking to access or perform *any* abortion, even one to save the life of the mother.

In “Internet Giants Censor National Abortion Debate,” Julia Duin relates how “starting in June 2022, pro-abortion groups doubled down on pressuring social platforms to de-list crisis pregnancy centers or CPCs (clinics that provide sonograms, pregnancy testing, and other services but not abortions) on the grounds that they were deceptive”—deceptive because *they don’t advertise that they don’t do abortions*. Like her eye-opening report in our Winter issue covering record physical attacks on pregnancy centers, this is an eye-opening report on “another battle—an invisible one—on social media.” Left-wing groups are disrupting pregnancy center operations by generating thousands of “negative reviews, spammed online appointments, and false online reviews.” Social media accounts of pro-life activists have been suppressed on popular platforms like TikTok, and pro-life organizations “banned from running ads” there. “Heartbeat International,” Duin continues, “a worldwide network of 3,000 crisis pregnancy centers, says Google has refused to allow it to advertise a technique known as abortion pill reversal,” which doctors who pioneered it claim “works two out of three times” to save a pregnancy after a woman has taken mifepristone. (Recently, Colorado went so far as to *ban* abortion reversal, though a federal judge has temporarily halted enforcement of the law.)

As state abortion legislation (pro and con) proliferates, state-supreme-court elections, as we recently saw in Wisconsin, where the winning far-left candidate waged an extremist abortion campaign, are taking on unforeseen significance. Does the pro-life movement need new strategies and tactics now that abortion is in the hands of state politicians, state courts, and state media outlets? Yes, says George McKenna in “Getting There,” a keenly insightful essay that inspired the symposium following it, in which several Human Life Foundation Great Defenders of Life respond to McKenna’s call for abortion rights supporters to be “publicly confronted and refuted just as Southern racists were sixty years ago.”

But, McKenna asks, “Where is *our* civil rights movement?” We need, he says, “a central command structure . . . a core of leaders to rethink our whole public face to see what works best in this new state-by-state environment.” We also “need to campaign for and put into office like-minded men and women who speak the same kind of vernacular English that ordinary Americans speak, language that will motivate and inspire voters.” Most importantly, McKenna argues that *all* proliferators need to get behind a prudential approach to ending abortion, one modeled on Lincoln’s approach to ending slavery. While he acknowledges “there is a logical case for shouting ‘No!’ to any proposed compromise on the life issue,” the “political fact is that we don’t have the votes to prevail—at least not now—in most of our state legislatures.”

The respondents to McKenna don’t disappoint: Edward Mechmann and Clarke Forsythe provide useful historical perspective on the wisdom of McKenna’s prudential approach. Ronald Reagan, notes Carl Anderson, also sought “incremental ways to advance pro-life policies.” From Gerard Bradley and William Murchison just saying No! to “a central command structure” to Helen Alvaré urging Americans to “soul-search their responsibility for children *beginning when they make them*” to Wesley Smith telling the pro-life movement “to change its (largely but not totally false) popular reputation as angry” to Marvin Olasky advising the movement to “do whatever it takes to get around the big media blackouts”—“Where Do We Go from *Dobbs*?” features wise and indispensable counsel from seasoned leaders, including David Quinn, who relates why Irish proliferators “took great heart” from the *Dobbs* decision.

Drew Letendre’s focus on language in our next article, “No Laughing Matter: The Inadvertent Pro-Life Genius of George Carlin,” dovetails nicely with McKenna’s call for using “vernacular English” in abortion debates. “In an iconic ‘set’ from his late career,” Letendre writes, the comedian “dissected a line of increasingly opaque euphemisms that were used to inure the American public, over a sixty-year period, to the awful reality of a combat-related nervous disorder originally termed ‘shellshock.’” After taking the reader through a “master class in semantic deconstruction,” in which Carlin “traces . . . the gradual fogging of a concept from its original sharp coinage in World War I to its anodyne reformulation and gassy deflation by the time of Vietnam” (i.e., from “shellshock” to “battle fatigue” to “operational exhaustion” to “post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD”), Letendre proceeds to subject the latest euphemism for abortion—“women’s reproductive healthcare”—to the same scrutiny. “No doubt Carlin would be grieved to see the tools of his comic genius

appropriated,” says Letendre. But you won’t be.

Even after multiple readings, I am agog over Ellen Wilson Fielding’s “Peddling the Pro-life Cause in the Post-Christian Age,” which in its own way wrestles with the question “Where Do We Go from *Dobbs*?” It is an extraordinary essay, at once easy to praise and hard to describe. But here is a taste of Fielding’s remarkable ability to elucidate the “deeply dysfunctional society” she sees most of us not only tolerating but sustaining: “Overall, in times such as ours, if a typical young woman detached from traditional religious dogma can accept that men really turn into women and women into men if they think that’s who they are, then such a woman can also consider an unborn baby sentient, conscious, and valuable if the mother wants it, and ‘a blob of tissue’ if she doesn’t.” Later in the essay, Fielding confides that “Pessimists like me often cultivate odd pockets of hopefulness.” Suffice it to say that the “pocket” she visits here has much soul-stirring content.

* * * * *

Stella Morabito’s new book *The Weaponization of Loneliness* is “a must read,” writes Jason Morgan in Booknotes, a “Gramscian argument that it is the culture that has turned against human society.” He combines this with a review of Mattias Desmet’s *The Psychology of Totalitarianism*, which he predicts “will be a classic of the covid era, perhaps akin to the work of Hannah Arendt.” And John Grondelski concludes about *The Story of Abortion in America: A Street-Level History, 1652-2022* by Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas: “Prolifers, who are fond of quoting Santayana on the dangers of not knowing history, would be wise to seek out this book.” (Congratulations to Stella, a longtime *Review* contributor and dear friend of its founding editors, and to Mr. Olasky, our 2021 Great Defender of Life.) As always, we include notable work from our online contributors in From the Website, and end with a selection of Appendices, recent commentaries from other sources we think important to share. Appendix A, however, is an evergreen as it were, a famous speech—Robert George called it “the greatest pro-life speech ever given”—by the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. “We have been at this a long time,” he told a gathering of pro-life leaders in 2008, “and we are just getting started.” I daresay he would say the same thing to us today.

ANNE CONLON
EDITOR

MEA CULPA: Raymond Adamek corrected an error in “Destined to Be Overturned” (Winter 23) before publication—unfortunately, we did not. The first sentence in the penultimate paragraph on page 52 should have read “Finally, the U.S. government reported that the number of maternal deaths *from all causes of abortion* at the end of 1973 was 25, having decreased from 197 in 1965.” A corrected text is available at our website (<https://humanlifereview.com/destined-to-be-overturned/>).

The Myth of *Dobbs* Losing the Midterms (Part I)

Thomas Clark

Political commentary on the 2022 midterm elections in much of the establishment media has coalesced into a mantra that support for abortion rights was a big winner for Democrats, even the main cause of the anticipated “red wave” not materializing. Correlatively, this commentary sees the Supreme Court’s decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* as a big loser for Republicans and their pro-life supporters. This commentary misreads both the root causes of the apparent victories for abortion rights and the meaning of *Dobbs* itself.

While a relative uptick in pro-abortion voter engagement could be expected in reaction to *Dobbs*, the dominant narrative errs in seeing this as evidence of a permanent majority for unrestricted abortion access. A more plausible, and more direct, driver of the admittedly good election cycle for abortion rights can be found in the fact that the Democratic Party and their pro-abortion allies unleashed an unprecedented political and marketing offensive ahead of the midterms to drive opinion, one that was unmatched by any even remotely comparable effort on the Republican side in favor of life. Moreover, the Republican “pro-life” position had become in many cases reduced to little more than an attack on *Roe v. Wade* as bad constitutional law, illegitimately taking the issue of abortion out of the democratic process. While this was undoubtedly a valid attack, excessive reliance on this argument, and reticence or inability to talk effectively about the moral evil of abortion, left many political campaigns ill-prepared for the victory represented by the overruling of *Roe*.

The good news for the pro-life community is that these elections do not have to portend the future that the commentariat would suggest. They rather show that Democrats were very effective at doing two things in the July through November time frame: (1) quickly mobilizing a powerful public relations blitz on abortion, far outspending and out-strategizing Republicans on the issue, and (2) miscasting *Dobbs* as dangerous judicial activism (rather than the correction of dangerous judicial activism that it was). There is nothing permanent or persuasive about these victories. They do, however, offer a couple of very important lessons for the pro-life side that should be internalized and acted on for the struggle ahead.

Thomas Clark is a lawyer and contributor to the *Human Life Review*, with over 30 years’ experience in public policy and legal affairs.

I: The Pro-Life Community Must Focus Its Alliances on Politicians Willing and Able to Articulate the Moral Evil of Abortion (Not Just the Judicial Usurpation of *Roe*)

For fifty years there has been a wonderful marriage of convenience between the pro-life movement and jurisprudential conservatives. When a huge constitutional monstrosity like *Roe* both usurps the democratic legislative process and produces the substantive result of unrestricted abortion access, it is natural and fitting that pro-life advocates and jurisprudential conservatives would unite against a common enemy. Anyone who sees abortion as the taking of innocent human life, yet is prevented from achieving any true measure of legislative protection for this life because of *Roe*'s judicial usurpation, will understandably sign on to the judicial conservative's project, grounded in originalism, of restoring the proper judicial deference to the legislative sphere by repudiating *Roe*. Without achieving *Roe*'s demise, after all, any political advocacy on behalf of the unborn would be in vain. There are, to be sure, many simultaneous adherents of *both* camps. However, it must be understood that *Roe* can be opposed because it is bad constitutional law, and it can be opposed because it leads to an evil result, and these are two different bases. Many may have opposed *Roe* on both bases, but many may have opposed *Roe* more, maybe much more, on one rather than the other.

This is where one lesson of the 2022 midterm elections becomes apparent. One side of the marriage of convenience opposed *Roe* primarily as the bad constitutional law it was. In this view, *Roe*, like other judicial decisions departing from originalism in areas such as recognizing a vast federal administrative state, failing to police any federalism limits to Congressional intrusions on state authority, and creating other speculative constitutional rights under the concept of "substantive due process," is wrong *jurisprudentially*. The solution to that problem, in the case of *Roe*, is simply to return the decision on abortion to the place where it belongs in our constitutional democracy: the people through their elected representatives. Indeed *Dobbs*, as we shall see below, makes this case eloquently. Once that is done, the goal of those motivated mainly by jurisprudential correctness, viz. originalism, is achieved.

For the pro-life side of the marriage, however, returning the abortion question to the people is only the first step in achieving the solution to the most fundamental problem of *Roe*, which is not one of jurisprudential propriety, but one of facilitating a *substantively* grave moral evil. Here, though, their erstwhile marriage partner was not found to be investing in the relationship. With the noble exceptions of some Republican governors who strongly defended pro-life legislation they had passed, the party strategists decided that the winning issues worthy of big media expenditures in this past election

did not include defending the cause of life, but rather emphasized inflation (above all), crime, and immigration. Meanwhile, Democratic strategists, recognizing the opportunity presented by *Dobbs* to mobilize their base so soon before the election, deemed it worth spending a huge percentage of their media budgets on attacking *Dobbs* and supporting pro-abortion candidates and referenda.

What transpired was the most unlevel playing field imaginable for the pro-life position in the elections. It is estimated that Republicans and Democrats spent about \$10 billion in political advertising in the midterm elections, more than in the 2020 presidential election, and triple the spending in the last midterms in 2018. Yet within these overall figures is a key story: Democrats went all in on abortion, spending by some estimates *twenty times* more on abortion advertising than they spent on abortion in the 2018 midterms.* By contrast, Republicans focused their advertising spending overwhelmingly on inflation, with a secondary but strong focus on taxes, crime, and immigration—but almost nothing on abortion. Now, it turns out that \$10 billion buys some slick and effective persuasion. And would you believe it: According to exit polls, the two issues that were most salient in voters' decisions were inflation and abortion. Given these immense but very differently focused campaigns, moreover, it should be shocking to almost no one that those who were most concerned about inflation tended to favor the Republican side, whereas those who were most concerned about abortion tended to favor the Democratic side, in both cases by about 2-to-1.

There was much triumphalist crowing from the pro-abortion commentariat that abortion restrictions could not withstand exposure to democracy. That triumphalism will prove premature if the right lessons are learned from the election. First, what was most clearly shown was that what abortion restrictions (or any political cause) cannot easily withstand is exposure to \$5 billion in unanswered media attacks. Second, courageous political leaders—think Governors Abbot of Texas, DeSantis of Florida, DeWine of Ohio, Kemp of Georgia—could sign and strongly defend pro-life legislation and still win with comfortable margins. Third, many Republicans allowed pro-life positions to be inaccurately tarred as extremist, as defending imaginary abortion bans with no exception for life of the mother. At the same time, more keen to change the subject to inflation, crime, immigration, or almost anything else, these Republicans (again, with noble exceptions, like Senator Rubio of Florida) gave a free pass to the more *truly extreme* position of pro-abortion

* See, "Republicans and Democrats are spending billions on ads—with very different messages," the *Guardian*, Nov. 3, 2022, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/03/republicans-democrats-political-ads-us-midterms>

Democrats. These latter seem unwilling to defend *any* restriction on any kind of abortion at any stage, as they gather around the banner of “*Abortion: On Demand, Without Apology*,” a position that all credible polling suggests is held by a minority of voters. Lesson number one of this election is that Democratic success on abortion was made possible in large part by Republican decisions in effect to concede the field and focus on other issues.

Internalizing this lesson, what might pro-life strategists pursue as next steps? First, a healthy dose of realism is required with respect to the marriage of convenience that has prevailed for the last 50 years. Some, hopefully most, of those committed to the righting of the wrong of *Roe* base their position, at least in part, on the need to avoid the evil result of unrestricted abortion. But there will be some anti-*Roe* partisans, viewing *Roe* primarily or even solely as a jurisprudential offense, who will likely choose this moment to part ways. It is not irrational, or even necessarily in bad faith, for them to do so. As I will discuss in more depth below, even Justice Alito’s opinion in *Dobbs* notes that many scholars who criticized *Roe* as bad constitutional law did so while supporting abortion as a matter of policy. People sharing that view can be expected, once *Roe* has been overruled, to deem the offense “resolved” and to be agnostic about, or even supportive of, abortion rights, so long as they are grounded in legislation adopted through the democratic process rather than by federal judicial fiat.

Second, this realism points to the need for redoubling of the long, valiant, and to a great degree successful and promising effort to educate society, particularly the young, about the moral evil of abortion. But that realism also requires a recognition that the struggle to come will be even more challenging than what we have undergone thus far. This is because the pro-abortion side, for these last five decades, has been fighting in a sense with less sense of urgency, knowing that the federal judiciary had their finger on the scales. Convincing the legislators, and ultimately the public, was less existential an exercise for those supporting the free abortion license when there was little constitutional scope for legislative action. Now, the very success of the pro-life movement in the first phase of its struggle, discarding *Roe*, has set up a battle for the ultimate goal that will drive the pro-abortion forces to unleash all the tools and financial resources at their disposal. This is exactly the dynamic of which the 2022 midterms have given us a foretaste.

Yet, third, this new struggle is hardly one that the pro-life side sets out on unprepared or ill-equipped. The strong witness for life, the marches, the arguments, the engagement with students, the very youth of the pro-life movement are all assets. Elections, though, will remain important tests. Winning elections will be important not only to maintain credibility and impact on

the public debate, but also to parry the likely legislative assaults, such as attempts to “codify *Roe*” and to move proactively to protect unborn life in the many states where whatever protections exist are in the process of being ripped down. One need only look at California, Vermont, and, more disappointingly, Michigan, to see the political enormity of the task ahead.

In this past election, we saw a one-sided lavishly funded propaganda blitz in favor of abortion, focusing disingenuously on the most difficult and rare pregnancies and most tragic situations of rape and child abuse, as if to obfuscate what the candidates this propaganda supports will actually do: vote for laws recognizing virtually *no limits* to any kind of abortion, fail to protect even babies born alive, moving the United States, in other words, to an extreme pro-abortion position well beyond what prevails in most comparable democracies. Now imagine a future election where, instead of trying to change the subject, we see political parties that care about life putting significant resources into advertising and education efforts that detail the real extremism of most Democratic politicians by explaining which abortions they would allow: late-term abortions, sex-selective abortions, abortions for any reason or none. As importantly, imagine an election where, with all due thanks for the past alliances that brought about the needed demise of *Roe*, new alliances are struck up by pro-life forces. These new alliances could include many with progressive groups who may be brought to recognize the strong alignment of the pro-life position with those defending the rights of the disabled, of immigrants, and of workers and opposing the excesses of materialist consumerism. Even the loss of some of our originalist conservative allies could be made up by new allies drawn by a shared respect for the needs of the vulnerable, including, most immediately, the needs of women in difficult pregnancies. Credible proposals to support women in crisis pregnancies and to hold fathers accountable must also be a part of this political program.

Seeing and acting on the full spectrum of moral evils posed by abortion and the culture that supports it, and articulating with conviction a multifaceted, moral political response to these evils, is the first way to learn the lessons of 2022 and make the pro-life position a winner.

II: *Dobbs* Was Rightly Decided; Defend It and Leverage It

All that has been said so far on the precedence of the moral over the jurisprudential harms of the abortion regime by no means undercuts the significant victory *Dobbs* represents. Moreover, while *Dobbs* goes more to constitutional process than to moral substance, there are important aspects of it that must be defended and more broadly understood to make the political struggle for unborn life more winnable. Put negatively, while achieving the

outcome in *Dobbs* does not ensure victory for life, losing *Dobbs* would make the victory almost impossible, for *two* distinct reasons. First, as the last 50 years have shown, the legal effect of *Roe* was to enjoin any legislative protection of life as a practical matter. Second, more subtly but as crucially, *Roe* also represented a symbolically powerful if deeply flawed talisman—that abortion is a constitutional right, and indeed one critical to women’s equality.

In our constitutional democracy, the enshrinement of any policy as a constitutional right is a potent support—legally, but also *socially and culturally*. The First Amendment has rightly protected unpopular speech and unpopular religions, not only legally but socially, making people more willing to tolerate opposing and diverse views. On balance, these constitutional values of our society, beyond the purely legal mandates they reflect, are good things. Of course, some constitutional values are of more debatable merit. Whether the nation should have the degree of laxity in its regulation of firearms that currently obtains is heavily contested. What seems uncontested, however, is that the pro-gun position would have considerably less strength, not only legally, but in terms of social acceptability, if its adherents could not point to the Second Amendment as an enshrinement of gun ownership rights. One can debate the objective moral strength of various claims of right embedded in different provisions of our Constitution; the simple contention here is that for the last fifty years, the ability of pro-abortion partisans to point to *Roe*, and claim that abortion is a constitutional right, has immensely aided and abetted their political and cultural messaging. *Roe* and its proponents in effect adopt the view, a view that would be risible were it not so destructive, that fundamental due process rights, the equal position of women in society, and other unenumerated rights somehow combine to *require* the state to permit unborn human life to be killed with impunity. This view holds that the due process enshrined in the Fourteenth Amendment, passed to combat the evils of racist and lawless oppression after the Civil War, prevents American democracy from protecting unborn human life to the degree done in numerous other constitutional democracies. The thorough repudiation of this errant view of *Roe* is a necessity culturally as well as politically for the attainment of a truly pro-life society. That is what *Dobbs* accomplished, and that is why *Dobbs* must be defended, explained, and leveraged. In what follows I lay out the main lines of criticism of *Dobbs*.

Dobb’s opponents can generally be categorized into two groups: the hyperbolic but expected attacks from the pro-abortion political and media commentariat, and the more nuanced yet still hard-hitting critiques of legal scholars.

The first group can be dispatched without wasting much time. *Dobbs* was met quickly with expected denunciations from Democrats in Congress and

the White House, and perhaps a little less expectedly from leaders of some other democracies. The spectacle of President Macron of France tweeting his “solidarity with the women whose liberties are being undermined by the Supreme Court of the United States” was noteworthy mostly for his ignoring the fact that France has stricter limits on abortion (at 14 weeks) than the Mississippi law upheld in *Dobbs*. Numerous politicians, foreign and domestic, railed against the Court “banning” abortion, while of course it did no such thing. The decision by Justice Alito was equated with fascism, absolutism, fundamentalism, and worst of all, *judicial activism*, all bold claims (to say the least) about a decision that properly restored to the People a difficult decision about which the Constitution says nothing.

One critique advanced by (among others) Linda Greenhouse, a long-time Supreme Court commentator who should have known better, even charged *Dobbs* with being a *theologically* grounded decision, ostensibly just because the majority opined that the question of what is human life, and the state interest at issue in protecting human life, is intrinsically more important than interests in related areas like contraception and same-sex marriage. But of course the government gives unique importance to human life, and what may or may not harm or destroy it, all the time. Acknowledging that whether abortion is or isn’t taking a human life is a supremely important question and no more “theological” than myriad other examples where government acts to treat even remote chances of taking human life as outweighing other interests. And the fact that destroying a fetus is at least potentially destroying a human life, in a way that most (but not all) contraception or allowing same-sex marriage is not, is a biological and scientific as much as a theological conclusion, unless Greenhouse wants to argue that a fetus is a polyp or a tree. Moreover, while *legislative* actions to adopt one theory of human life may or may not be partly “theologically” based (and when they are, that is fine, as moral considerations, even ones theologically based, may motivate a legislator to vote for welfare, for or against the death penalty, for civil rights law, etc.), it is entirely a matter of originalist jurisprudence, and not of religious doctrine, *for the Court* to say that in our constitutional system, it is the job of the representative branches to decide those important questions. Perhaps the final irony of this bizarre view worth mentioning is that it was Justice Blackmun, in *Roe* itself, who said that whether a fetus is a human being is a supremely important question, because if in fact a fetus is a human being, then abortion would not only be constitutionally proscribable, but would be constitutionally prohibited! (On this, more below.) Alas, Justice Blackmun went on to say that Texas could not ban abortion by adopting “one theory of human life,” before blithely going on to adopt a contrary theory himself in

order to constitutionally enshrine abortion. Justice Alito's main sin according to Greenhouse and others, it seems, is that he had more epistemological humility than Justice Blackmun. Irony indeed.

The second, and by far more serious group of critics of *Dobbs*, are those legal scholars who, even if admitting the weaknesses of *Roe*'s ersatz approach, unmoored in the text or actual history of the Constitution, nonetheless find the complete rejection of any right to abortion in the Constitution as too radical a break with the nearly 60-year substantive due process line of cases from *Griswold v. Connecticut*. While not necessarily embracing all parts of *Roe*, or even its successor *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, which slightly limited *Roe* in adopting the slightly more deferential but still ersatz "undue burden" standard, these critics view the complete jettisoning of *Roe* by Justice Alito's opinion as inconsistent with rights to personal autonomy, and particularly with the role of women in modern society. These critics implicitly read the holding of *Roe* more through the Equal Protection prism that Justice Ginsburg, among others, thought would have been a more solid basis for the right to abortion than the Due Process basis.

While several such critiques have been written since *Dobbs* was issued, the best lines of argument are included in, and we shall focus on, the dissent in *Dobbs* itself. The dissent of Justices Breyer, Sotomayor, and Kagan in *Dobbs* must be credited as a valiant effort. Faced with the impossibility of defending *Roe* on its own terms, it focuses its considerable rhetorical power on attacking what it urges are the flawed bases for the majority's takedown of *Roe*: a cramped reading of constitutional liberty interests that hews obsessively to what was thought of abortion in 1868, or 1791, or even earlier; a callous rejection that there is "anything of constitutional significance attached to a woman's control of her own body and path of life"; and, lest anyone think it can't get much worse, a cavalier departure from *stare decisis* that leaves other cherished rights, undergirding or flowing from *Roe*, now vulnerable to evisceration. Close reflection shows, however, that the dissent's compelling rhetorical flourishes on these points mask a failure to engage with the majority's accurate dissection of *Roe*'s own fatal flaws.

Part II of this article will appear in the Summer 2023 issue.

Internet Giants Censor National Abortion Debate

Julia Duin

In a year of very visible attacks on churches, medical offices, crisis pregnancy centers, and even homes of Republican politicians over abortion, there's been another battle—an invisible one—on social media.

Major platforms were already banning pro-life organizations (or at least their ads) and individuals before the U.S. Supreme Court decided last year to dismantle *Roe v. Wade*. Starting in June 2022, pro-abortion groups doubled down on pressuring social platforms to de-list crisis pregnancy centers or CPCs (clinics that provide sonograms, pregnancy testing, and other services but not abortions) on the grounds that they were deceptive.

“The GOP are insisting that the fake clinics operate as they are,” said Callum Hood, the research director for the Center for Countering Digital Hate. “We’re not asking for them to be removed; we just want to see them labeled correctly [as] to whether or not they handle abortion. It is not about censorship, it’s about more transparency.”

Another tactic was to just squelch the debate. Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life, was speaking at the University of Texas campus in San Antonio about a year ago when a red-haired student in a short midriff-baring white shirt and brown athletic pants confronted her. The student said her name was Darby, and she was holding a poster.

“So, my poster reads,” the student said, “‘Life begins when you understand living women matter more than potential babies.’”

The last half of that sentence ended with a baleful stare at Hawkins, who was standing behind a podium sporting a grey sign with white letters: “The Future is Anti-Abortion.” Cheers erupted from other students sitting nearby.

“What is it?” Hawkins asked, referring to the poster.

“What do you mean?” asked the student.

“If it’s a ‘potential baby,’ what is inside of a woman?”

“It’s a fetus,” Darby responded.

“Is it living?” Hawkins wanted to know.

“No!” yelled several students.

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“How can it grow if it’s not living?” Hawkins persisted.

“Actually, that is like saying if an acorn is a tree,” Darby replied.

“When does the fetus become living?”

“Um, that’s actually a good question.” As several people tried to shout her down, Hawkins pressed the young woman on the matter.

Two days after the three-minute, thirty-two-second exchange hit TikTok,¹ the platform banned both the exchange and Students for Life itself.² It took Students for Life two weeks to get back on the platform, although it normally only takes a few hours to have one’s account restored, according to Students for Life spokeswoman Caroline Wharton.

“They never gave us an explanation,” she wrote in an email. “By the time we got back onto TikTok, dozens of other accounts had gone viral for reposting our clip. We unfortunately got none of the traction or credit because TikTok had our account removed during the time that video was circulating.”

Students for Life reports that they have had other videos banned by TikTok and Instagram. Occasionally, if SFL protests, the videos are reinstated. Other times, not. The abortion battle in social media has attracted less attention than other aspects of the fight, but here are some of the highlights:

- Live Action, an anti-abortion group that specializes in outreach to young people, saw the account of its founder, Catholic activist Lila Rose, banned from TikTok, and Live Action itself was banned from running ads. The media platform told Rose that her organization was guilty of “partisan political motives,” Live Action recounted in a press release,³ while at the same time TikTok allows Planned Parenthood to advertise. TikTok did not respond to my request for comment.
- During May and June of 2022, abortion rights groups dominated ad buys on Facebook and Instagram, according to Axios.⁴ Advertising has been critical for both pro- and anti-abortion forces, with both sides seeking to shore up support, influence state legislatures to pass restrictive—or unrestrictive—laws on abortion access, and raise money for their cause. What Axios didn’t mention was whether anti-abortion groups may have wanted to advertise as well, but were blocked from doing so.
- Gen-Z for Change, formerly known as TikTokforBiden, is a group that prides itself on spamming and trolling pro-life groups. Among their claims: “Flooded and took down a Texas anti-abortion tip line with over 30K fake submissions.” Care Net, a CPC network with 1,200 affiliates, was especially hard hit, with a tsunami of fake negative reviews, spammed online appointments, and false online reviews. It got so bad that Google and Yelp disabled the reviews on CPC sites. Gen-Z for

Change has been lauded for their efforts, and in March 2022, members of the group were among the 30 TikTok stars briefed by the White House on the war in Ukraine. Prolifers aren't their only targets; the group sent 140,000 false job applications to Starbucks locations⁵ after the famed coffee company tried to hire non-unionized staff. The following month, it used the same tactic (40,000 false job applications) against three Kroger grocery stores that were also hiring during a strike.⁶

- The day after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, Facebook labeled “Jane’s Revenge,” an anonymous militant group that has claimed responsibility for vandalizing and firebombing CPCs across the country, as a terrorist organization. Abortion rights activists chafed at the label,⁷ saying the designation made any posts about Jane’s Revenge subject to censorship and threatened freedom of expression.
- Heartbeat International, a worldwide network of 3,000 crisis pregnancy centers, says Google has refused to allow it to advertise a technique known as abortion pill reversal, claiming that the organization’s ad contained “harmful health claims.” In abortion pill reversal, a woman who has begun the first phase of a chemical abortion—a dosage of the drug mifepristone—reverses the procedure by taking doses of progesterone. Several Catholic doctors who have pioneered this method⁸ say it works two out of three times. (The remaining one-third of those attempting it miscarry.) Despite a protest letter initiated by GOP senators Steve Daines and Josh Hawley and signed by 12 members of Congress that accused Google of suppressing information that might save an unborn child, the tech giant has not relented. TikTok will also not allow ads for the procedure, on the grounds that they “don’t comply with our advertising policies,” Heartbeat was told. Neither will Snapchat, claiming they violate community standards.

A second front in the social media war pitted opposing parties in Congress in a shouting match of conflicting press releases. Democratic politicians led by Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.) and Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.) began pressuring Google to fine-tune its search results for abortion clinics so that women wouldn’t end up at a CPC. In a June 17 press release, the lawmakers claimed that 37 percent of all Google Map results for an abortion clinic in states with “trigger laws” to end abortion access turned up a CPC instead.⁹ Moreover, 11 percent of Google search results for “abortion clinic near me” and “abortion pill” in states most in danger of abortion being banned were for CPCs, and 28 percent of Google ads displayed at the top of search results were for clinics that had no intention of providing abortions.

Apparently too many women using search engines were ending up at CPCs that looked and sounded like abortion clinics.

Those results came from a 10-page June 9 report from the Center for Countering Digital Hate. That organization has also tackled ads for abortion services. In September, it published research concluding that Google was not doing enough to label which businesses were abortion clinics and which were CPCs.

In an interview, Hood (the research director at the Center for Countering Digital Hate) said that people searching for abortion key words such as “Carafem” or “Plan C” or “Planned Parenthood” have ended up viewing ads for CPCs. Hood said that Google promised in 2019 to make sure advertisers provided accurate abortion information. “Before someone can advertise on this highly sensitive topic, Google said it would certify whether or not they offer abortion,” he stated. “In September, we discovered they were not enforcing their 2019 policy to label all ads as to whether or not the advertiser provides abortion. This is not a massive ask—it’s basic health care and safety of people seeking abortions.”

And the controversy over Google Maps continues. A month after the Democrats’ press release, Republican attorneys general from 17 states also wrote Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet and its subsidiary Google, calling the Democrats’ threat a “gallingly un-American political pressure.”

“If you fail to resist this political pressure, we will act swiftly to protect American consumers from this dangerous axis of corporate and government power,” they wrote.

Whatever Google did, it wasn’t enough, according to a Bloomberg report released in January that maintained that one-quarter of all searches on Google Maps for “abortion clinic” still led to a CPC. Google did not respond to a request for comment.

However, some Google searches for CPCs draw unwanted attention the CPCs would prefer to do without. After a CPC in Madison, Wisconsin, was vandalized and set on fire on May 8, 2022, James Harden, president of CompassCare, a network of pregnancy-help centers headquartered in Buffalo, New York, knew he could be next. First, he disclosed, the search engine Google de-listed his organization, declaring it closed on May 16. Then the militant pro-abortion group “Jane’s Revenge” torched his clinic the first week of June. “We were re-listed one hour before the firebombing on June 7,” he said. “When the first firebombing happened in Wisconsin, Jane’s Revenge put out a notice giving CPCs a month to shut down. June 7 was a month later.”

The attacks haven’t stopped. During the early morning hours of March 12

this year, the organization was vandalized again, with antifa-style (large red spray-painted letters) graffiti on their exterior sign.

Meanwhile, other fronts in the social media battle have opened up. In November, the Associated Press unveiled a new policy toward crisis pregnancy centers, telling reporters not to refer to them as such nor as “pregnancy resource centers” but instead as “anti-abortion centers.” The AP sets style standards for American journalists, so most media will no doubt follow its dictates. The AP’s Abortion Topical Guide states that reporters should “avoid potentially misleading terms such as pregnancy resource centers or pregnancy counseling centers,” because “these terms don’t convey that the centers’ general aim is to prevent abortions.” (Why AP didn’t list the far more common term “crisis pregnancy centers” is unknown.)

The terms “pro-life” and “pro-choice” have long been frowned upon by AP, despite the industry’s policy to allow groups to choose their own names. The recommended terms are “anti-abortion” and “abortion rights,” despite the “anti” wording having a far more negative cast to it than the “rights” term. The new rules also reframe the first trimester of pregnancy. The AP recommends that reporters not use the term “fetal heartbeat” but rather “cardiac activity.” Their reasoning? The heart under discussion supposedly isn’t one yet because the embryo has only the rudimentary beginnings of a heart.

Pro-life leaders excoriated AP for its cluelessness on the basics of pregnancy. Dr. Christina Francis, CEO-Elect for the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians & Gynecologists, was one of them. “By six weeks’ gestation, the human embryo has developed an organ that contracts rhythmically to pump blood through its body, aiding in the exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the blood—in other words, a heart,” she told Fox News.¹⁰

While the Associated Press continues to shade the issue, and major social media platforms continue to block it, a series of revelations last December disclosed a deliberate campaign on the part of Twitter to promote certain views and those expressing them and demote certain other ones. The topic hit like a bomb in mid-December when former *New York Times* journalist Bari Weiss¹¹—who now runs a successful substack known as The Free Press—published what’s been known as the “Twitter Files.”

As she related in a Dec. 15 Twitter post and column: “At dinner time on December 2, I received a text from Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, founder of SpaceX, founder of the Boring Company, founder of Neuralink, on most days the richest man in the world (possibly history), and, as of October, the owner of Twitter.¹² Was I interested in looking at Twitter’s archives, he asked. And how soon could I get to Twitter HQ? Two hours later, I was on a flight from Los Angeles to San Francisco with my wife, Free Press writer

Nellie Bowles, and our three-month-old baby.”

With the help of seven other reporters, her team culled through a myriad of information points (posts, emails, files, interior Slack discussions) to discover that Twitter had been repressing certain points of view and certain users and censoring reporting on certain un-woke-friendly topics (Hunter Biden’s laptop, why Covid lockdowns harm children, etc.). Twitter employee teams built blacklists, prevented disfavored tweets from trending, and limited the visibility of controversial people—without informing them, she wrote.

What took place wasn’t so much the shutting down of certain unpopular (to Twitter employees) accounts, but what’s known as “visibility filtering” or locking users out of searches for certain topics or preventing other users’ tweets from trending. (Some call that viewpoint discrimination.) Weiss’s reporters found that some people’s accounts had a “do not amplify” warning on them. Others such as Libs of TikTok—which questions gender transition procedures—were outright suspended because, according to an inside memo obtained by the Weiss team, Libs of TikTok “has continued targeting individuals/allies/supporters of the LGBTQIA community for alleged misconduct.” This sort of banning had long been familiar to proliferers. Lila Rose was talking about it as far back as 2018.

“Twitter’s actions suggest it’s OK for Planned Parenthood to tweet that a woman has a right to an abortion,” she wrote in an editorial¹³ for *USA Today*, “but when I tweet and try to promote that a baby has a right to life, Twitter considers that inflammatory.”

Defenders of Twitter say the social platform was reacting to Russian attempts to flood social platforms with false information to sway the 2016 election. Social media sites began banning anything they considered false or disruptive information, which—in the minds of those who monitored them—included a lot of material posted by proliferers.

Although news of the “Twitter files” was played down in much of the mainstream media, many people took notice. In January, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and other anti-vaccine activists with Children’s Health Defense filed an anti-trust lawsuit against several top media organizations alleging that—in the name of quashing vaccine misinformation—the BBC and others censored valuable content about Covid-19 vaccines, the origins of Covid, and more.¹⁴ On March 24, Kennedy and Children’s Health sued the Biden administration, saying it encouraged social media companies to suppress speech that the government does not want the public to hear and to silence specific speakers who are critical of federal policy.

Perhaps the most damning show of the influence of political and liberal cultural influences on Twitter also occurred this past March, when the House

Judiciary Committee held hearings on the “Twitter files” and their exposure of social media platforms’ unequal treatment of opinions and those expressing them, featuring journalists Matt Taibbi and Michael Shellenberger. Taibbi was not a member of the group Weiss brought in, nor was Shellenberger, but along with Weiss and several others, they received from Musk internal Twitter documents whose publication as Twitter threads they and Weiss coordinated. Taibbi’s opening statement accused government agencies ranging from the FBI to the CIA and Department of Defense of pressuring Twitter to delete and de-platform people with unpopular opinions.

“We learned Twitter, Facebook, Google, and other companies developed a formal system for taking in moderation ‘requests’ from every corner of government: the FBI, DHS, HHS, DOD, the Global Engagement Center at State, even the CIA,” he said. “For every government agency scanning Twitter, there were perhaps 20 quasi-private entities doing the same, including Stanford’s Election Integrity Project, Newsguard, the Global Disinformation Index, and others, many taxpayer-funded.”

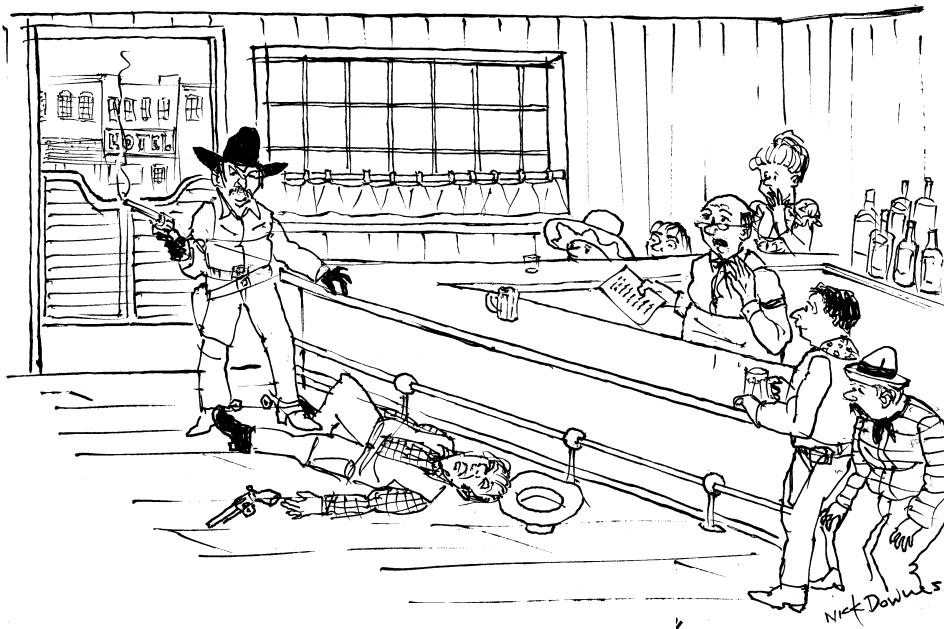
Taibbi continued: “A focus of this fast-growing network is making lists of people whose opinions, beliefs, associations, or sympathies are deemed ‘misinformation,’ ‘disinformation,’ or ‘mal-information.’ The latter term is just a euphemism for ‘true but inconvenient.’”¹⁵

Meanwhile, if he or Shellenberger or the team Weiss brought in at Elon Musk’s invitation have unearthed proof of institutional animus toward the pro-life movement via actual memos, emails, and the like by Twitter higher-ups, they have not publicized them. But the bias was there; anything opposing abortion was going to get censored on certain social platforms. That was nothing new. The outreach of Twitter’s new owner, Elon Musk, allowed Weiss and the other journalists to see how other topics were getting black-listed—an indication that prolifer claims of bias were right all along.

NOTES

1. You can watch the whole exchange here: https://www.tiktok.com/@studentsforlife/video/7089110774064418091?_r=1&_t=8Ymio4s50nO.
2. From an April 27, 2022, Students for Life blog post “SFLA condemns TikTok for censoring pro-life speech through banning their account without warning.” <https://studentsforlife.org/2022/04/27/sfla-condemns-tik-tok-for-censoring-pro-life-speech-through-banning-their-account-without-warning/>
3. From an August 4, 2022, analysis on Live Action’s web page: “More Big Tech censorship: TikTok blocks Live Action founder’s account.” <https://www.liveaction.org/news/big-tech-censorship-tiktok-blocks-live-action/>
4. “Abortion rights ads swamp social media,” by Lachlan Markay, *Axios*, June 28, 2022.
5. “Gen Z TikTok creators are turning against Amazon,” by Taylor Lorenz and Caroline O’Donovan, the *Washington Post*, Aug. 17, 2022.
6. Gen-Z has a link on its page to this *Wired* story describing its trolling efforts: <https://www.wired.com/story/tiktok-army-union-busters-amazon/>

7. "Facebook labels abortion rights vandals terrorists following *Roe* reversal," by Sam Biddle, *The Intercept*, June 28, 2022.
8. "Catholics at the forefront of controversial abortion pill reversal method," by Julia Duin, *Newsweek*, Jan. 21, 2022.
9. "Warner, Slotkin, Colleagues Urge Action on Misleading Search Results About Abortion Clinics," issued June 17, 2022, by Sen. Mark Warner's office.
10. "Pro-lifers outraged as Associated Press rejects 'fetal heartbeat,' 'late-term abortion' as valid terms," by Scott Whitlock, Fox News, Dec. 8, 2022.
11. For a helpful, recent history of Weiss, read "How Bari Weiss Broke the Media," by Harry Lambert in the Feb. 23, 2023, issue of *The New Statesman*.
12. "Our Reporting at Twitter," by Bari Weiss, Dec. 15, 2022, obtained from <https://www.thefp.com/p/why-we-went-to-twitter>.
13. "Twitter feigns political neutrality, but my pro-life organization sees the bias firsthand," by Lila Rose in the Sept. 16, 2018, issue of *USA Today*.
14. "RFK Jr Sues BBC and Other Media Outlets over Covid 'Censorship,'" by Carlie Porterfield, Jan. 13, 2023, in *Forbes.com*. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlieporterfield/2023/01/13/rfk-jr-sues-bbc-and-other-media-outlets-over-covid-censorship/?sh=20400c0e1508>.
15. Be sure to read Taibbi's opening statement at <https://www.racket.news/p/my-statement-to-congress>.



"Now, can we please get back to the trivia quiz?"

SYMPOSIUM

Where Do We Go from *Dobbs*?

This October we will hold our 20th Great Defender of Life dinner, and soon after commence celebrating our 50th anniversary year. We are grateful to have outlived Roe, but the question today is: Where does the pro-life movement go from here? While saving unborn babies from destruction remains our goal, how do we get there now that the Supreme Court has taken itself out of the fight? Our esteemed longtime contributor George McKenna considers the question in the following article, “Getting There,” to which nine Human Life Foundation Great Defenders of Life—Helen Alvaré, Carl Anderson, Gerard Bradley, Clarke Forsythe, Edward Mechemann, William Murchison, Marvin Olasky, David Quinn, and Wesley Smith—respond with comments on his proposal and ideas of their own.

—The Editors

Getting There

George McKenna

Several years ago, while attending a faculty-student party near the college where I taught, I was approached by one of my students, who told me she would be unable to attend my class on Monday because she was going into the hospital for a “routine abortion.” I was so taken aback by this that my only response was something along the lines of “oh.” Looking back on the encounter, I wonder about her motives for telling me this. Yes, I did take attendance in those days, but it would have been enough if she’d just told me that she’d be in the hospital for a day. Was she flaunting her independence from bourgeois values? Or, on the contrary, was she inviting me to talk her out of it? Either way, I was sorry afterwards that I didn’t take it up with her. I still am.

What enabled her to talk that way was *Roe v. Wade*, which made access to abortion part of the law of our land. She and others could bask in that normalization—nothing to see here, just a regular routine abortion. That rug was abruptly pulled out by *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. *Roe* has lost its iconic value because it is dead now and can never be resurrected.

The battle to save the lives of unborn children, however, is far from over. The Court struck down *Roe* not because the Court changed its mind about abortion but because it changed its mind about jurisdiction. It handed the question of legality over to the people of the several states. What

prolifers were hoping for was some kind of federal ban, one that would at least federalize Mississippi's ban on abortion after fifteen weeks—then, I suppose, whittle it down some more in a later case—or, optimally, go all the way, creating a national abortion ban from the time of a fetal heartbeat. What they got was neither of those outcomes, not because the Court majority offered any opinions about the morality of abortion (a topic they went out of their way to avoid) but because they could find no reference to abortion, direct or implied, in the U.S. Constitution. Ergo, being good originalists, they concluded that abortion is largely, if not exclusively, a state concern.

The final say on the issue of abortion has now moved from the Supreme Court to fifty state legislatures, each permitted to shape its abortion laws in a manner agreeable to the majority of voters in the state. These changes are monumental. There has always been diversity between the states in structuring their abortion laws, but in case of controversy the final judgment was in the hands of the U.S. Supreme Court. That has now been taken away. State courts and state constitutions may ultimately figure in shaping the abortion laws at the state level, but the heavy lift will not be in courts but in the legislatures of the several states. The very language used in the debates will change from the language of lawyers to the language of legislators and the people who vote for them.

Do you want to hear how lawyers talk? Here is an exchange between Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and Scott G. Stewart, Solicitor General of Mississippi, during the arguments in *Dobbs*:

Thomas: “If we don’t overrule *Casey* or *Roe*, do you have a standard that you propose other than the viability standard?”

Stewart: “It would be, your honor, a clarified version of the undue burden standard. It would emphasize, I think, as your Honor is alluding to, that no standard other than the rational basis review that applies to all laws will promote an administrable, workable, practicable, consistent jurisprudence that puts matters back with the people. I think anything heightened here is going to be problematic.”

This is lawyer talk, and without in any way disparaging it (law cases must be adjudicated in precise, technical language), it simply won’t work in the legislative arena, and certainly not on the stump where legislators and aspiring legislators meet their constituents. Prolifers need to campaign for and put into office like-minded men and women who speak the same kind of vernacular English that ordinary Americans speak, language that will motivate and inspire voters.

How do we do that? First, by being forthright in describing our goals. We believe that all human beings, of whatever age or physical condition, have

a right to be accepted into the world and to live out their lives until natural death, and we aim to do what we can to realize that goal. Sometimes that means we must use language that is blunt, even shocking. Not many years ago I heard a public debate between two candidates for public office where one was asked by the moderator whether late-term abortions could ever be justified. He replied, “Well, I think it’s terrible. If you go with what [my opponent] is saying, you can . . . rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth of the baby. Now you can say that that’s OK and [my opponent] can say that that’s OK—but it’s not OK with me.” The language was crude but accurate, as anyone who has read descriptions of late-term abortions knows. I had never before heard any politician talk like that. Perhaps it takes a political outsider, in this case Donald Trump, to throw it into the arena. It rattled Hillary Clinton, who accused him of “scare rhetoric,” but it may have helped bring to the polls voters who might otherwise have stayed at home because of qualms about Trump.

I hold no brief for Donald Trump. I hope he doesn’t win the inevitable primary, because he has lost the trust of many by his failure to call off a mob in time after the 2020 election; since then he has taken to blaming his loss on proliferators for failing to modify their “extreme” positions on abortion. That said, I still think his forthright denunciation of late-term abortion in the 2016 presidential election was the way pro-life politicians should talk in this new phase of the campaign. They need to get out of what political philosopher Patrick Deneen has called their “defensive crouch,” orally and physically making the life issue visible through marches and demonstrations in our nation’s towns, cities, and university campuses. Their model should be the early civil rights campaigns of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights demonstrators in the 1950s and ’60s. After being arrested and jailed for holding street demonstrations banned by the authorities in Birmingham, Alabama, King was accused of hypocrisy because, after urging Southern authorities to obey the Supreme Court ruling that outlawed racial segregation, he was himself breaking a local law banning street demonstrations. In his now-famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in 1963, King explained that the difference is that the Supreme Court’s ban on racial segregation is a just law, whereas the municipal law banning demonstrations against segregation is an unjust law. “I would be the first,” he wrote, “to advocate obeying just laws.” But one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. “I would agree with Saint Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’” In Martin Luther King’s case the unjust law was one that effectively prevented victims of racial segregation from publicizing their plight and demanding a remedy. Regarding abortion,

the unjust laws are those that give physicians or others the right to kill unborn children. King further developed his argument: A just law is a law “that uplifts the human personality,” while an unjust law “degrades personality.” The analogy to the abortion issue should be clear. Killing an unborn child degrades not only the person who did it but also those who facilitated and celebrated it as a “right.” They need to be publicly confronted and refuted just as the Southern racists were sixty years ago.

Given this challenge, I can’t help wondering: Where is our civil rights movement? Where is our Martin Luther King, Jr.? There are more than 200 pro-life organizations in this country, ranging from Americans United for Life to Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians, and I have great admiration for the ones I’m familiar with. But we lack a central command structure comparable to what King and his associates put into operation for two decades. We need a core of leaders to rethink our whole public face to see what works best in this new state-by-state environment. We need to cultivate straight talk in confronting pro-abortion politicians who occupy high office in many states. How many of us are willing to (politely, of course, always politely) get in the faces of those governors who have pushed for the passage of new laws permitting nine-month abortions? What kind of turnouts are there for peaceful demonstrations across the street from abortion clinics? How much outreach do pro-life groups have to the racial groups most victimized by abortion, particularly blacks? And churches—where are the churches on late-term abortions? I confess I have found it difficult to get Catholic priests interested in talking about the subject of abortion from the pulpit. Martin Luther King had the same problem in the ’60s when it came to civil rights, as he complained in his “Letter”:

In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: “Those are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern.” And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

Yet today King is celebrated everywhere, certainly in the churches. It’s like the scene in the movie *High Noon*, where all the townspeople came out to celebrate the marshal once the gunfight was over.

Our own fight is just beginning, and its locus is not going to be in the courts; it will be in the state legislatures, the polling booths, the streets, and ultimately in the hearts of the people. It won’t be easy. And yet, despite all the advantages our opponents possess in wealth, connections, and media coverage, I do believe we are going to win. Here is why: Our opponents are holding a weak hand.

At least seven states now have abortion laws so radical that they permit abortion up to the moment of birth. Everyone knows that killing a nine-month “fetus” is killing a baby. Everyone has always known it, even before ultrasound. Other late-term abortions are performed earlier in pregnancy, but even at the beginning of the third trimester (24 weeks), babies in the womb have already developed most of their organ systems; the four chambers of the heart have already developed; the heart’s beating can be heard. Various external organs, from the nose to the toes, have appeared; so have the child’s fingernails. Yet in some states they can be killed during that last trimester.

These facts have the potential to become a public relations nightmare for the abortion industry and its supporters, which is why they always handle them with great verbal delicacy. In her debate with Trump, Hillary Clinton called the decision to get a late-term abortion “the most heartbreaking, painful decision.” How often have I heard this, or variants of it, from other abortion defenders! I am always puzzled. On the one hand they treat the unborn child as an “it,” something akin to a tumor that needs to be removed. But then they do all this hand-wringing over “its” removal. Is the unborn baby a thing, an “it,” or is it a human being? Or is it an “it” first, and later “it” becomes human? If so, how did that happen? What magic wand was waved over the thing to turn it into a child? Of course we know it was the same kid all along. It just grew. It grew by the very same process that will turn a helpless baby into a fourteen-year-old soccer player.

The case for late-term abortions, then, is flawed both logically and scientifically. As such, it is not a good card for abortion proponents to be holding. You would think they would want to get rid of it by offering some kind of compromise. A couple of facts might even be helpful to them if they took that route. Fact number one: Very few abortions (less than 6 percent) are performed in the third trimester, when the baby’s internal organs and external features have developed to the point where he or she could live outside the womb. Fact number two: A majority of Americans (61 percent in a 2020 AP-NORC poll) think abortion should be legal in the first trimester (though 65 percent think it should be illegal in the second trimester and 80 percent oppose it in the third trimester). The smart move, then, for a pro-abort lobbyist would be to say something like this: “OK, I acknowledge that most Americans oppose late-term abortions—but the majority of Americans support abortion in the first trimester. So let’s make a deal.” Thus, in the scenario I am imagining, there would be some haggling back and forth over how many weeks a child in the womb must reside there for her life to be spared. Ten? Twelve? Fifteen?

As you may know, that scenario, at least with the leaders of the abortion

movement, is highly unlikely. They don't want any chipping away of their abortion absolutes. If they took the deal I just laid out, they would have given away their "right" to second- and third-trimester abortions, and such a deal might eventually make early abortions negotiable. But there might be cooler heads in our fifty state legislatures—legislators who represent voters with honestly ambivalent feelings about abortion—who might be ready for some back-and-forth bargaining.

Should we engage? There is a logical case for shouting "No!" to any proposed compromise on the life issue. We are not talking about budgets and taxes now. We are talking about human life, and our scientifically backed premise is that human life at the very least has begun by the time that a heart-beat is detected. From that point on it must be protected, not bargained away because the baby was a couple weeks earlier than whatever agreed-upon week of pregnancy it was—a purely arbitrary number—that the legislators worked out to define the beginning of protected human life.

And yet there is this inconvenient political fact that is every bit as absolute as the scientific fact about the humanity of the unborn child. The political fact is that we don't have the votes to prevail—at least not now—in most of our state legislatures. I have cited the figure of 61 percent in a 2020 AP poll as the percentage of Americans who favor the right to first-trimester abortions, and a more recent development has reinforced that finding: Last August, voters in Kansas, a state often (but inaccurately) identified as conservative on abortion, voted "no" by 59 percent to 41 percent on a proposed amendment that would have removed permission to abort from the state constitution. Politics is the art of the possible, and right now it is not possible to get the outcome we want, the logical outcome. We can get only part of it, and come back later for the rest.

I mean to emphasize both parts of that last sentence. Since I invoked Martin Luther King, let me go back much further in time to another figure who had something to say about civil rights, and whose birthday is honored the month after King's: Abraham Lincoln. Even as a young man, long before he ran for high office, Lincoln was horrified by slavery after seeing a group of slaves chained together and pulled through the streets, as he said, like fish on a line. Later, running for the U.S. Senate against Stephen Douglas, he fiercely criticized the Supreme Court's 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, which had held that slaves could never claim rights as U.S. citizens. Finally, Lincoln presided over a nation that fought a four-year Civil War, culminating in his signing of an Emancipation Proclamation and, eventually, passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which he called the "King's cure for all the evils."

Yet Lincoln has been much criticized by some scholars for hesitating and delaying in the fight against slavery. The issue in his quarrel with Douglas, they say, was not over Southern slavery per se, but only over whether slavery could be extended into the new territories. His Emancipation Proclamation, they say, was simply a war measure aimed at the enemy, the slave states, with no application to the four slave states that remained loyal to the Union. Those assertions, though accurate, miss a crucial point: Lincoln knew that he did not have the votes to do what he wanted to do, and what he eventually did.

In 1861, when he took office, not many people in this country outside of New England could even imagine the end of slavery in the American South. What would happen if the slaves were freed? How would the owners be compensated? Where would the freed blacks go, since white laborers wouldn't work alongside them and white-collar types didn't think they were fit for intellectual work? These and questions like them immediately surfaced whenever the topic of freedom was raised. There were plans—some even partially realized—for shipping the slaves back to Africa or the Caribbean. But turning them into American citizens? No, no, that was impossible, because the Old South would fight to the last man before allowing that to happen! Four years later slavery was abolished, and two years after that the former slaves were given the right to vote. Lincoln didn't live long enough to see the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments ratified, but those amendments came about because of the momentum he achieved during his four years in office.

Lincoln didn't have the votes at first, but within four years he found them. In the meantime he took what he could—before coming back later for the rest. That sentence—both parts of it—is the sum of my argument. We do not yet have the votes to wipe out the infanticide unleashed by *Roe v. Wade*, but we have enough to make a start. About a dozen states have already implemented near-total bans on abortion, and other states' restrictions on it are still tied up in courts. We need to continue that legal fight (yes, there is still a place for lawyer talk) while making our case to the people who elect the lawmakers in thirty-plus states. We should thank the Supreme Court for making it possible to bring our case to the people. At the very least, it has stirred the waters, given new life to the controversy. Nobody, even its supporters, can talk about a “routine abortion” anymore.

What Lincoln instinctively knew, we must remember: Lawmaking is not a static but a dynamic process; events can change people's minds, as can the way events are interpreted. Lincoln didn't have the votes at the beginning, but in the end he did. His speeches played no small role in completely reorienting

people's minds to the best way of defending and promoting the common good of our nation. Martin Luther King, Jr. did the same. So can we.

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Helen Alvaré

As a family law professor, one of the trends I (and others) have observed is the vaulting of adults' rights over those of children. Legal abortion is a preeminent example of this. Reversing this ordering must be part of a post-*Dobbs* solution. It's an aspect of a human rights/civil rights strategy for children—one which I wholeheartedly endorse—as described by George McKenna.

The late Professor Don Browning—a leading divinity and family scholar at the University of Chicago—used to say that American family law puts adults “at the front door” of the law, and children “at the back door.” By this he meant that the law preferences adults' interests and desires by satisfying them as demanded, and then thinks later about how to handle the harm these wreak upon children.

To wit: no-fault divorce, followed by decades of hand-wringing about how to help children of divorce. Maybe legally mandated pre-divorce parent-education on how to handle children post-divorce? Maybe special counselors? Or what about assisted reproductive technologies involving “donor” gametes or embryos, such that the resulting children are separated from their biological mother or father or both? Maybe laws allowing these children at majority age to contact these parents (so long as the parents too, at the time of their donation, have agreed to be contacted)? Maybe just let them hunt around on 23andMe to find their genetic relatives? Maybe encourage them to pour out their souls on the Anonymous.us.org website to feel better in a community of similarly-situated folks?

Now it is true that abortion is not often thought of as part of family law, prey to the trends affecting it, but it is. It is about parent-child relations—the heart of family law. And the willingness to allow abortion most certainly partakes of the trend to valorize adults' interests over children's.

How to approach abortion then, considering this national predilection, in a post-*Dobbs* era? I think there might be two human-rights themes that could assist. First, propose that Americans soul-search their responsibility for children beginning when they make them. For example, the vast majority of aborted children are conceived in a nonmarital relationship in which the couple often know—outright or *sub rosa*—that they are not in a solid position to welcome a child. They just met, or they have no plans for any stable future together let alone marriage, and/or they feel it would be

financially impossible to care for another person. Sex is procreative. It points to tomorrow whether we keep that in mind or not. Children's life situations begin with the situation of their parents at the moment of their conception. Prolifers thus should be asking them whether it's fair for adults to proceed to make children when they have no earthly intention of taking care of them, and might even be tempted to kill them.

It will undoubtedly be a challenge to promote this theme at a time when abortion advocates are (if this is even possible) declaring more full-throatedly than ever that abortion is nothing more than one in a set of women's rights to freedom from restraints on their economic and social desires. The *Dobbs* dissenting justices sounded this theme from beginning to end, to the exclusion of any mention of or empathy with the humanity of the unborn child. It is also the battle cry of abortion advocates coast to coast, as if there is no life to consider on the business end of the abortion instruments. We need to flip the script. Women and men are capable of thinking in advance about their actions. They are capable of taking responsibility for them. Why shouldn't those on whom vulnerable unborn children completely depend think first about what is due those children? Like every human being, women and men are first "chosen" to care for the vulnerable, not first choosers with the power of life or death over another.

A second human-rights'-themed approach is to ask Americans to soul-search their use of technology to "manage" their lives. The fear of technology as a force that devours its inventors is well-known and should be applied here. Americans are both excited and queasy about the seemingly relentless march of AI, fearful of what ChatGPT will do to young people's ability to think and write, and engaged in a love/hate relationship with the medical technologies promising to extend our lives past 100 years.

So what about abortion? Including, increasingly, abortion by pill, brought to you by America's leading multi-billion-dollar pharmaceutical companies to use in the privacy of your own home? We are rightly suspicious of inventing the means of our own destruction; abortion—like the nuclear bomb, like endlessly distracting social media, like suicide drugs—should be considered in this orbit.

Americans remain sensitive to a straight-out civil rights/human rights argument. On some days we may think we are more of an economy than a culture, but our compassionate response to everything from the murder of George Floyd to the women of #MeToo tells me that we still have ears for our fellow human beings, including both the unborn and their mothers.

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Carl A. Anderson

For nearly five decades the *Human Life Review* has been the place where pro-life leaders have explored the intellectual, cultural, and social context of the right to life movement. Such is the case with Professor George McKenna's excellent article "Getting There." He offers an important starting point as we think through the challenges that await us in the years ahead.

Prof. McKenna recognizes the need for a post-*Roe* communication strategy and recommends a new "language" for "legislators and the people who vote for them." This is especially true if we are to reach those Americans conflicted about abortion—who support legalization in limited circumstances but consider themselves "pro-choice" because they are for some choice. They support abortion out of concern for women's welfare. And because they self-identify as pro-choice, they often find strong pro-life language off-putting. Reaching them will be key to future legislative success. How to do so effectively is a complex question and one we need to address.

Prof. McKenna offers the example of Donald Trump as someone whose language "may have helped bring to the polls voters who might otherwise have stayed at home." I suggest we also consider the example of an earlier president. During his eight years in office, Ronald Reagan oversaw the transformation of the Republican Party into a truly national pro-life party. His Administration inaugurated many pro-life initiatives, such as the Mexico City policy. His annual meetings with national pro-life leaders helped review pro-life policies. He helped frame pro-life as a national issue by speaking about abortion on many occasions, including in the State of the Union Address and in his 1984 HLR essay "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation."

Many have observed that the Reagan revolution was built on compromise (see, for example, former senator Phil Gramm, *Wall Street Journal*, 2/22/23). I saw something different while working with him on pro-life initiatives. Reagan was uncompromisingly pro-life in principle. At the same time, he willingly moved forward in incremental ways to advance pro-life policies. He once addressed the March for Life—which he did from the White House on four occasions—referring to the "*long* march for life" in which we were engaged. He knew we needed sustainable communications and sustainable policies if we were to make sustainable converts to our cause. We knew that we needed inspired leaders capable of attracting ever-greater numbers of supporters on the long road back from *Roe v. Wade*.

In today's post-*Roe* environment, we need to show a generation that cannot conceive of a world without abortion, abortion-free environments where abortion is unthinkable and where *that* new normal is accepted and happily

so. And in jurisdictions that insist on maintaining the legal regime of *Roe* by legislation, we need to continue our moral resistance, speaking out on the evil of abortion and continuing to rescue as many as we can through compassionate alternatives. This means increasing community support for women so that they can see a viable path forward. Today, that path is lit by the loving care offered by thousands of pro-life pregnancy resource centers. We need to do a better job of telling their stories and, in this way, help convince those conflicted regarding abortion that the true welfare of women consists in choosing life for their child.

Our nation learned the hard lesson that it could not exist half slave and half free. There are many lessons from that experience for us today. One of the most important will be one of the hardest to implement. It concerns our political leaders. Just as in the case of racial segregation, politicians who promote abortion should be judged unfit for public office and rejected by voters. It is time to see abortion as it truly is—not only as a paramount issue but as a disqualifying issue. Justice for the more than 60 million victims of abortion since *Roe v. Wade* demands nothing less. The true tragedy of *Roe* was not that it failed to understand the Supreme Court’s role in our federal system, but that it failed to recognize and respect the humanity of the pre-born child.

In 1967, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. published *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* His book challenged Americans to overcome racial division and injustice. But his further concern was about a potential change in tactics: “In recent months several people have said to me: ‘Since violence is the new cry, isn’t there a danger that you will lose touch with the people in the ghetto and be out of step with the times if you don’t change your views on nonviolence?’” To which he replied, “My answer is always the same.... If every[one] in the United States turns to violence, I will choose to be the one lone voice preaching that this is the wrong way.” He went on: “With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid our nation of the incubus of racial injustice. But we need not in the process relinquish our privilege and obligation to love.”

I do not for one moment suggest that it is the pro-life movement that is tempted to violence. To the contrary, for more than half a century I have witnessed a movement committed to loving both mother and child. It is this compassionate courage to love that continues to sustain our movement and its leaders. As we work to rid our nation of the incubus of abortion, love will be decisive in bringing healing to the lives of women, their children, and our nation.

Today, post-*Roe* America also faces a choice between chaos or community. We will continue to build true communities in America—communities of

life. For a time, there may be a stark contrast in many places, but ultimately, we will get there.

—*Carl A. Anderson is past Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus and a former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan; he also served for nearly a decade on the U.S. Commission for Civil Rights.*

Gerard V. Bradley

George McKenna writes that the pro-life movement today should model itself after “the early civil rights campaigns of Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights demonstrators in the 1950s and ’60s.” So, he asks: “Where is *our* Martin Luther King Jr.?” McKenna observes that there “are more than 200 pro-life organizations in this country . . . But we lack a central command structure comparable to what King and his associates put into operation for two decades.”

I do not know enough about the civil rights movement to judge whether it actually had a “central command structure.” Maybe it did. I am pretty sure, though, that the pro-life movement after *Dobbs* is not going to develop one as a matter of fact. And I doubt that it needs one.

Why not as a matter of fact?

There are many routes to legally protecting the lives of unborn children, from the moment of conception. It is impossible to say with certainty—or even with much confidence—which is *the* most promising way to go. A constitutional amendment recognizing the personhood of the unborn? National legislation under section five of the Fourteenth Amendment to the same effect? Could there be another climactic Supreme Court decision in the offing, one which holds that the word “person” in the Amendment includes every human being, born and unborn?

Or is it more promising to pursue pro-life legislation in each of the fifty states? What about the various state supreme courts, which have emerged since *Dobbs* as key battlegrounds in so many red states? Even where pro-life legislators do the right thing (as they did last summer in Indiana), judges have annulled their efforts by injunction. Which litigation strategies are most likely to succeed in a given state? Which political tactics are likely to yield up state judges who are willing to protect the unborn?

Going down any of these paths naturally raises the question: how best to get the ball rolling? And which “compromises”—better, but not yet fully

just abortion regulations—should be supported along the way? Which political alliances should be cultivated, and which shunned?

People can and do reasonably disagree about such matters, even after fully airing their opinions and earnestly seeking to find common ground. Indeed, I have been party to more pro-life lawyers’ “summits” and “consultations” over the last forty years than I can recall. Dedicated, smart, open-minded attorneys sat across the table from each other and argued the question: What is the best strategy for getting the Supreme Court to reverse *Roe*?

We never could agree. It turns out that the answer was: Elect Donald Trump president. No one saw it coming.

Besides, even *after* the prize of legally protecting human life from conception is obtained, there would be many strategic and tactical choices to make and no certainty about which to make. Say that there is a constitutional amendment or Supreme Court decision fully establishing that the unborn have an equal right to life. We should then expect many states (California? New York?) to hold fast to their ways—just as so many Southern states did after the *Brown* case held that segregated schools were unconstitutional. What would be the best way to quiet these pro-abortion rebellions?

George McKenna knows all of this, of course. What he proposes is a strategic concentration of forces, on the view that anything less won’t do the job: *If* pro-life Americans do not adopt one path to achieving equality for all, *then* they are going to fail. Success requires a “central command structure,” sufficient to identify a unified course of action and possessed of the soft power (if you will) necessary to enforce compliance with it.

This proposition deserves to be taken seriously, especially because one so eminent and prudent as George McKenna asserts it. For myself, I plead the lawyer’s *dubitante*. My strong suspicion, however, is that no such overarching structure is needed.

Why not?

In defense of my plea, I summon evidence from the last fifty years. Americans since 1973 accomplished something that no other society in the world has. Everywhere else on Planet Earth where abortion sunk its tentacles into a legal culture, it never let go. Our law and our cultural elites swallowed abortion hook, line, and sinker with *Roe v. Wade*. But the American people kept alive a vibrant grassroots pro-life culture and accompanying political-legal movement. They succeeded in reversing *Roe*. They have not nearly succeeded in their stated goal of ending abortion. But they persevered, and thrived, and succeeded where no other people did. They did so without anything like a “central command structure.” It is not apparent why the various pro-life forces cannot go forward on the same terms of cooperation as those of the past.

At least, the past half-century's experience should be enough to shift the burden of persuasion back to George McKenna, to explain why we cannot go back to the future.

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Clarke D. Forsythe

In last year's *Dobbs* decision, the Supreme Court clearly and directly shifted responsibility for the abortion issue from the Court to the American people. There is no evidence whatsoever that *any* justice, let alone a majority, is willing to revisit the *constitutionality* of abortion any time soon. So, for the foreseeable future, abortion will be a democratic issue in the broadest sense. The major challenge will be to *persuade* our fellow Americans that abortion should be prohibited.

The elections in 2022 made the shift in responsibility even clearer in the attempts at “direct democracy” through ballot initiatives involving abortion in six states: Kansas, Michigan, Kentucky, Vermont, California, and Montana. The people in those states voted and were the final decision-makers—what they decided was not blocked or overruled by any governmental entity, federal or state. Abortion advocates are planning more ballot initiatives in 2023 and 2024. They are hoping to short-circuit the legislative process in the states with “direct democracy,” aided by multi-million-dollar campaigns. In these contests as well as in more traditional state legislative battles, pro-life Americans will need to stretch and limber their democratic muscles to be effectively engaged.

As a long-time Lincoln scholar, Professor McKenna advocates a prudential approach that provides exactly what's needed after *Dobbs*. I would like to amplify his prudential approach with some additional proposals.

Some view abortion as a moral issue that simply should not be subject to majority vote or democratic decision-making. But the foundational principle of republican governmental theory in the Declaration of Independence and the *Federalist Papers* is that government rests on *the consent of the governed*. As Robert Reilly lays out in his book *America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding*, the morality of consent has been affirmed by natural law theorists at least since Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) and Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). That moral principle was adopted by the American

people in the federal and state constitutions. Moreover, Lincoln elaborated on the importance of consent as the moral basis of government, used that principle to assail the contradiction of slavery, and returned to the theme in many speeches in the 1850s and during his presidency. The morality of consent did *not* mean that Lincoln believed that majority opinion was always right, as he laid out in his opposition to Senator Stephen Douglas' proposal for "popular sovereignty."

Since *Dobbs*, some pro-life advocates have yet to show a *democratic disposition* to appeal to the public. The absence of this disposition is demonstrated by an exclusive focus on rousing "the base," demanding complete prohibitions on abortion immediately in every state, and criticizing leaders who propose advancing less-than-complete prohibitions of abortion as an intermediate measure.

What is needed is a Lincolnian disposition to appeal to the public. Lincoln's example is uniquely important because he was experienced in discerning and navigating public opinion on the most divisive issue of his era—slavery. Because Lincoln understood the role of public opinion in our system of government, actively studied it, and appealed to citizens with respect, he developed finely tuned antennae for what was possible to achieve politically. Although he did *not* believe that majority opinion was always right, he understood that democracy moved on public opinion and determined what could be accomplished over the long term. As he said, "[I]n a government like ours, public sentiment is everything, determining what laws and decisions can and cannot be enforced." That understanding enabled him to effectively act, and, with time, even *change* public opinion, as he did during the Civil War with emancipation and with recruiting black troops into the Union Army.

The Lincoln scholar Harry Jaffa identified the judgment needed for achieving the highest degree of good possible in politics: "judge wisely as to what is and what is not within his power," select effective means to achieve the right goals, and avoid a permanent compromise that prevents "future statesmen from more perfectly attaining his goal when altered conditions bring more of that goal within the range of possibility."

Those who want a national ban *now* need to understand the virtues of federalism. The existence of a United States, either in 1787 or in 1866 (the year the Fourteenth Amendment was passed by Congress), depended upon preserving state sovereignty to some significant degree. First and foremost, federalism prevents tyranny and preserves freedom.

Each state is different, but strong public support is essential in every state to sustain and effectively enforce an abortion prohibition. Depending on the state and the existing obstacles (including public opinion), a 20-week or 15-week

or earlier gestation limit with rape and incest exceptions may establish a solid beachhead from which greater future protection of human life might be secured.

Although the intentional killing of the innocent unborn child is the gravest moral issue, abortion is not just about “the babies” and never has been. To explain why, the best primer available is Ryan Anderson and Alexandra DeSanctis’ book *Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing*. They understand that the public argument must be broadly stated to include *all* the ways in which abortion harms women, babies, and our society.

For the foreseeable future, abortion is a democratic issue, and therefore those promoting the cause for life must appeal to families, friends, and neighbors, blue states and red states, with *genuine respect and compassion*. Even a constitutional amendment—along the model of the Thirteenth Amendment that prohibited slavery—requires the approval of 38 states, which would prove impossible without dominant public support. The prudential lesson is this: Accept as much as you can get in the current context of existing obstacles and work over the long term for a greater good.

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Edward Meckmann

George McKenna’s call to action is right on target for how the pro-life movement must move forward after the *Dobbs* decision. Certainly, lawyerly arguments will still be necessary in the battle in court over state constitutions. But McKenna is right that those arguments will not be good enough to convince people to treat unborn children with the dignity and equality that they deserve. To that end, McKenna rightly points to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and even further back to Abraham Lincoln for inspiration.

But we need to look back even further, to the first civil rights movement—the battle for full legal equality for African Americans before the Civil War. This was most prominently the movement for abolition of slavery. But it also sought to eliminate invidious legal discrimination against African Americans that degraded them and denied them basic rights. This was not just a problem with the South. Many of the “free” states had laws that treated African Americans as unworthy of legal respect and protection.

The most infamous examples of these “black laws” were in the Midwest—Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Those states required an expensive bond before an African American could move into the state and production on demand of documents

proving their freedom. The “black laws” also denied the right to vote, to serve on juries, or to testify—the basic ways that people defend their legal rights.

Those states were not alone. Missouri was admitted to the Union with a constitution that directed its legislature to enact laws denying the right of any free black person to move into the state. Legal battles raged over whether African American sailors who arrived in Southern ports were “citizens” of the states, and thus entitled to protection under the federal constitutional Privileges and Immunities Clause. In the District of Columbia, free African Americans had to carry proof of their freedom or risk being arrested and sold into slavery. States that had eliminated slavery, like New York, still denied equal voting rights to “men of colour” in their constitutions.

These discriminatory laws denied full legal personhood to African Americans. Overturning them took decades and was only accomplished—at least in principle—with the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Throughout that time, the principal argument against the laws was that they were radically inconsistent with the promise of natural equal rights in the Declaration of Independence. They appealed to a sense of fairness and humanity—echoing the words on the famous Wedgewood anti-slavery medalion, “Am I Not a Man and a Brother”?

By the time of MLK, the equality of African Americans in principle was not enough. They had to convince Americans to deliver on the “promissory note” of full legal equality promised in the Declaration. But their success would not have been possible if the first civil rights movement had not already obtained the necessary constitutional foundations for full legal personhood.

Regarding the status of the unborn, we are now in a place comparable to the antebellum civil rights movement. No state grants unborn human beings full legal personhood and equal protection of the laws. Instead, there is a patchwork of laws that grant some elements of equality for unborn children, while denying them others. Some ban abortion at six weeks of life, while others do so at 20 weeks. Some provide protection from criminal assaults at any stage of pregnancy, while others do not. All recognize some inheritance rights, and all treat unborn children to some extent as patients who need health insurance or who are protected against medical malpractice.

But the states that have outlawed abortion from conception still recognize a right to abortion in medical emergencies even after the child is capable of life outside the womb. Many states and the federal government will pay for the abortion of a child conceived through a sexual assault. As tragic as those cases are for the mother, the innocent child is still being denied the equal right to life inherent in his or her humanity. And radically pro-abortion states basically hold that unborn children have no rights that born people are bound to respect.

So we must continue with the agenda that McKenna lays out of convincing our fellow citizens of the full humanity of unborn children and the injustice of denying them equal rights. Any law that recognizes any rights for the unborn is a movement in that direction.

That's our proactive agenda. But there also must be an active, assertive defense.

Pro-life organizations are under constant attack from pro-abortion legislatures and administrative agencies. Pregnancy centers incite their ire because they insist on treating unborn children and their mothers like real persons. Sidewalk counselors and prayer witnesses are targeted because they dare to speak the truth about the gross injustice of abortion. Religious hospitals are under constant regulatory pressure because they refuse to treat murder as if it were health care.

The pro-abortion fanaticism about eliminating dissent recalls the slave states' obsession with enforcing fugitive slave laws, hunting runaways, silencing debate in Congress, and censoring any abolitionist literature in the mails. They refused to compromise in any way with the idea that their disfavored class had any claim to equal treatment and dignity. The first civil rights movement fought back, and so must we. Our best defense is to push back hard at any attempt to oppress our institutions and activities.

Of course, we must be prudent and wily in our tactics. Compromises and half-measures will have to be accepted. But even the smallest victory is an important contribution to the ultimate goal of full legal recognition and equality for unborn children.

Like Abraham Lincoln, we are engaged in "the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong." And like him, we are confident that "Wise councils may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later the victory is sure to come."

—*Edward Mechmann is an attorney and Director of Public Policy for the Archdiocese of New York.*

William Murchison

I agree with the eloquent and intellectually fertile George McKenna: "We do not yet have the votes to wipe out the infanticide unleashed by *Roe v. Wade*, but we have enough to make a start." From which it follows that we take what we can get in the way of legislated protections for unborn life: proceeding from gain to gain, win to win, until . . .

Until, maybe—permit me to stick my nose in—we find ourselves bound

to take rueful note of a central reality about democracy and its functionings. That reality is the impossibility of ever conforming *demos*—we, the people, don't you know?—to a single viewpoint on anything under the sun.

A genuine democracy, like our own, is unruly—and accordingly hard to rule. You just don't, and shouldn't try, really, to get everyone on the same page—where you couldn't keep 'em even if you succeeded for a moment. That's humans for you.

My brother McKenna correctly understands lawmaking as “a dynamic process.” Just as “events can change people's minds,” so work and dedication can bring them around as to the evil of exterminating life in the womb. He cites as a precedent the country's decisive move, in the 1860s, from unwillingness to attack chattel slavery to ratification of the 13th and 14th amendments, owing to “the momentum [President Lincoln] achieved during his four years in office.” Momentum generated, one could add, by war and the deaths of 750,000 Americans.

So. If we lower our heads, hitch up our pants, and vow, in the post-*Roe v. Wade* era of freedom from judicial interference with the right-to-life cause, we can leverage the weakness of the pro-abortion position on destruction of human life. And win. What we need, my brother declares, is a civil rights movement—our own Martin Luther King, Jr.

I would rejoice to think so. My reluctance to throw up my cap stems from two notable differences between the anti-slavery cause and the cause of preventing further slaughter of the unborn.

Reason 1: Slaves were visible persons. With faces, bodies, names; all the marks of realized life. Yes, yes—an unborn child has these, too. The problem is their out-of-sightness. Many don't care a rap for not-yet-ness. It doesn't arrest them in the way pictures or tales of toiling blacks arrested steadily accumulating numbers of Americans over many decades, not counting the civil rights era, with its white/black restroom signs and so forth.

Reason 2: This is the big one. Abortion and feminism are joined together at the hip. Performing the necessary acts—acts, plural—of surgery will be a long and painful task, if indeed it ever becomes approachable. *My* right to control *my* body is the signal affirmation of the women's rights movement. Nodding in agreement entails closing hearts and minds to biological truths, like, look, lady, what do you think you've got in there, a platter of spaghetti? Have you heard of pregnancy, meaning the production of life in the immortal way every one of us got here originally? That the phrase “every one of us” should include those making the sophomoric claim to authority over personal birth processes shows you as well as anything else could the vapid-ity of modern moral reasonings.

A pregnant woman who says “my body, my choice” isn’t going to respond to rousing pro-life exhortations on the personhood of the unborn. It’s all, you see, about me. I’m not talking about the rare victims of rape or incest, or about women whose lives truly are at risk from their pregnancies. I’m talking about women whom the feminist cause—the cause of women’s “rights”—makes unlikely recipients of a civil rights message affirming the rights of those sometimes dismissed as mere “products of conception.”

Civil rights? Isn’t choice in the matter of abortion a fundamental civil right? Aren’t women an oppressed and put-down class on a par with blacks, pre- and post-Civil War? You make people do what they don’t want to do— toil in the fields or bear babies, maybe both—and you know what you are? You’re a slave-driver! Get lost! That’s the message we hear.

In the age of liberation, moral suasion that points to personal restraint looks either laughable or loathsome. Which is why I fear a new civil rights movement, however morally correct, in behalf of the unborn is likely to enjoy limited prospects in the political/governmental universe.

What, then, could work? Moral renewal inside the vast community of America strikes me as the likeliest possibility; moral renewal of a sort larger and more compelling than political exertion, practiced for political reasons, aimed at political outcomes involving the exercise of power.

Abortion itself: That’s not the problem. I-want-to is the problem—running through the culture. Evaluations of right and wrong go unspoken, unheard. I want, I demand, is the key to it all.

What, then, I say, could work? I cannot imagine abortion, an immemorial “remedy” for perceived ills, personal or social, ever quite vanishing. However, I can see it succumbing in large degree—even among feminists—from a broad cultural change in moral perceptions; from the awakening of our long-slumbering perception that life is Good, and worthy of nourishment.

The “how” of such an enterprise is immense: a larger challenge than Dr. King, I think, ever encountered. He finished the uprooting of an already undermined and unworkable folk philosophy of race. In contrast, the moral truths by which the West once lived lie under heaps of earth. It will take persistent shoveling to uncover them—by ardent volunteers who understand their God-given power.

I sense the task has begun, due partly to widespread repulsion at the moral soot now enveloping us. Moral inquiry, serious, serious moral teaching—and, yes, the earnest prayers of God’s faithful. Such as that, it seems to me, beats a law or a court decision any day of the week.

—*William Murchison, a former syndicated columnist, is a senior editor of the Human Life Review. He will soon finish his book on moral restoration in our time.*

Marvin Olasky

George McKenna says Lincoln’s “speeches played no small role in completely reorienting people’s minds to the best way of defending and promoting the common good of our nation. Martin Luther King Jr. did the same.” Regarding abortion, McKenna concludes, “So can we.” I hope so, but I’d add one word: “Maybe.”

The “maybe” is because though King had a high bar over which to leap, ours is even higher. A crucial difference: King had nationally prominent journalists on his side, with newspapers, magazines, and television networks amplifying his message, but the national press has been highly pro-abortion for a long time. I’ve seen no evidence of change since the 1995 survey of nationally prominent journalists conducted by Stanley Rothman and Amy E. Black. They found 97 percent agreeing that “it is a woman’s right to decide whether or not to have an abortion,” and 84 percent agreeing strongly.

What *Boston Globe* legal reporter Ethan Bronner acknowledged in 1990 still seems true: “Opposing abortion, in the eyes of most journalists . . . is not a legitimate, civilized position in our society.” I haven’t seen any widespread media polling since the *Dobbs* decision, but comments last June, as tracked by the Media Research Center, include: “devastating . . . dark day . . . rigged Court . . . highly politicized . . . legal chaos . . . legal wild west . . . legal civil war.”

In 1954 ABC, CBS, NBC, *Time*, the *New York Times*, and so on did not characterize *Brown v. Board of Education* that way. Later, they gave King favorable publicity. They supported the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In January 2023, CNN’s Nia-Malika Henderson complained about “the so-called pro-life movement.” Did any network reporters in the 1960s complain about “the so-called civil rights movement”?

Instead of equating the drive to protect the unborn with the abolitionist or civil rights movements, leading journalists over the years have said the pro-life movement is trying to enslave women. *Time* in 1989 quoted an unnamed *Chicago Tribune* reporter as saying, “To me, the struggle for abortion rights is as important to women as the struggle against slavery.” (Many more examples from the 1960s to the 1980s are in my book *The Press and Abortion, 1838-1988*.)

After *Dobbs*, the bizarre “pro-life is proslavery” meme continued. MSNBC host Joy Reid said, “More than 100 million women—and queer folks with uteruses too—woke up to another day in America, basically as state property in the more than 20 fully or partially Republican-controlled states that the Supreme Court’s conservative majority unleashed to literally take physical control of half the population.” Literally.

So, McKenna's good plan will be stymied by journalistic opposition unless we can circumvent the biases at the top. I have no easy solution to offer here, but I hope that over time biblical objectivity—an accurate look at the reality of God's creations both worldwide and in the womb—will win out over existential subjectivity. I believe that's possible because of both God's mercy and what McKenna points out: that abortion advocates “are holding a weak hand.”

The weakness of that hand is apparent in the reaction when people see even an 8-week-old unborn child: They say, “that's a baby.” Starting in 1839, Drs. Hugh Hodge and Stephen Tracy, and then pro-life female physicians Anna French, Rachel Gleason, Prudence Saur, Mary Hood, and many others, presented word pictures of human life “from the moment of conception, as modern science has abundantly proven.” A century after Hodge's verbal descriptions of fetal anatomy, one of the most popular exhibits at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City featured sculptures of unborn children's development month by month.

People stood in line for hours “with wonder on their faces” to see what before had been invisible, as historian Rose Holz has recounted: “Neither rain nor shine stopped the crowds from coming; nor did the occasional stampede.” The sculptures combined scientific accuracy with artistic beauty to depict development as a romance beginning with conception and unfolding all the way to birth.

In 1965 an unborn child appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine. In 1984 Dr. Bernard Nathanson used an early ultrasound machine to show in *The Silent Scream* a child being aborted. Ultrasound imaging, now 3D and 4D, has been worth more than a thousand words in changing the hearts of some who were contemplating abortion. The pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute complains that the requirement in some states to show a mother what's happening in her womb is “a veiled attempt to personify the fetus and dissuade an individual from obtaining an abortion.”

Well, sure. That fear among abortion advocates is a GPS to guide the pro-life movement over the next decade. Keep showing pictures and ultrasound videos. Publish them, post them, stream them, beam them, do whatever it takes to get around the big media blackouts.

—*Marvin Olasky is co-author of The Story of Abortion in America: A Street-Level History (1652-2022) (Crossway, 2023).*

David Quinn

Here in Ireland, the pro-life movement took great heart from the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* ruling. Readers may recall that in 2018, Ireland held a referendum on abortion and voted by a two-to-one margin to repeal the very strong protection the Irish Constitution afforded the unborn. Morale was understandably low following this defeat, and we wondered if there was a way back. Then along came the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court.

What this showed us was that through patience and very hard work the tide could begin to be turned back. *Roe v. Wade* had seemed set in stone. A partial repeal seemed the most proliferers could hope for. To see it totally overturned was incredible.

Ireland's pro-life amendment lasted from 1983 until 2018, which is to say, for 35 years. From the day it was inserted into the Constitution by the Irish people, pro-choice forces worked very hard to overturn it, with the full backing of the media. Eventually they got there.

As we can see, the work of overturning landmark decisions and votes can take decades. *Roe v. Wade* lasted for nearly half a century. But as George McKenna observes, the fight in America has now been returned to each of the 50 states, and voters in those states vary widely in what kind of restrictions on abortion they want to see implemented, running the gamut from strong protection for the unborn to no protection at all.

If the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was mainly a battle for the Supreme Court and only secondly a battle for public opinion, the next stage is very much a campaign to win over hearts and minds. And that will not be at all easy, because abortion has become so embedded in our culture.

Ireland is a sobering reminder of that. Though our law prior to 2018 prohibited abortion except where the life of the mother was in danger, several thousand Irish women still travelled to England each year for terminations. The overall rate of abortion was still low by American or British standards (about one in twelve pregnancies ended in abortion, compared with one in four or five in the U.S. and the U.K.), but it was becoming normalized all the same.

That's because abortion was seen by many people as a necessity if they were to enjoy a sex life free of any unchosen or unwanted commitments. The Irish in this regard did not differ from any other Western nation—the miracle is that we kept the pro-life amendment in place for so long and saved so many lives because of it.

But now we face the same problem as America; namely, how to persuade public opinion that abortion should not be part of modern life, and that the vision of “autonomy” we have been sold is destructive not only of the unborn,

but of the wider society as well.

What we need is a social revolution in what people see as “the good life.” In reality, continuing high divorce, a declining marriage rate, growing loneliness, widespread abortion, and (on the horizon) widespread euthanasia hardly seem to qualify.

Today we are faced with a rapidly aging population. What are we going to think in a few short decades when we look around and see how many of us are over the age of 65, and how few of us, relatively speaking, are young?

George McKenna argues that, going forward, the pro-life movement needs to model itself on the civil rights movement, taking inspiration from what Martin Luther King did. He is correct that there needs to be a very broad-based, well-coordinated campaign by pro-life groups statewide and nationwide guided by good, high-profile leaders who will win over hearts and minds so that the law will move, bit by bit, in a more pro-life direction.

I think this may happen in the manner envisaged by John Paul II in his great encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. He argued that moving from a “culture of death” to a “culture of life” would most likely occur only incrementally. Recognizing this, he said that Catholic politicians could in good conscience vote in favor of laws that permitted abortion so long as the imperfect new law they were supporting was replacing a worse one.

But strange as it may seem, the challenge before Martin Luther King was actually easier than the one facing the pro-life movement today. Bringing about racial equality did require a social and legal revolution, but persuading the public that their vision of the good life is drastically misguided will take even more work.

Ultimately, I think the pro-life movement will prevail only when society itself reaches the point when it can no longer deny the wreckage caused by our extreme individualism, and that point may arrive only when the demographic crisis comes into plain view.

Society might, of course, greet this crisis fatalistically and continue on its present course; or, viewing the results extreme individualism has wrought may prompt an overdue reassessment and a pro-natal social revolution in which we start to turn our backs on abortion both collectively and individually.

The job of the pro-life movement in the meantime is to nudge public opinion in that direction and develop and sell a vision of what a pro-natal society looks like.

—*David Quinn is a columnist with the Irish Independent and the Irish Catholic and the founder and director of the Iona Institute in Dublin.*

Wesley J. Smith

Overturing *Roe v. Wade* was a major historical victory for the pro-life movement. In bringing the country to this portentous moment, proliferers acted in the grand tradition of social activism that has been a hallmark of the American experience.

But that does not mean the overall task of creating a more humane union is accomplished. Nor should this unquestionable achievement be celebrated simply as a matter of “winning.” Obviously, the final victory is not yet “won.” Moreover, the strategic questions with which the pro-life movement grapples are not properly framed as matters of winning or losing, but instead, of saving as many lives as possible.

With abortion now returned to the states, this will be both easier and more difficult to accomplish, depending upon location. With *Roe* gone, some states have restricted abortion access and undoubtedly saved lives. But other states are so radicalized that they have enacted laws or constitutional amendments establishing a fundamental right to abortion through the ninth month. California even will pay the expenses of women who travel there from out of state to terminate their pregnancies.

Nearly fifty years of judicially enforced legalization has corrupted American culture and desensitized many among us to the sheer brutality of abortion. Indeed, more than half the country believes that abortion should be legal at least in the early months of pregnancy, to protect the wellbeing of the mother or to prevent babies with disabilities or serious medical conditions from being born.

Changing those cultural attitudes is going to be an effort measured in decades—just as overturning *Roe v. Wade* was. And make no mistake; until the culture becomes more humane, the dream of some proliferers to enact a national abortion prohibition will remain only that. A national law unsupported by a majority of the people would be impossible to sustain even if it could be enacted.

So the immediate question becomes how to create a culture of life in which people act righteously regardless of legalities. Part of the effort will, of course, entail hard political and cultural lifting. Nothing new there. The pro-life movement has been engaged in those efforts for more than 50 years.

But that can't be all. Changing times require new advocacy approaches. The pro-life movement needs to lead by example. Here are three areas of activism that can help accomplish this important goal.

Help Make the Choice of Birth Easier: During the *Roe* hegemony, the pro-life movement developed pregnancy resource centers to assist women in crisis.

These clinics of compassion provide free pregnancy tests, ultrasound scans, and other means of supporting women in the choice to give birth. Belying the canard that proliferates only care about children before they are born, most of these support facilities also help with things like diapers, social services, and post-natal education. Increasing these efforts will both benefit the clients of these centers and help overcome the lies the media tell their audience and readers about the motives and actions of the pro-life movement generally.

But more is required. This is a time for creative thinking and a willingness to think outside the usual political and philosophical boxes. Americans United for Life has already launched such a project by publishing a white paper arguing that childbirth should be free for every mother in the country (<https://aul.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Make-Birth-Free-White-Paper.pdf>). The proposal needs to be debated and perhaps honed. But in opening so boldly, AUL jump-started a vital conversation about how best to promote a culture of life that the entire country will be able to coalesce around, regardless of individual views about the legality of abortion.

Increase Commitment to Oppose Assisted Suicide: The pro-life movement opposes assisted suicide as a matter of principle. But I have noticed that it has often not invested the same levels of energy and commitment in opposing that death agenda as it has historically invested in abortion. It's time for the movement generally to up its game in this area of societal contention.

The stakes involve more than the potential victims of assisted suicide as commonly framed. Studies have now shown that advocacy for—and legalization of—assisted suicide for the terminally ill exacerbates the suicide crisis the United States currently faces. This makes sense. Assisted suicide advocacy promotes suicide as an answer to the problem of human suffering. Thus, by thwarting the assisted suicide movement, we can not only save the lives of those currently targeted by the movement from premature death, but also potentially save others who face existential crises that do not involve health or disability.

And here's a truth that some may find hard to swallow. Fighting the spread of assisted suicide will require the pro-life movement to work in concert with those—like disability rights activists and organized medical associations—that may not hold pro-life views on abortion. This doesn't mean downplaying the importance of abortion. But it will—particularly in politically progressive states—require temporarily setting those fundamental differences aside toward the end of defeating the assisted suicide agenda that is profoundly toxic to everyone in existential despair.

Protect Medical Conscience: Protecting the right of doctors and other medical professionals to refuse complicity in abortion and assisted suicide

is another important means of saving lives. This will require energetic political organizing. Medical conscience is under unprecedented threat today as the Biden administration, political progressives, the bioethics movement, and establishment medicine are working overtime to distort professional ethics and require doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and others to be complicit in life-taking actions, either by compelled participation or by providing referrals to doctors they know to be willing to abort or prescribe death. Maintaining the right to say no will not only save the lives of patients directly affected, but allow these conscientious medical professionals to communicate a powerful life-proclaiming message that certain actions are wrong regardless of legality.

Finally, to be effective in these and other efforts that will need to be undertaken, proliferers will have to work to change the movement's (largely but not totally false) popular reputation as angry into one recognized as steeped in love. This means increasing the movement's commitment to nonviolence, turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile, and loving adversaries—even (perhaps better stated, particularly) when proliferers are faced with slanderous attacks and unfair characterizations. This is not only morally correct, but it is a practical necessity. If proliferers are to have any hope of leading the culture into greater humanity, they will have to conduct themselves in a way that makes people want to follow.

—*Wesley J. Smith is chairman of the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism and author of Culture of Death: The Age of "Do Harm" Medicine (Encounter Books).*

Happy 100th Birthday to James Buckley: A Great Defender of Life



I consider this issue to be of paramount importance. As we stand here on this day, quite literally thousands of unborn children will be sacrificed before the sun sets in the name of the new ethic. Such a situation cannot continue indefinitely without doing irreparable damage to the most cherished principles of humanity and to the moral sensibilities of our people. The issue at stake is not only what we do to unborn children, but what we do to ourselves by permitting them to be killed. With every day that passes, we run the risk of stumbling, willy-nilly, down the path that leads inexorably to the devaluation of all stages of human life, born or unborn. But a few short years ago, a moderate liberalization of abortion was being urged upon us. The most grievous hypothetical circumstances were cast before us to justify giving in a little bit here, a little bit there; and step by step, with the inevitability of gradualness, we were led to the point where, now, we no

longer have any valid legal constraints on abortion.

What kind of society is it that will abide this sort of senseless destruction? What kind of people are we that can tolerate this mass extermination? What kind of Constitution is it that can elevate this sort of conduct to the level of a sacrosanct right, presumptively endowed with the blessings of the Founding Fathers, who looked to the laws of nature and of nature's God as the foundation of this Nation? Abortion, which was once universally condemned in the Western World as a heinous moral and legal offense, is now presented to us as not only a necessary, sometime evil, but as a morally and socially beneficial act. The Christian counsel of perfection which teaches that the greatest love consists in laying down one's life for one's friend, has now become, it seems, an injunction to take another's life for the security and comfort of one's own. Men who one day argue against the killing of innocent human life in war will be found the next arguing in praise of killing innocent human life in the womb. Doctors foresworn to apply the healing arts to save life now dedicate themselves and their skills to the destruction of life.

To enter the world of abortion on request, Mr. President, is to enter a world that is upside down: It is a world in which black becomes white, and right wrong, a world in which the powerful are authorized to destroy the weak and defenseless, a world in which the child's natural protector, his own mother, becomes the very agent of his destruction."

—*Senator James Buckley, the Human Life Foundation's 2012 Great Defender of Life, from his address introducing his Human Life Amendment on the Senate floor, May 31, 1973. Reprinted in the first issue of the Human Life Review (Winter 1975).*

No Laughing Matter:

The Inadvertent Pro-Life Genius of George Carlin

Drew Letendre

In the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, it was not surprising to see the pro-abortion lobby raising hell by, among other things, posthumously summoning Ruth Bader Ginsburg (in the form of “Ruth Sent Us”) and by the timely release of HBO’s *George Carlin American Dream* documentary—the latter being the pretext for this reflection on abortion and euphemism.¹

Like his soulmate Joe Biden, George Carlin is one of “those Catholics,” at once famous and infamous—well-known, and well-known for the extreme dissonance between their Catholic credentials and their moral convictions. What distinguished Biden from Carlin, however, was that Biden incongruously insisted—and continues to insist—on the consonance of “his faith” with his moral predilections, while Carlin consistently stood “on principle” (*his* principles) and disavowed *his* faith. This familiar cleavage of Catholic identity and private moral conviction is particularly and most frequently evident regarding abortion and the related litany of what are called “pelvic issues.” In the 2022 HBO series, we see Carlin in some of his most virulent rants against the Catholic Church and proliferators. This being a family publication, I will refrain from quoting verbatim the offensive passages or doing the written equivalent of bleeping them out. That said, my aim is to wrest “Saint George’s” lance from him and slay a dragon that he would not—by critiquing the deployment of verbal camouflage to obscure the violence by which millions of the unborn die.

From “Shellshock” to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

No doubt Carlin would be grieved to see the tools of his comic genius appropriated, conscripting him posthumously into the service of a cause he so violently disavowed in life—namely, Life itself. However, in addition to his lurid pro-abortion advocacy, Carlin was a veritable “St. George” when it came to exposing any form of words that deliberately veils or disfigures the truth. His targets tended to be selective—and in one direction.

In an iconic “set” from his late career,² Carlin mercilessly dissected a line of increasingly opaque euphemisms that were used to inure the American

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public, over a sixty-year period, to the awful reality of a combat-related nervous disorder originally termed “shellshock.”³

You can't be afraid of words that speak the Truth. Even if it's an unpleasant truth. I don't like words that hide the truth. I don't like words that conceal reality. I don't like euphemistic language. American English is loaded with euphemisms because Americans have a lot of trouble dealing with reality..., so they invent a kind of soft language to protect themselves from it—and it gets worse with each generation.

Carlin goes on to offer an analysis of verbal subterfuge that is a master class in semantic deconstruction. He traces in time lapse, as it were, the gradual fogging of a concept from its original sharp coinage in World War I to its anodyne reformulation and gassy deflation by the time of Vietnam.

The neology “shellshock,” he points out, has just two syllables. “Simple. Honest. Direct.” He then observes that the conjunction of its hard consonant ending (“-ck”) and the staccato repetition of the “sh-” almost sounds like rifle recoil, like guns fired.⁴ Come World War II, he tells us, the language undergoes the first of three successive transformations. In less than a quarter century, he notes, “shellshock” melts into “battle fatigue.” Exact same condition. Now four syllables. “It takes longer to say. It doesn't hurt as much.” “‘Fatigue’ is a nicer word than ‘shock.’” By the time of the Korean War, “battle fatigue” becomes “operational exhaustion.” Now it has eight syllables and, Carlin comments, “all humanity has been squeezed completely out of the phrase.” It is totally sterile. It sounds, he says, like “something that might happen to a car.” With the coming of the Vietnam War, “operational exhaustion” deflates even further into “post-traumatic stress disorder.” Still eight syllables, but now four words with a hyphen added—and the pain is “completely buried under jargon.” He concludes: *“I'll bet you if we'd have still been calling it 'shellshock' some of those Vietnam veterans might've gotten the attention they needed at the time. I'll bet you. I'll bet you.”*

His point is well-taken, and it is that we must call things by their real names. Much—and many—may depend on it. It almost goes without saying that words are not the things they refer to and that there is a chasm between representation and reality. Even so, we seem to know ourselves to be under some quiet imperative to conform our words to the world and its true contours—conscience so beckons. Even if we concede that language is imperfect, that it does not always “cut reality at the joints,” this does not relieve us of the obligation to wield it as precisely as possible, especially when it really matters—as when a life is on the line.

Truth, it has been said, is the first casualty of war.⁵ The coda of Carlin's skit is a cautionary tale, a regretful lament, and finally a cry of outrage over that avoidable fatality. Ideas have consequences—moral ones—and language is

the primary vehicle of our ideas. In language there is an ever-present fork—the option to reveal or conceal, to one degree or another, the truth about things we write or speak of. What we say and how we say it shapes what we see or do not see, what we do or refrain from doing.

Carlin had no problem righteously exposing the appalling truth buried under the path from “shellshock” to “PTSD.” He saw that softening the properly sharp edges of the original language masked the ugliness of the condition and the violence that produced it, dissolving the condition into a diagnostic abstraction. Consequently, a serious condition was effectively trivialized, removed from the field of vision—from the field of battle—where it could be (and was) ignored. Or to put a finer point on it: *Our veterans* could be and would be ignored—left to languish, suffer, and die, untreated.

From “Abortion” to “Women’s Reproductive Healthcare”⁶

Recourse to euphemism is not confined to the arena of war. Euphemism is also the lingua franca of the pro-abortion movement—another realm of violent action. That observation was a bridge too far for George Carlin and his ilk. But let us go where comedians fear to tread. There is nothing to stop *us* from taking and applying his methodology to the murky cognates of abortion—the real civil rights issue of the 21st century. (President Biden claims that title for LGBTQ+, but the president is mistaken.)

If one were to dissect or x-ray that method, it would disclose something like the following properties as the marks or tactics of verbal dissimulation—or a strategy thereof:

- **Length and complexity**—longer, more complex language exercises the mind and, in some cases, intimidates through a false veneer of intellectual sophistication.
- **Vagueness or abstraction**—eschewing the clear, concrete, and specific (what philosophers refer to as “definite descriptions”).
- **Antonyms**—the overt, unashamed resort to outright conceptual contraries, to achieve maximum opacity.
- **Esoteric or technical terminology**—as opposed to ordinary, commonplace (in this case) English words, with plain, widely available meanings.
- **Partial, trivial, or irrelevant truths**—employed to evoke the perception of complete, meaningful, or germane truths—but “on the cheap.”
- **Neutral, “clinical,” or even positive language**—to mask benighted facts.

This is the Euphemist’s Toolkit, if you will. So, in the spirit of Carlin’s method, let us fix on that ubiquitous expression—“women’s reproductive

healthcare” (WRH, henceforth)—and dissect it in a similar way. The surface scope of reference is, by design, much broader, encompassing in theory pap smears, mammograms, sonograms, pelvic and physical exams, the provision of antibiotics, flu shots, vaccines, and even cold remedies. But this implied “portfolio of products and services” is really meant to camouflage the D&Cs, D&Es, and abortifacients that shelter, so to speak, among and behind them. It is a distraction strategy, designed to block the real referents, the means of violence that will not speak their names.

“Women’s Reproductive Healthcare”—eight syllables, three words—is more than twice the length of “abortion,” with its three compact syllables occupying one word⁷—bearing in that sense a resemblance to “operational exhaustion” or “post-traumatic stress disorder.” Perhaps the first thing to point out is that the middle term (“reproductive”) is the very thing that an abortion is designed to intercept and terminate—human reproduction and human ontological development. Yet there it sits, between “women” and “healthcare,” without any hint of irony. But it is the negation of reproduction that “we” are really talking about. Abortion is not the *pro*-duction—let alone the re-production—of anything or anyone. Destruction and death hide behind an antonym. Then there are its salient associations with the industrial, with manufacturing, with assembly or construction out of components, rather than with organic development and fruition. Production is about making *things* and reproduction is about making *copies of things*. The clear point of this nomenclature, again, is to dehumanize. We are meant to have our eyes diverted or deceived.

To further distract from the carnage, there is “healthcare,” with its inherently positive elements and associations, chosen in part because it is anti-oppositional (“*What? You’re anti-healthcare?*”). Ironically, there is a degree of truth in this word’s application. But that too is a part of the “euphemist” tool kit—the inclusion of partial or trivial truths to create the broader aura or “halo” of legitimacy *in toto*. For it is true that abortions are performed in “healthcare” settings: clinics, doctor’s offices, and hospitals where care, treatment, and healing take place.

It is also true that they are performed by so-called “healthcare” professionals—licensed physicians, physician’s assistants, or trained “medical technicians.” But these facts do not make abortion healthcare. No more than vacuuming the clinic’s waiting room carpet makes vacuuming healthcare; no more than a doctor encouraging a patient to smoke a pack of cigarettes a day makes smoking healthcare, simply because it is “prescribed” by a doctor. The doctor’s professional title, identity, or persona, and the trappings of the clinical space, cannot confer the valid “stamp” of “healthcare” onto the

actors who operate there or the acts they undertake.

Coming full circle, the journey from “abortion” to “women’s reproductive healthcare” is approximately the same semantic distance as that between “shellshock” and “PTSD.” The point of the journey from the one to the other is also the same—to prevent us in the end from seeing two vulnerable human beings, but especially the human child who is—naturally—out of our view. *Pace* Carlin, all humanity has been squeezed out. The language has been rendered totally sterile—with the pain completely buried under jargon. But not only the pain—the violent death of the aborted child is also buried.

In the face of the obscurantism, it must ever be said that abortion is *a violent act the end of which is to kill an individual human being*—moreover, an innocent human being, lacking as it does the power, means, or mens rea to harm or pose a lethal threat to anyone. There is nothing “editorial” in that formulation. It eschews words like “baby,” “child,” or “infant,” which to some minds are rhetorical enormities—though in my view it need not and should not eschew them as a way of evincing impartiality.

Surgical abortion is gruesome, a “procedure” designed to kill a living human being inside a pregnant woman⁸—the unborn child’s mother—by cutting, crushing, lacerating, and dismembering him or her, and then expelling the remains piecemeal. It is not, as some would have it, the equivalent of removing a cyst, tumor, the proverbial “clump of cells,” or an infected organ, however much the crushed remains resemble these to the untutored eye or the fleeting, reluctant glance.

From Rhetoric to Realism?

Having said all of that by way of taking on euphemism, I note that the tide is now turning against euphemism—and with a vengeance. As I write this, *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned by the Supreme Court of the United States in the *Dobbs* decision. A Fox News online feed took the occasion to reference an article in *The Nation* by feminist Sophie Lewis who counsels, in effect, *the abandonment of euphemism* and the embrace of abortion as “justified killing”—on grounds of self-defense. The “justification” is, however, defeasible.

Gestation and birth are in most cases not lethal, and it is a question whether or not some degree of harm or discomfort justifies a *lethal* response. Moreover, to the extent that motive or intention has to be present in the real or potential “aggressor,” there is a conceptual problem for Lewis: For it is precisely the lack of intention, the absence of the capacity for motive or premeditation, that is invoked to deny the fetus’s personhood and thereby establish the right to abort “it,” effectively as a mere object.

There is, however, only so much reality that a writer, so convicted, can embrace before making an atavistic retreat into the fog. Later in the same article, Lewis conjured up the “proto person,” another neology in a long train of inventions designed to dehumanize the unborn. But it is only a superficial innovation, old wine in new bottles, the “potential person” of an older, pseudo-philosophical pro-choice rhetoric. Even President Biden, in what was almost certainly another of his signature fumbles, stumbled onto the truth when he uttered the expression “aborting *the child*”—in *defense* of that act—perhaps provoked into honest speech by “The Science” or just the plain facts available to anyone with eyes to see.

Means without Ends

The contrast of abortion with other procedures or the implied or “forced” equivalence with other procedures is another subtle maneuver to peripheralize the victim linguistically. Even among proliferators one often hears expressions (“statistics”) like, “Since 1973, 60 million abortions have been performed in the United States alone” rather than, “Since 1973, 60 million unborn children have been aborted in the United States alone.” The former formulation is the language of means (or ends), where the subject-object is at best implied. “Abortion” is used in the same mode as “biopsy” or “debridement” or “mastectomy”—as a free-floating verb, detached from object or subject, depicting an action in the abstract—just the way the advocates of abortion like it.

A “fetus”—it used to go without saying—is not a disorder. It is not diseased or damaged tissue—not, at least, until the abortionist’s cannula, curette, and forceps reduce it to such. Abortion does not aim to correct a pathological condition, or cure any disease, or—least of all—save a patient (even the mother, in most instances). And pregnancy—it should go without saying—is not pathology. Every justification tendered for an abortion—and a fortiori for the “right to” abortion—must pass the same threshold of justification, the same ethical stress-test that would be applied to any human being (“in utero” or “ex utero”) and regardless of any other “accidents of birth” or “condition.” This applies, in other words, as much to the fetus as to the life of the woman who bears that human being within her. That is the gravamen of abortion.

Parts without Persons: Mother, Uterus, in Utero

I use the expressions “inside a woman” and “inside a woman’s body” in lieu of “in the womb” and the more clinical “in utero,” because these latter expressions, regardless of their rhetorical function, prescind from the woman and reduce her, in effect, to a biological incubator. This is to play into the

hands of our pro-abortion opponents. Rightly or wrongly, this criticism has been leveled at proliferators and pro-life discourse. Whatever the rhetorical intention, these expressions belie, I believe, rather than betray the heartfelt concern that many if not most proliferators feel for women, especially those with unplanned, challenging, or problematic pregnancies. It behooves us to drop the partial or metonymic “in the womb” and the clinical “in utero” for language that is more holistic and more humane—in (literally) other words, to employ the most transparent, honest expressions at our disposal.

This unadorned picture is the part that is almost never mentioned in all of the pleas, alibis, excuses, explanations, and justifications for elective abortion, abortion on demand—and now, abortion right up to moment before delivery and beyond. For all of that, it must ever be said that there is also a real woman, “with child,” with her own beating heart, fears, anxieties, hardships, and life, with claims on our consideration, care, and love. But—and this is the crux of the matter—our consideration, care, and love for the woman cannot degenerate into aiding and abetting her abortionist in the violent disposal of her offspring. There are other and far better courses of action, though they may well not appear as “easy” as abortion.

Ultimately, the point of tearing back the veil, exposing the accrued layers of abortion euphemism, is not to shame the woman in a difficult pregnancy. It is not even to shame the advocates of abortion or “choice.”⁹ Rather, it is, I hope, to open their eyes to what—in fairness—they may not be seeing (or if seeing, may not truly understand, especially if she has a strong motivation to deny it).¹⁰ But, above all, it is to give the unborn their due, to balance their silent, natural claims to a chance at life, even in the face of the competing considerations and interests that define the “hard cases” so often, so aggressively, and so exclusively put before us by the “The Party of Choice.” Empathy is not theirs alone (as they would have us believe). Euphemism, however, just might be. If our words finally do “cut reality at the joints,” perhaps the abortionist’s hardware won’t.

* * * * *

Permitting myself a lengthy sidebar, one way to avoid the dilemma that tempts so many to abort—one almost never mentioned anymore, perhaps because it has become unthinkable post-1968—is principled abstinence from heterosexual intercourse (regardless of the “status of the parties” as married, unmarried, co-habiting, etc.). With the obvious exception of rape, the overwhelming number of instances in which men and women engage in sexual congress are voluntary and by mutual consent. These couples, in more-than-theory,

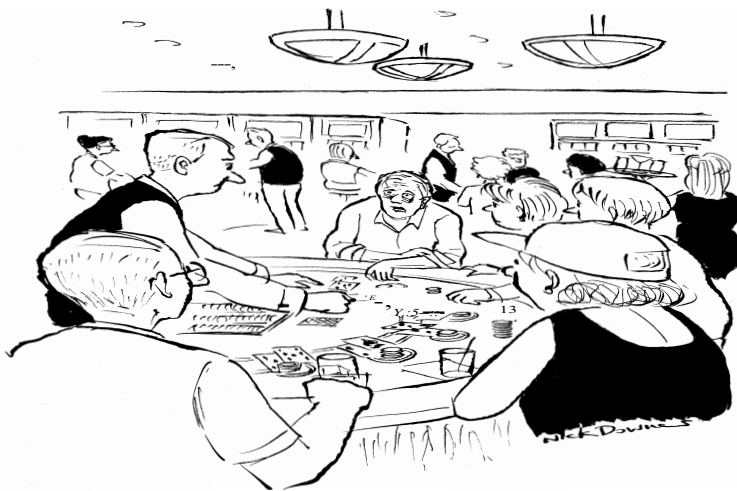
possess and can exercise the liberty to refrain from intercourse or—on one view of the matter—“responsibly” contracept (where their motives for coition exclude procreation, e.g., are exclusively “unitive,” to use terminology drawn from *Humanae Vitae*).

Some talk as if it is “a given that people cannot not copulate,” and that “unplanned pregnancies” are simply inevitable. The sexual urge is clumsily corralled under the rubric of instinct, alongside eating and drinking, conveniently bypassing the fact that abstinence from these latter activities means imminent suffering and eventual death. The “need” (as Joe Biden recently put it with uncharacteristic clarity) “to abort the child” will remain. We appear at times to think that we are no longer capable of altering our ideas, or managing our actions, habits, and urges—even in the face of successful social and cultural precedents, e.g., the abolition of slavery and apartheid, the stigmatization of smoking—or in the face of the great tolls this aggregate activity takes on our national life (apart from the “body count,” that ultimate, gruesome datum). When it comes to sex, we are no longer capable of “self-government.” And, thus, to persuade us “back” toward voluntary continence in our erotic lives is seen as a chimera and a cruel one. Better to imbue our tendencies—flickering though they may be—with the normative status, force, and permanence of a law of nature than to gird our loins and shape our conduct in accordance with principle.

Among modern, educated, “aware” adults—and less mindful but sexually capable adolescents—there seems little or no excuse for believing (and thus acting on the belief) that there is no possibility of sexual congress resulting in conception/pregnancy so long as contraceptive precautions are taken. We do not have a 100 percent foolproof form of contraception. That is a fact. And of course, sometimes precautions aren’t taken—and “chances” are. So-called unplanned pregnancies are hardly unpredictable or even unlikely—let alone impossible. Parenthetically, the locution (ubiquitous in pro-choice rhetoric) “unplanned pregnancy” is simply a verbal screen for the more sincere but morally wanting idea of an “unwanted person,” i.e., just the sort of euphemism that is the target of this analysis. At day’s end, acts that beget persons are not things to be trifled with, are not to be indulged in lightly or—at times—at all. They are freighted with God-like power. In spite of that, we have managed to trivialize them, the language in which we speak of them, and in the process, ourselves and each other, for the sake of fleeting euphoric experiences.

NOTES

1. To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that I think (let alone hope) that RBG’s soul has been consigned to hell, nor the souls of the good folks at HBO (hence, the quote marks around the expression). I—literally—pray that this is not their eternal destination. I follow the classical Christian precept that one must radically be agnostic with respect to the state of the souls of others.
2. George Carlin *Shell Shock* - Bing video.
3. Unsurprisingly, “shellshock” was coined by the soldiers who suffered the condition, not the medical establishment in Britain. See “Shell Shocked” by Edgar Jones, MD, APA, June 2012, Vol. 43, No. 6, p. 18 of the print version.
4. In linguistics, the “SH-“ sound (in English) is called the “voiceless palato-alveolar sibilant.” The sound is generated by creating “friction through clenched teeth by (forcing) air flow through a narrow channel along the middle of the tongue.” Even this disinterested description of the anatomical mechanisms that create the sounds, evince, and express the tense reality that the sounds conjure—a phenomenon in linguistics known as “onomatopoeia.”
5. The quote in its usual formulation is attributed to Senator Hiram Warren Johnson of California, circa 1918, though it seems to have myriad apocryphal authors.
6. This is of course only one specimen, from a class of opaque, polysyllabic cognate expressions, e.g., “terminating a pregnancy” (8 syllables), “reproductive healthcare (6 syllables),” and “fetal demise” (relevant more for its opacity than its length).
7. Not to mention the single word “kill,” the length of which it exceeds by a factor of eight.
8. This point of the moral equivalence of acts (abortion and killing) and the equality of the subjects (victims), born and unborn, is made with great rigor by, among others, Hadley Arkes in *First Things: An Inquiry into the First Principles of Morals and Justice*, 1986, Princeton University Press (see especially Part Two, chapters 15-17).
9. If it is to shame anyone, it is the practitioners of this gruesome, homicidal craft. Given what is daily before their eyes and under their hands, it would be hoping against hope that (my) mere rhetoric would produce the shock of recognition necessary to bring them to their moral senses, see the gravity of their handywork, drop their tools, and repent of their labor—“’Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.”
10. Recalling Christ’s word from the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).



“No, I mean that literally—hit me.”

Peddling the Pro-Life Cause in the Post-Christian Age

Ellen Wilson Fielding

For those of us who are Christians, however much we embrace biology, logic, and the law as tools to convey to others the right to life of the unborn, a fundamental question looms large: How do we effectively communicate a sanctity of human life ethic developed over the course of 2,000 years in the Christian West, when the societies that Western Christians live in are now post-Christian?

The final clause of that question—“when the societies that Western Christians live in are now post-Christian”—is I think increasingly hard to dispute, particularly if you pay close attention to my wording. To confine ourselves to this country, I am not saying that a majority of Americans no longer identify as Christians. According to a 2020 Pew survey,¹ 64 percent of Americans identify as Christians (down from 90 percent fifty years earlier, though still a majority). Among young adults (aged 18 through 29), a smaller majority (56 percent), but still a majority, reported identifying as Christian.

Still, even among the declining majorities of those still accepting the label of Christian, many interpret their Christianity in ways that would astonish their spiritual ancestors. For example, a great many Christians, particularly in the younger tiers, speak of “my truth” and “your truth” rather than “*the* Truth,” which would puzzle past believers of any but the most syncretistic religions. In 2005, sociologist of religion Christian Smith interviewed 3,000 American teens (who would now be in their thirties) and identified a set of common beliefs among them. In their book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Smith and co-author Melinda Lundquist Denton termed this collection of beliefs Moral Therapeutic Deism. As set out by Smith and Denton, these common beliefs are:

- A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught by the Bible and by most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

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- God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.

There is no reason to believe (see Pew, among others) that in the succeeding 18 years most people—including young adults—have grown more doctrinally orthodox or chosen to order their lives more closely to traditional morality. The morally and intellectually undemanding nature of Moral Therapeutic Deism suggests that even many of those Americans who call themselves Christians are following a Christianity that would be unrecognizable to, say, St. Paul.

Perhaps the most we can say is that many of us seem to be in transit, unsure whether to undertake the seemingly hopeless task of swimming upstream against a strong current, or just relax and let the river follow a course along the path of least resistance.

Of course, the moral landscape will vary according to the region of the country we inhabit. Many of those who continue to call themselves Christians, and mean by that a religious belief recognizable in creed and morality to bygone generations of Christians, predominately collect in certain geographic areas—most obviously the South. And the largest concentrations of the unchurched or disaffected-from-dogma, as well as atheists and agnostics, have massed themselves on either shore of the continent and in scattered major urban centers in between. Each concentration is somewhat diluted by the other, but the generalities roughly hold true.

Still, the trendlines are heading in a certain direction. And this reality tugs against the sort of weirdly optimistic view some of us have that we Americans are a God-fearing people captured by the infidel educational establishment, the news media, the entertainment industry, professional sports, Big Business, government bureaucracy, Silicon Valley transhumanists, the scientific establishment—have I left anybody out? That adds up to a large number of human beings purveying a “minority” view. It seems clear that these institutions are more radical than most of the rest of us, but it is not so clear that most of us aren't heading in the same direction, albeit at different speeds and with differing degrees of self-awareness and intent.

My tentative conclusion, then, with the caveats entered above, is that we have met the Enemy and he is Us. Consider how many of those outside these institutions—or inside and unhappy—nevertheless repeatedly make peace with a lot of bad notions (bad from both the pro-life perspective and the pre-post-Christian perspective). As the years roll on and the level of publicly tolerated insanity keeps rising—the transgender hormones and surgeries pressed on middle schoolers, the “nonbinaries” proliferating, the neon-blue

states pushing abortion privileges to the very threshold of birth (and why stop there?), the metamorphosis of that famed Canadian “niceness” into a kind of horror-movie homicidal mania just a few short years into their plunge into legalized euthanasia—you have to ask why, if we non-post-Christians are so different from all those seemingly dictating to us, we don’t firmly and consistently vote them out or boycott what they are selling or decline to participate. Despite the shrill electioneering every two years, and despite the many closely contested contests, most people, most of the time, don’t seem to live very differently from the norm or object very deeply to their day-to-day immersion in a deeply dysfunctional society. Some people are despairing and think it pointless to protest. But rather a large number (as proliferators know just as well as the pollsters) don’t deeply care about any of the life issues that cause us to lose sleep, even if they are willing to register their disquiet with the most unpalatable aspects of abortion on demand in a survey.

Dobbs, as we know, sent abortion back to the states, to the voters. At long last we are free, for a time, from desperately fixating on Supreme Court nominations as almost our sole hope of victory. Now the end that we have labored so long and so hard for depends instead upon state ballot boxes. (It also depends to some extent on state courts, as we saw some months ago, but that is another and still presumably state-bound issue.)

Certain states are already comfortable with sharply curtailing abortion; others (the usual suspects) are competing with each other for the prize of most progressive abortion law. Most are in between; possibly they will eventually line up more or less on a Western European model that outlaws late-term abortion on demand. Overall, across the varied expanse of our country, it seems likely for the near term that abortion will be made somewhat more difficult to obtain than in the pre-*Dobbs* days, and overall numbers will probably decrease. This is a good thing, since each human being is of incalculable value. But abortion is unlikely to be beyond the reach of anyone determined to have one, and the more liberal parts of the country will be encouraging abortion tourism. In addition, there is the game-changing nature of the abortion pill in an era of remote medicine and mail-order prescriptions.

Therefore, rendering the womb safe for unborn children will once again come down to changing minds and hearts. And this is where the significance of living in a post-Christian society lies. It determines what hearts and minds need to be changed *from* so that they can be changed *to* a view of human life that acknowledges its sanctity “from conception to natural death.”

In the Christian tradition, the underlying moral philosophy identifying our duties to one another is, despite the uncomfortableness of using a phrase long

weaponized by the left, something like a “seamless garment.” The Christian injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves and to see Christ in each person enjoins us to relieve suffering and battle injustice on many fronts. Over millennia, that underlying Christian philosophy of the human person slowly and very partially and imperfectly began to permeate many aspects of Western society, grappling in different eras with each age’s hallmark moral challenges. The past few centuries have seen a strengthening counter-pattern of deconversion, or of intentional movements to shed traditional Christianity and with it (unavoidably, regardless of whether or not that was the primary intention) the moral and physical protections afforded by the philosophy of the human person underlying it.

Christopher Dawson, in his profound book on *The Formation of Christendom*, explained the early Christians’ relations with a not-yet-converted pagan Roman Empire in this way:

To Cato the slave is a chattel, to be sold when he becomes old and sickly, he is purely an economic instrument to whom even the practices of religion are forbidden—all that must be left to the master. St. Paul sends the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master to be “received not now as a slave, but instead of a slave, a most dear brother, especially to me. But how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord?”

This contrast is not economic. The old legal rights are the same in either case, but an inner revolution has been effected which must necessarily produce in time a corresponding change in all external social and economic relationships.

Consequently, the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, when it came, marked a revolution not only in the history of Christian culture but in the history of the world.²

What then should we have expected—what then should we now expect—from the Western world’s deconversion?

In our own time we find a host of peculiarly modern forms of human exploitation, such as egg donation, frozen embryos, surrogate mothers, and various forms of genetic research. In addition, an economic and productivity-based valuation of people partly underlies campaigns to legalize assisted suicide. The calculation of the “quality of life” of the old and infirm, the senile and handicapped, tends almost inevitably to focus on productivity, working intelligence, and financial independence.

Those calculations coexist with other, individualistic measures of “quality of life” as personal autonomy, which is not so much a status or condition as an emotional and psychological reaction to perceptions of one’s status or condition. After all, the same set of circumstances can strike one person as unacceptable and another person as acceptable, though far from ideal. While all of us fear pain, incapacitation, loneliness and depression, our personal

preferences and temperaments and our beliefs about the meaning and destiny of human life will enter into how insupportable we find each of them.

And because these varying reactions to all sorts of human deprivations are (in our ranking of them and in the intensity of our response to them) personal and even idiosyncratic, they cannot tell us with any rigor or objectivity where the preciousness of human life lies. Instead, they resemble the “reasoning” we undertake to decide whether to euthanize a beloved family pet. “Fido is suffering,” we think, “and he can no longer do the things he used to enjoy.” If it is true that human beings anthropomorphize animals, the reverse is also true: We frequently find it easy to identify our own conditions with theirs.

If someone threatened us with extinction unless we could explain why our life was precious and valuable, why it should be preserved and sustained and honored, *as human life*, how would a devotee of such personally derived markers of quality of life respond? A feeling-based defense of our continued existence does not prepare us for an objective and morally and logically binding defense of our continued existence to an outside observer.

And it is precisely someone outside ourselves that we are concerned with in the case of abortion, even though that “outside” person is actually, for a period of several months, “inside” the mother. If our ideas about what would make or break our own quality of life are not generalizable but personal to us and emotion-based, so too are the ideas about the unborn’s current and future quality of life to the post-Christian or post-Christian-influenced or disaffected-from-dogma woman who finds herself in a crisis pregnancy. The child’s fate rests on the mother’s emotional and psychological reflections about whether the child would be better off dead or alive, whether the mother feels capable financially or psychologically or emotionally of undertaking motherhood, whether she wants a child (and whether she wants one now), whether prenatal tests indicate a problem—so many questions and concerns and emotions, but none of them building on the question of what the unborn child is and whether that child qualifies *ontologically, by his or her status as a human being*, to be born, and subsequently fed and clothed and cared for, even if the mother herself is not in a position to do so.

Abortion is always an emotional decision, even when it takes account of reason. A woman who considers abortion is clearly unhappy about her pregnant condition. She or her partner or family and loved ones don’t want a child (now) or don’t feel they can care for this one or provide for it. Tsunamis of emotion will normally be passing through almost anyone entangled in such a situation. The natural inclination to be drawn in the direction of our feelings, like a log surrendering to a rushing stream, is very strong—in both the woman who believes in the sanctity of human life and the woman who does not.

People in both categories have aborted their babies under the pressure of circumstances and the strength of their emotions. But the woman who lacks an underlying recognition of the objective sanctity of human life, barring some other strong inclination, will only and always be dragged about by her emotions. The emotions themselves will vary, and so therefore will the direction in which they drag her. A more accepting partner, the unexpected lift of a sunny spring day, even a prolifer's handout with pictures of the unborn baby at eight and ten and twelve weeks, may tilt the decision toward life. Overall, however, in times such as ours, if a typical young woman detached from traditional religious dogma can accept that men really turn into women and women into men if they think that's who they are, then such a woman can also consider an unborn baby sentient, conscious, and valuable if the mother wants it, and "a blob of tissue" if she doesn't.

That's where believing in, relying on, changeable and individualistic emotions and states of mind gets you when it comes to evaluating the human worth of a fetus, or the gender of a man or woman, or the quality of life of a senile or largely incapacitated adult. Emotions will lead if the mind does not provide the will with reasons to go in another direction. And emotions only lead us right sometimes—usually when they have been properly schooled.

For centuries Christianity has been working to school balky, emotion-driven, self-interested, self-indulgent people into acknowledging and respecting the God-given, imperishable, immortal value of the human being (a value beyond valuing, unless you dare to value each life at the cost of a deicide on the hill of Calvary). Such an endeavor, undertaken with and by and for fallen, imperfect, and often unappealing fellow human beings, has always met with imperfect results, both individually and in nations and eras. But the effort so to value fellow members of our God-touched species is 1) a way of getting onto firmer ground for decision-making than passing emotions and states of mind and 2) superior to the contingency-based or group-based valuations of human beings that preceded Christianity and now rival radical individualism, grading a human being according to a calculus of hierarchy, wealth, tribe, talents, productivity, and chance.

What does all this mean in practical terms for those of us peddling pro-life causes in the post-*Dobbs* era of the post-Christian age in which we live? In some ways, not much. In the political realm of the states—and where the federal political realm continues to be germane to our efforts—pro-life people who are good at this sort of thing will do what they always have done: They will make the reasonable and the scientific and the emotional arguments for life, and they will make the best deals that they can. Those deals

will be closer to the pro-life ideal in more family-friendly and fetus-friendly and life-affirming sectors of the country, which still resist with some success, or less failure, the slide into post-Christianity. The contrary will be true in other regions of the country, but such has already been the case for decades now—even predating *Roe*.

Meanwhile, on the front lines of baby-saving and life-affirming, in our exchanges with women and families in crisis or with our own families, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, we will also continue to do what has to be done—making arguments that we sometimes “know” will have no effect, trying to meet the needs or allay the fears of each person in their given circumstances, offering personal testimonies that can be ridiculed or dismissed, explaining our understanding of the value of human life in the eyes of God.

Will we win all or most of our arguments? Will we inspire and strengthen all or most of those women and families in crisis? No, but that too is not new. Not even the most baptized eras of human history since leaving Eden have done that well. How much harder it will get, and for how long, is unclear. But in a way it is already harder than we may fully realize, and despite that there are and have been and will be a multitude of small (and sometimes not so small!) victories.

Pessimists like me often cultivate odd pockets of hopefulness, even in challenging times. At the close of 2022 someone very dear to me (though he never knew me) died. When he commented on our times, he was something of a pessimist too. But he wrote beautifully on the supernatural virtue of hope, and in 1969, he spoke with ultimate hopefulness of the dark times appearing on the horizon. Father Joseph Ratzinger (who would later become Pope Benedict XVI) explained,

If today we are scarcely able any longer to become aware of God, that is because we find it so easy to evade ourselves, to flee from the depths of our being by means of the narcotic of some pleasure or other. Thus our own interior depths remain closed to us.³

He went on to trace the arc the Church would track as he saw it at this juncture:

. . . . From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge—a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning It will be hard going for the Church, for the process of crystallization and clarification will . . . make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek. . . . But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church. Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.

In the days and weeks and months and years following *Dobbs*, which in turn followed *Roe*, which in turn followed great ages of sanctity and sinfulness going back 2000 years to the death of Christ, we must keep doing, broadly speaking, the things we have been doing. Many of the specifics and some of the arenas in which pro-life efforts occur will grow or diminish in importance; some opportunities will open, a few close, but much will remain the same.

But we should try to remember, simultaneously with all the striving, that (as Mother Teresa kept reminding us) we are called to be faithful and not necessarily successful. And we should try to become—for ourselves, for our children, and for those around us—what Father Ratzinger foresaw we could be: “A hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.”

NOTES

1. Pew Research Center, *Modeling the Future of Religion in America*, Sept. 13, 2022. How the U.S. Religious Landscape Could Change Over the Next 50 Years | Pew Research Center.
2. Christopher Dawson, *The Formation of Christendom*. NY: Sheed & Ward, 1967.
3. Joseph Ratzinger, “What Will the Church Look Like in 2000,” *Faith and the Future*. San Francisco: St. Ignatius Press, 2009.

BOOKNOTES

THE WEAPONIZATION OF LONELINESS: HOW TYRANTS STOKE OUR FEAR OF ISOLATION TO SILENCE, DIVIDE, AND CONQUER

Stella Morabito

(Bombardier Books, 2022, paper, 304 pages, \$19.99)

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TOTALITARIANISM

Mattias Desmet

(Chelsea Green Publishing, 2022, hardcover, 240 pages, \$28)

Reviewed by Jason Morgan

Over the past few years, lockdowns, vaccine mandates, information squelching (and often outright censorship), social distancing, mask requirements, cancel culture, and murderous riots have torn the very fabric of American life. And not just American life—worldwide, societies are reeling from what appear to be deep and pervasive problems in our shared human lives. We do not trust one another, do not like one another, do not appear to want or need one another, and have come to have little to no patience even for the presence of other people in our vicinity. We are, in short, lonely. Suicides, depression, drinking, drug use—all the symptoms of a breakdown in interpersonal relationships—have been skyrocketing as the pandemic and the ills that attended it have beaten the world black and blue.

We know this is happening, but what in the world is really going on? The coronavirus pandemic was of course a problem in its own right, but it also exacerbated pre-existing maladies. That is just the point. The problems were with us before the pandemic hit, and don't appear to be getting better now that the manic years of the early twenties are giving way to grim, abiding reality once again. How have we turned into people who exemplify the war of all against all?

A good set of answers can be found in the 2022 book *The Weaponization of Loneliness*. Here, former CIA analyst and current *Federalist* and *Human Life Review* contributor Stella Morabito tracks the mechanisms by which our basic human need for acceptance and belonging has been twisted by “tyrants” (in her words) into atomization, alienation, and even cruelty toward our fellow human beings.

Morabito begins with some useful historical sketches of similar episodes from the past: Robespierre's French Revolution, Cromwell's regicidal England,

Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, and Mao's China. In those cases, Morabito argues, the basics of life in common—faith, culture, even the often-overlooked importance of private conversations—were systematically undermined by people or groups seeking total control. The tyrant hates organic social cohesion, Morabito explains, citing a raft of other thinkers who argue similarly. Anyone who wants to bend society to his will, therefore, has to destroy the things that bind people to one another, so that they will sway to his tune like a million cobras in a million separate baskets.

“Totalitarians have always targeted the private sphere of life for destruction,” Morabito notes. “The rallying cry ‘Abolish the family!’ comes straight from *The Communist Manifesto*” (xxix).

This is just the beginning of Morabito's analysis, however. *The Weaponization of Loneliness* does much more than provide historical context for the social ills of the present. In fact, Morabito makes a distinction that I think raises *The Weaponization of Loneliness* to the status of a must-read. In the past, she observes, identifiable psychopaths were prominent in their drives to remake society after their deluded visions, but today it is people who are “almost-psychopaths,” working not so much against as with society and its institutions, who are tearing our world apart. Yes, identity politics, political correctness, cancel culture, and other trends that feed on social isolation are stoked by people in government, academia, and the media, Morabito argues. But there is not really a Hitler, Stalin, or Mao to whom one can point as the ganglion of evil impulses. The pathology is diffused. Mobs form, Morabito notes, almost of their own volition. People in positions of power and authority whip up mob anger and hatred, true. But the mobs that burned down Black businesses in major American cities in 2020, the Twitter mobs that swarm doctors and professors who question party lines on history, medicine, or a dozen other subjects, the mobs that ransacked Portland and attacked journalists as “fascists,” the mobs that torch pro-life pregnancy centers (as the FBI apparently looks the other way), the mobs that shriek “homophobia” and “transphobia” when gender ideology is subjected to scrutiny—these are products of a post-truth environment in which people have lost the ability to engage with reality using their common sense. Morabito makes a powerful case that the weaponized loneliness of the present is systemic (to borrow a freighted term), beyond the ability of any one tyrant to control.

“Unlike radical revolutions we may have read about in history books,” Morabito argues, “there appears to be no primary force cultivating the oppressive trends multiplying around us” (3).

And yet, the past does matter. We did not spontaneously self-destruct as a society. Somebody had to throw the grenades. A lot of somebodies, in fact.

As Morabito lays out in great detail, our social anomie has long been incubating under the watchful eyes of some very insidious characters. Social saboteurs (my term, not Morabito's) such as education "reformer" John Dewey (1859-1952), professional agitator Saul Alinsky (1909-1972), bad-faith professors Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and (unrepentant terrorist) Bill Ayers, and sexual revolutionaries Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), his companion Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956), and Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) paved the way for the conceptual and anthropological chaos we see around us today. Readers will likely be as fascinated as I was to see Morabito connect these various strains of antisocial behavior into a very disturbing tapestry of a century gone wrong.

But to make this case for human agency is also to buttress Morabito's larger, Gramscian argument that it is the culture which has turned against human society. Gender dysphoria in kindergarteners, pronoun tyranny, critical race theory, Marxists masquerading as Black Lives Matter activists—all of this is in the air, agreed to by many in public out of fear, but not manipulated by this or that mastermind behind the scenes. It is disharmony that has taken over, and it is rooted in the fundamental breakdown of human communication. Morabito returns often to Allan Bloom's 1987 work *The Closing of the American Mind* to reinforce her argument that it is not Person A or Person B who is to blame for our social problems, but the disintegration of American social (and moral and intellectual and spiritual) life as a whole. The breakdown has momentum now, in other words, and not even a tyrant could take the reins of this team of horses gone mad. As Morabito writes, when protestors turned out in social-media-fired droves to cancel Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court in 2018, they shouted, "Believe all women!" But when Ketanji Brown Jackson was nominated to the Supreme Court just three and a half years later, she could not answer the question "What is a woman?" This is not someone's sick control of society—this is a sign that society itself is sick.

Morabito focuses on the United States in much of her outstanding book, but we should remember that the disorders wracking our world are global. While she does an excellent job of analyzing the psychological pathologies that are crippling the United States, relying partly on the work of other social analysts (American and otherwise) such as Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), Edward Bernays (1891-1995), Margaret Thaler Singer (1921-2003), Carl Jung (1875-1961), Joost Meerloo (1903-1976), and Solomon Asch (1907-1996), there is even more to the story than Morabito's study reveals.

This is where I turn to *The Psychology of Totalitarianism* by Mattias Desmet, a professor of clinical psychology at Ghent University in Belgium who has

given us what I think will be a classic of the Covid era, perhaps akin to the work of Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), which Desmet and Morabito both cite extensively. Desmet's 2022 book is a probing, fearless rethinking of the entire scientific order, in the manner of a Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994) or Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996). It seems destined to become an index volume that future scholars and curious laypeople will read to try to understand (good luck!) the craziness of the corona years. Desmet is young, but he commands a wealth of knowledge about not only psychology but history and science, and he has the courage to follow his own mind rather than the bleatings of the herd. *The Psychology of Totalitarianism* is a bleak book in many ways, a portrait of the frailty of human reason. But it is also, by that same token, a needful one. We are not, Desmet tells us, nearly as much in control of the world as we think.

Desmet's argument, at its most basic, is that human beings are limited creatures with a rather bizarre psychology that makes it difficult for us to arrive at and understand bare, factual, statistical truth. Desmet states this argument in various ways throughout his book, but a good example appears in a fascinating chapter on "the living universe," where he describes how the world around us (as chaos theory has partly revealed) has a mind of its own, and how human minds do not often do very well in understanding this. In this vein he writes:

A society primarily has to stay connected with a number of principles and fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of speech, the right to self-determination, and the right to freedom of religion or belief. If a society fails to respect these fundamental rights of the individual, if it allows fear to escalate to such an extent that every form of individuality, intimacy, privacy, and personal initiative is regarded as an intolerable threat to "the collective well-being," it will decay into chaos and absurdity. The belief in the mechanistic nature of the universe and the associated overestimation of the powers of the human intellect, typical of the Enlightenment, were accompanied by a tendency to lead society in a less and less principled manner. (157-158)

This is where Desmet brings into his sights the Enlightenment, which he sees as one of the major drivers of, ironically, irrational behavior in human beings. Desmet does not dismiss the Enlightenment out of hand, as the above paragraph about individual rights makes clear. But he does note that the Enlightenment places too much emphasis on reason, which, Desmet says, is not as reasonable as we would like it to be. Human beings are highly susceptible to group pressures, and we routinely throw our reason overboard to please what we perceive to be the group's preferred way of thinking (or not thinking, as is more often the case). Desmet continues:

Within a purely mechanistic way of thinking, it is extremely difficult (not to say impossible) to ground ethical principles. Why should a machine man in a machine

universe have to adhere to principles and ethical rules in relationships with others? Isn't it ultimately about being the *fittest* in the struggle for survival? And therefore, aren't ethics and principles a hindrance rather than a merit? In the final analysis, it was no longer a question for Enlightenment people to adhere to commandments and prohibitions or ethical and moral principles, but to move through this struggle for survival in the most efficient way based on "objective knowledge" of the world. This culminated in totalitarian and technocratic forms of government, where decisions are not made on the basis of generally applicable laws and principles but on the basis of the analysis of "experts." For this reason, totalitarianism always chooses to abolish laws, or fails to implement them, and prefers to rule "by decree." [. . .] This is perhaps the most direct and concrete illustration of Hannah Arendt's thesis that ultimately totalitarianism is the symptom of a naïve belief in the omnipotence of human rationality. (158; emphasis in original)

It is worth noting, in the context of Desmet's analysis of "experts" who provide totalitarians with the (pseudo-) scientific justification they need to carry out absolute rule on "Enlightenment" principles, that Stella Morabito's book cover features a photograph of an old television set tuned to a grainy image of one Anthony Fauci. "I am the science," said this "expert." As Desmet might reply, "Precisely."

There is much else in Desmet's extraordinary book about how masses are formed out of broken-down people, and how our psychology, particularly as it develops during early childhood, can contribute to the manipulation of masses of adults. I was not always completely convinced by Desmet's psychological arguments (some of them were a bit too determinative for my tastes), but they are nevertheless compelling and a refreshing take on the sorry state of our disordered world.

To give just one example of some psychological analysis with which I very much agreed, Desmet argues that our need to belong—something that Morabito also stresses—leads us to accept patently untrue propaganda, simply because such acceptance is the ticket to our being accepted as part of the group. "In all major mass formations," Desmet writes,

. . . the main argument for joining in is solidarity with the collective. And those who refuse to participate are typically accused of lacking solidarity and civic responsibility. This is one reason why the absurd elements in a story do not matter to the masses: *The masses believe in the story not because it's accurate but because it creates a new social bond.* (97; emphases in original)

This is a theme running throughout both Desmet's and Morabito's works here under review. Indeed, much of Desmet's book is an effort to understand how people around the world bought into what would probably appear, in non-pandemic times, to be utterly unscientific pronouncements and preposterous demands—even to the point of injecting experimental serums that fiddle with our cells at the ribonucleic level. The answer to this mass insanity is

in the gray matter between our ears, which, Desmet reminds us, is not nearly as good at thinking clearly and dispassionately as High Enlightenment discourse tells us it is. “Trust the science?” Well, it depends—who is the scientist, and who does he or she work for?

Stella Morabito’s *The Weaponization of Loneliness* and Mattias Desmet’s *The Psychology of Totalitarianism* are, in my view, both essential books for our time. They provide thought-trails out of the morass of herd behavior and unscientific tail-chasing. They remind us that we are human beings and that we do not have to be pushed around by tyrants. It is for these reasons, and because both books deal with similar subjects in complementary ways, that I recommend that they be read together. As a bonus, Morabito provides an uplifting closing chapter about what we can do to stop being lonely and start living human lives again. Have conversations, she tells us. Speak the truth in public. Don’t be afraid. We can recover our humanity and our societies, Morabito is telling us. But first we have to figure out what’s wrong.

Along those lines, here’s a really great idea that Morabito offers—start a book club. Read texts with friends and neighbors, she encourages us, and discuss them like civil adults. Brilliant, and I absolutely agree. Let me add this: When you start your own book club, put *The Weaponization of Loneliness* and *The Psychology of Totalitarianism* on the list for Week One.

—Jason Morgan is associate professor at Reitaku University in Kashiwa, Japan.

THE STORY OF ABORTION IN AMERICA: A STREET-LEVEL HISTORY, 1652-2022

Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas
(Crossway, 2023, 512 pp., \$39.95)

Reviewed by John Grondelski

Ecclesiastes advises that “there is nothing new under the sun.” Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas show that much of the history of abortion in America can be summed up as “been there, done that.” This doesn’t mean their book is boring or repetitive: In fact, it’s quite engaging. Through 50-plus chapters and over 500 pages, the writers keep the story moving, interesting, even gripping.

Most histories of abortion focus on laws and court cases. What did Blackstone mean? What drove abortion law “reform” in the late 1960s and early

1970s? Olasky and Savas examine abortion as it has been practiced. Yes, they cite the law, but often to point out how inadequately laws were enforced.

Surprised that Kermit Gosnell got away with his unregulated “house of horrors” in Philadelphia? “Madame Restell,” the abortion trade name of Anna Lohman, a leading Manhattan abortionist in the mid-1800s, avoided jail despite New York’s pro-life laws because of her largesse (read bribes) to Tammany Hall Democrats who looked the other way.

Worried that pharmaceutical abortifacients might be used to subvert state laws restricting abortion? Chemically induced abortions (usually some form of herb) preceded surgical abortions in American history. State and federal Comstock laws banning interstate commerce in abortifacients were already in place in the 1870s.

Shocked that some people tried ingesting Clorox to fight COVID? In the 1890s, some women were ingesting Lysol to induce “antiseptic” abortions.

Olasky and Savas’s “street level history” demonstrates that America has always been of two minds about abortion: a visceral awareness that there was “something” wrong with the practice and a utilitarian willingness to dispose of an inconvenient pregnancy, usually one stemming from nonmarital origins. In the process, they explode myths cultivated by revisionist pro-abortion historians like Cyril Means (who played no mean role in Harry Blackmun’s twisted history of abortion in *Roe*) about the “abortion liberty” in this country.

Take, for example, the claim that it was not until 1821 that abortion was restricted in the United States. The authors refute this, documenting and discussing criminal cases involving abortion dating back to 1652 in Maryland. (There may even have been an earlier case in 1629 Virginia, but those records went up in smoke with the Confederate evacuation of Richmond). Nor did the 1821 Connecticut law come out of nowhere: It was enacted following a trial in which an Episcopal clergyman got a reduced sentence following a procured abortion involving a young lady to whom he had devoted particular ministrations. Again, there’s nothing new under the sun.

By the way, the Nutmeg State’s legislature was not the first legislative body in what would become the United States to proscribe abortion. That honor goes to the New York Common Council—the forerunner of today’s New York City Council—which imposed an oath on Manhattan midwives not to “counsel or administer” abortifacients in 1716.

Olasky and Savas remind readers that our understanding of human procreation only came about in the last 175 years. The female reproductive system is largely internal, mostly invisible to the eye and inaccessible in a pre-anesthesia world. That’s one reason why so much attention was attached to “quicken-ing” as a sign of life in the womb—it was discernible. If colonial juries let off

abortionists with insignificant penalties—especially if only the unborn child and not the mother died—it was because in a pre-pregnancy test/non-ultrasound world, establishing that a pregnancy existed, and then proving it was illegally terminated, largely depended on the word of the few parties directly involved. That was typically enough to bestir “reasonable doubts.”

The book makes clear that abortion cannot be seen apart from the social world in which it occurs. In colonial America, for example, the social pressures of small communities tended to protect women from irresponsible men who might engage in premarital sex and then abandon mother and child. Things changed in the early 18th century as industrialization attracted young women to towns and cities—such as the textile mills of New England or the exploding metropolis of New York—in search of work, money, and opportunities. (This was one reason, Olasky and Savas note, why YWCAs were founded.)

Nineteenth-century developments in gynecology and obstetrics led to a doctors’ movement to ban abortion, not just because the procedure was unsafe for women but because it took the life of a child. Among the book’s many lessons is that pro-life minds and hearts require a pro-life culture as well as pro-life laws—a perspective in post-*Dobbs* America we fail to reckon with at our peril.

Olasky and Savas are uncompromisingly pro-life, but also unflinching in examining the historical record. Prolifers who are fond of quoting Santayana on the dangers of not knowing history would be wise to seek out this book. Highly recommended.

—*John M. Grondelski (Ph.D., Fordham) was former associate dean of the School of Theology, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. All views expressed herein are his.*

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George McKenna is professor emeritus of political science at City College of the City University of New York and the author of *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (2007), which *National Review* called "one of the year's best books." McKenna's superb *Atlantic* article "On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position" was reprinted by the *Human Life Review* in 1995; since then, he has written over 20 essays for the HLR. His most recent, "Getting There," is the subject of the symposium "Where Do We Go from *Dobbs*?" on p. 21.

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FROM THE WEBSITE

GO TO THE MATTRESSES?

William Murchison

Just when we thought the federal judiciary had given over its avocation of sorting through the moral questions that surround the issue of abortion, lo, the federal judiciary resumed its avocation of sorting through the moral questions that surround the issue of abortion.

As political controversies go—and the mifepristone flap is a political controversy, make no mistake about it—this one is a lulu; a lulu fraught with deadly consequences for the unborn, as well as for shall we say the moral commonsense of the nation.

The U.S. Supreme Court will have to address and perhaps, in some way, in some manner, some fashion—resolve the issue, though just how is hard at present to see. We are not back to 1973 and the incipience of *Roe v. Wade*, which is practically as well as theoretically dead, but the politics involved have not lost their fetid odor. We might want to keep our gas masks at the ready.

In two cases involving the Federal Drug Administration's 23-year-old decision to approve use of a pill—mifepristone—that precipitates abortion, the complexity and perdurability of the abortion mess, so to call it, comes out of present-day shadows and into brilliant light.

No, abortion isn't a constitutional right—enforced by the federal government—but the idea behind the right hasn't lifted like Noah's flood. Individual states, according to local consciences and worldviews, may enforce it, in part by making mifepristone available to prospective mothers.

Hold it right here, said a Texas federal judge—appointed by Donald Trump, as the media reliably inform us—the FDA's ruling, however long ago it came down, wrongly approved use of the abortion pill.

Hold it yourself, a federal judge in Washington State countered, in essence, 20 minutes later. The FDA's judgment deserved respect. The judge, as duly noted in the media, was appointed by Barack Obama. If you don't get the politics of the matter, your eyes aren't open: Democrats say yes to mifepristone; Republicans say no. Let's fight it out, huh? The challenge couldn't be clearer.

With the Supreme Court waiting figuratively in the wings to referee the squabble, we count on 2023 and 2024 as years of vitriolic controversy over the assumptions of the pro-life wing of American life versus those assumptions and views of the pro-choice wing. It will not be edifying. It will not be

useful to the ending—if such is intended—of our seemingly endless failures to deal with one another as reasonable people. Which perhaps could be because we're not reasonable in the first place. On the other hand, American history by and large refutes the notion that a common mind on large questions—yes, even on slavery after a time, a rather long time—is beyond the reach of a scrappy people.

The fly in the buttermilk, unless my aging eyes fail me, is politics; or, rather the enthronement of politics and political perspectives as primary in human affairs. When you hang around politicians all the time, or those who live by their words and notions, you quickly get the idea that virtue resides in one brand of politics and unlimited vice in the other brands. You want—grrrr—to stamp out the bad kinds. You'd rather look at polls than principles.

The politicization of the “choice” issue means you strive to put in power those who promise to work for your cause. It's warfare—cut, slash, rat-a-tat-tat: sometimes for real.

Roe v. Wade wrested the abortion issue from any semi-peaceable context it might have enjoyed and delivered it into the keeping of judges backed by politicians with specialized views as to what constituents were entitled to do—and as to who, correspondingly, had jolly well better let 'em do as they please.

Abortion as a moral issue—involving obligation to principles and understandings higher than preference alone—too infrequently comes into view in our time: which suggests, in place of *guerre à outrance*, as we're accustomed to observing all around us, the need for meetings, frequent ones, of minds and hearts.

We may yet get there once black robes, ear mikes, and cameras retreat even part way from the American scene: a big ask if ever there was one. Meantime, pull out the ear plugs. Hide the children. We live in a nasty time getting nastier by the hour, the minute, the millisecond.

—*William Murchison, a former syndicated columnist, is a senior editor of the Human Life Review. He will soon finish his book on moral restoration in our time.*

LAZARUS & HUMAN ECOLOGY

David Poecking

Prolifers can learn from the marvelously practical language of Alcoholics Anonymous. In AA, the phrase “stinking thinking” refers to destructive habits of thought that tend to return the alcoholic to the bottle. Those of us concerned with abortion do well to be alert to how our own thinking might serve—or fail to serve—our cause.

Rationalizing the Bad Logic

The alcoholic tells himself, “Just one more drink, and tomorrow I’ll stop.” Likewise the gambling addict, “Just one more win, and then I can go home.” And many an abortion begins with a similar rationale: a man saying to his partner, or a woman saying to herself, “We’re not quite ready. We’ve just got to get past this pregnancy, and then we’ll be in the clear for whatever we want down the road.”

Pope Francis describes this habit of thinking as the “use and throw away” logic, because he sees it operative in poor ecological choices as well as in the exploitation of people:

The culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labor on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests. It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage. In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species? Is it not the same relativistic logic which justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale or use in experimentation, or eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted? This same “use and throw away” logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato si* (123)

We tell ourselves that the past is in the past; but in reality it endures, not only in the accumulating trash, but in our decision-making habits, our “stinking thinking.” We reject the lie from obvious addicts who tell us that today is an exception, tomorrow will be different. But as Francis observes, too many of us accept the lie when it comes to matters of ecology—whether environmental ecology, or human ecology and the problem of abortion. The habit

of throwing away children to get what we want in the short term becomes a culture of death, poisoning all our institutions: sexual relations, family, law and jurisprudence, politics, journalism, even social security!

The Special Damage of Abortion

When it comes to human ecology and throwing away children, there is a third consequence, beyond the loss of children and the perversion of our social institutions: Because people never truly go away, abortion alienates us from each other, the born from the unborn.

This is one of Jesus's lessons in John 11, the story of the raising of Lazarus. Martha's brother Lazarus had died, and Jesus assures her that Lazarus will rise again. Martha concedes the point, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day," as if this distant reality consoles her very little in the moment. Jesus famously responds, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

What Jesus teaches in this crisis is that though he may be dead to the world, Lazarus isn't really dead: He lives in Jesus! Martha should be consoled not only by the promise of resurrection on the last day, but by the assurance of life now. As Jesus says elsewhere: "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living: All are alive in him" (Luke 20:38).

If Lazarus's ongoing life is consolation for his sister Martha, then the life of the unborn, though aborted, is a challenge to all of us. Do we think that by abortion we have evaded the consequences of that new life? On the contrary, we have intensified our difficulties, for we have assumed the burden of the sin of killing, and we owe an account of ourselves both to the unborn and to the Lord in whom they live. That debt comes due not only on "the last day," but must be serviced beginning immediately.

And lest I be misunderstood, let me hasten to explain that the debt is owed not only by mothers and abortionists, but by all of us who, to one extent or another, fail to create the conditions necessary for new life to be welcomed into the world.

Leavening Logic with Truth

Following the passage above, Pope Francis goes on to explain:

We should not think that political efforts or the force of law will be sufficient to prevent actions which affect the environment because, when the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, then laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato si* (123)

Here Francis's explanation applies again not only to environmental ecology, but to human ecology, and he points toward a higher goal for proliferers. Though the precise purpose of the pro-life movement is to secure the protection of the unborn in law and in fact, the force of law and our political efforts will never by themselves be truly adequate. Even if we pose as pro-life, so long as we refuse to submit ourselves to truth beyond our own convenience we will corrupt the law and the culture itself—and in a direction that leans pro-choice.

So let proliferers lead the way—not only in welcoming the unborn, but in speaking the truth. Let us put the common good ahead of our own good, and put adhering to higher principles ahead of our own convenience. By living thus, we weaken “use and throw away” logic, and strengthen logic ordered to the truth—that every person, born and unborn, is a gift.

—*Fr. David Poeking is the regional vicar of the South Vicariate of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.*

A JOYFUL PILGRIMAGE

Rev. Paul Stallsworth

The Church recognizes the absolute necessity of repetition. The Christian Year repeats its seasons—Advent through Pentecost Season (or Ordinary Time)—year after year, so that the congregation and the individual can be renewed in the whole Gospel. Week after week, the Church's liturgy repeats familiar readings from the Word, and gives bread and wine and water. The Church's creeds, Apostles' and Nicene, repeat the sweep of salvation history for a congregation at worship.

Why all this repetition? The Church realizes that the truths of the Gospel can be lost—by forgetfulness or by compromise—if they are not regularly and faithfully repeated by the People of God. The demands of everyday life, the power of digital media, the seductions of the evil one, and the proneness to wander can distract the local church and the Christian from Jesus Christ. In response to this dangerous reality, the Church faithfully repeats the truths she has received. And repeats. And repeats—until Christ returns in glory.

An annual pilgrimage is another example of the Church's tendency to repeat. Such a pilgrimage renews its pilgrims in Gospel truths that are essential to their lives. For example, the annual March for Life can be understood as a pilgrimage that renews its participants in the Gospel truth that God creates every person in the divine image, so every person is to be loved and protected.

On January 22, 1974, the first anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, a Washington

DC lawyer named Nellie Gray launched the March for Life on the steps of the Supreme Court to build resistance to the abortion-on-demand regime the Court had declared the year before. While *Roe* was overturned this past June, the March will continue until the right to life is restored to unborn children—until abortion is made “unthinkable.”

Here’s what the March looks like: Tens of thousands of proliferers descend upon the nation’s capital. Buses seem to be their standard mode of travel. At noon on the day of the march, they assemble for a rally on the National Mall near the Washington Monument, listening to a variety of speakers gathered on a gigantic, raised stage. Politicians and actors, bishops and pastors and rabbis, former abortionists and abortion survivors, representatives of the disabled, and many others take their turn delivering strong speeches about God’s gift of human life. After around ninety minutes, this mass of humanity moves to nearby Constitution Avenue and then marches up Capitol Hill. Once on the Hill, marchers proceed to the steps of the Supreme Court, where more speeches are delivered, and/or visit the offices of their US representatives or senators. By mid-to-late afternoon, most marchers are beginning their trip home—whether it covers 30 or 3,000 miles.

This year’s March took place on January 20, a Friday. There had been some concern that the fall of *Roe* would mean that fewer participants would attend. Exact counts are unavailable, but one source estimated there were 100,000 people in attendance this year. The weather was cold but clear. As usual, the crowd was overwhelmingly young and energetic. Tens of thousands of high school and college students from across the United States participated. They themselves were full of life—hopeful, friendly, fun-loving, and surprisingly thoughtful. And they witnessed for life—by listening to speeches, applauding memorable lines, joining in chants, carrying signs, and marching up the Hill.

Most who have not attended a March for Life would probably imagine it as a grim, depressing affair. To be sure, there are shocking reminders of what the March opposes. The large pictures of butchered babies mounted on mobile units cannot be avoided. But joy sets the tone. The thousands of youthful marchers—sometimes silent and attentive, sometimes loud and laughing—tend to pull even the sullen out of their negativity. Just by being there, the young witness so clearly to God’s gift of life, to the Gospel of Life.

Major culture-forming institutions in American society—BigTech, Big Media, Big Business, Hollywood, popular entertainment, higher education, oldline religious denominations, and the Democratic Party—generally support the right to abortion. Only the Roman Catholic Church, the United States Supreme Court (for now), and We the People reject the notion of an absolute abortion liberty in America.

Participating in the March for Life is like making an annual pilgrimage, one that is desperately needed. After all, recognized or not, the “abortion-is-good” messaging comes at all of us all the time. Becoming a pilgrim for life, one is renewed in the truth that every human being, including the youngest and smallest, is God’s gift. Therefore, it is not only our duty but our privilege to protect and defend these little ones.

Next year, participate in the March as a pilgrim. Do the same the next year, and the year after that. We need—no, require—the renewal these pilgrimages bring.

—*Rev. Paul Stallworth is retired from pastoral ministry in The United Methodist Church. He edits Lifewatch—a newsletter on the Church, life, and marriage for United Methodists, Global Methodists, and others. He lives in Wilson, NC, with his wife Marsha.*

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

Diane Moriarty

You know what killed *Roe v. Wade*? *Roe v. Wade*. New York State legalized abortion in 1970, and it didn’t need the Supreme Court to do it; it already had the option because of states’ rights. Hawaii was actually first, but its law had residency requirements, whereas New York’s did not—it was “come one come all.” Washington and Alaska legalized abortion too, but also with residency requirements. And thirteen other states had already chosen to liberalize their abortion laws. States that still prohibited it had save-the-life-of-the-mother exceptions, of course. The way things were going on their own has led some trend watchers to credibly opine that either by the late 70s or early 80s abortion would have been legal in the majority of states—without *Roe*. Not only would this have eliminated the constitutional fragility that ultimately contributed to *Roe*’s undoing, i.e., the unconstitutional violation of states’ rights, it also would have made unnecessary the convoluted mental gymnastics the 1973 Supreme Court exercised in (mis)interpreting the 14th Amendment in order to make abortion legal.

The 14th Amendment proclaims in part that no state shall deprive any “person” of liberty. The justices declared that the “unborn” were not “persons” and so not protected by the Constitution. Actually, at the time *Roe* was decided, several states recognized unborn children as persons under property, tort, and criminal law, including Texas, the state whose abortion

ban was before the Court. Texas argued that “the fetus is a ‘person’ within the language and meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment.” In response, Justice Blackmun said: “If this suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant’s case, of course, collapses, for the fetus’ right to life would then be guaranteed specifically by the Amendment.” After noting that to recognize the personhood of unborn children would tank the pro-abortion argument, Blackmun concluded that “the word ‘person,’ as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn.” Really! There’s nothing in the United States Constitution about whether the unborn are or are not “persons,” so let’s err on the side of barbarity!

What made them hell-bent on pushing *Roe* through at the cost of established jurisprudence, so much so that two of the seven justices in the majority, Lewis Powell and Warren Burger, later changed their minds and regretted what they had done? If you believe your liberal bible, it goes like this, as per former New York state senator Manfred Ohrenstein, a Democrat who represented Manhattan: “We were living in a time of enormous change . . . There was the women’s movement, which was really bringing the abortion issue to a crescendo. It was the end of the civil rights era, and we viewed this as a civil right.” Right. There was also the manufactured panic that 10,000 women a year were dying from illegal abortions, a massive exaggeration that is still promoted today. But was the women’s movement, with its rusty-coat-hanger optics and “My body, my choice” rhetoric, all that was motivating the Supreme Court? Might the justices have feared that the sexual liberation movement was on a collision course with the “population explosion” panic, and this is what made them jump the gun? Jehoshaphat! Today’s youth are f**king like minks and we’re overcrowded as it is! What to do, what to do! Hmmm (stroke the beard, furrow the brow). Aha! Let the women “take care of it.”

Now this manifestly anti-feminist solution had to be sold to the public as pro-woman. Initially packaged as a way to keep poor women from dying in back alleys, once it became legal, abortion was elevated to being a necessary tool for personal empowerment. Today it is heralded as a “social good”—an inherent civil right implicit in our Constitution.

There’s a relatively new phrase to describe an expectant couple. Instead of “my wife and I are having a baby,” now it’s “we are pregnant.” Getting past the absurd visual it conjures, hey, if this is meant to inspire more paternal involvement once the baby comes, say, changing the dreaded diaper, bravo! But there’s a deeper truth therein. Yes, she carries the baby and delivers the baby, but it’s the man’s baby too, even if she is doing the heavy lifting. This is annoying, but it’s an unavoidable fact.

Now, does a citizen indeed have a constitutional right to end an unwanted

pregnancy? Women have been programmed to scream Yes—in the streets, from the mountaintops, in the voting booth. And although abortion is odious in practice, logic compels me to admit that in a pluralistic, democratic society an argument can be made for it being accommodated, as long as it meets the criteria of being pluralistic and democratic. Which means both men and women would have that civil right. It's the man's baby too, so technically he has the right to bring a lawsuit if she doesn't want to get rid of it but he does (or conversely, if he wants it but she doesn't). So, if women are going to claim abortion is a citizen's constitutional right . . . Be careful what you wish for. Not that anything like this would ever get within a hundred miles of becoming law; it would be grotesque overreach, and besides, any man who would actually claim this right would be a bum and the world would hate him. I'm just trying to illustrate a point, and I'm almost there.

Wouldn't we be a better people today if, fifty years ago, when *Roe* became law, or failed to become law, that either way the argument for legal abortion had been couched in the recognition that in a pluralistic, democratic system it's—as odious as it may be—within the purview of a citizen to abort? But, in order to be truly pluralistic and democratic, society had been careful to caution that there were three parties involved and vigorously exhorted both sexes to adopt this motto: Abortion is legal. Live like it isn't.

I wish.

—*Diane Moriarty is a freelance writer living in Manhattan.*

WILL THE “WORLD’S FIRST ARTIFICIAL WOMB FACILITY” INCUBATE 30,000 LAB-GROWN CHILDREN EVERY YEAR?

Christopher M. Reilly

Moral disgust and fascination are often two sides of the same coin when it comes to new developments in biotechnology. In many ways, it is the capacity for moral disgust that will save our society by steering us away from the encroaching culture of death. But that capacity for moral disgust seems to be just as precarious as the vulnerable human lives that depend on it.

When he published multiple videos, images, and descriptions of what has been called “the world’s first artificial womb facility,” molecular biologist Hashem Al-Ghaili clearly expected to fan the fascination of the public. This new Ectolife venture will apparently build upon the recent advances in artificial “wombs” as well as biological manipulation of human stem cells to

generate children without active involvement of the parents in procreation (i.e. without sexual intercourse).

In one video, Al-Ghaili portrays the facility as composed of rows upon rows of egg-shaped incubators, each holding a nascent human life. Arrayed bleacher-style and surrounding a gray, industrial-looking apparatus, with technicians in hazmat suits, the scene is oddly reminiscent of the inside of a nuclear power plant. The babies in the videos look far from real, often with distorted features, and in some scenes almost as large as their adult overlords. Music for the videos is a dramatic, adrenaline-producing mix of digital synthesizers, bass-level bursts, and repetitive orchestral strumming.

The female narrator explains that the new company will have the capacity for incubating 30,000 human infants per year in each building it operates. The babies will develop inside “growth pods” with every imaginable technological and medical capability, including “artificial intelligence” that monitors their growth and healthcare needs. Interaction with human caregivers does not seem to be part of the package.

Perhaps the most important statement is heard halfway through the video. “Prior to placing the fertilized embryo of your baby inside the growth pod, in vitro fertilization is used to create and select the most viable and genetically superior embryo, giving your baby a chance to develop without any biological hurdles. And if you want your baby to stand out and have a brighter future, our Elite Package offers you the opportunity to genetically engineer the embryo before implanting it in the womb.”

Notice that the pitch draws on the heartstrings and acquisitive desires of prospective parents by referring to “your baby” while dismissing any emotional attachment to the growth-pod-bound creature by such rhetorical but nonsensical devices as “the fertilized embryo of your baby.” This is the kind of marketing sophistication (i.e., double-speak) we have learned to expect from IVF clinics and even abortion mills.

Now a reality check: while the Ectolife story has gained notoriety through *The Economic Times*, *Huffington Post*, and many smaller new sources, Al-Ghaili is more of an aspiring film producer than biologist, and neither Ectolife nor any artificial womb facility exists in the real world. According to his website, Al-Ghaili is merely “helping society catch up to modern science” with education and science fiction creations. He claims that “his flagship page, Science Nature, has garnered over 33 million followers on Facebook,” and his hundreds of original videos—“renowned for their simple, yet powerful visual storytelling—have been viewed over 17 billion times, and have inspired hundreds of thousands of people across the globe.” Evidence for such claims does not seem to be available on the website.

This is not just a story about an imaginative futurist's dream, however. The science behind the Ectolife concept is dangerously real—or on the cusp of being realized. Neonatal incubators already care for extremely young premature babies, IVF facilities can already coax along the gestation of embryonic persons after just four weeks in the mother's womb, Chinese researchers claim to have created a “long-term embryo culture device” that uses artificial intelligence to monitor and assist embryos (currently tested on mice) in minute detail, and Israeli scientists created a Ferris-wheel like device that allowed newly formed mouse embryos to develop for over half of their normal gestation period.

Even more important is the science that is enabling formation of new human embryos—or “embryo-like” human beings—directly from embryonic stem cells. No parents are needed in the process, only a laboratory. This has been achieved with human cells, although current regulations require destroying the living being within 14 days. It has also been tested in mice, and they developed beating hearts and functioning brains.

Getting back to the two-sided coin I described above, it seems that such far-reaching biotechnological developments can generate plenty of both disgust and fascination, very much like the Frankenstein story of old. Will our fascination and pride in human ingenuity carry the day? Or will we, recognizing that the perceived value of human life declines every time somebody manipulates or manufactures human life for non-essential purposes, embrace our moral disgust and follow it toward difficult but life-affirming decisions about the role of technology in our society?

Horror movies are fascinating and disgusting at the same time. Real-life horror shows are something else entirely.

—Christopher M. Reilly lives in the greater Washington, DC, region and writes and speaks about bioethics, moral theology, philosophy, and issues related to technology. He holds master's degrees in philosophy, theology, and public affairs.

APPENDIX A

[*The late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, the founding editor of First Things and a giant in the pro-life movement, gave this speech at the close of the National Right to Life Committee Convention in 2008.*]

We Shall Not Weary, We Shall Not Rest

Richard John Neuhaus

Once again this year, the National Right to Life convention is partly a reunion of veterans from battles past and partly a youth rally of those recruited for the battles to come. And that is just what it should be. The pro-life movement that began in the twentieth century laid the foundation for the pro-life movement of the twenty-first century. We have been at this a long time, and we are just getting started. All that has been and all that will be is prelude to, and anticipation of, an indomitable hope. All that has been and all that will be is premised upon the promise of Our Lord's return in glory when, as we read in the Book of Revelation, "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be sorrow nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And all things will be new.

That is the horizon of hope that, from generation to generation, sustains the great human rights cause of our time and all times—the cause of life. We contend, and we contend relentlessly, for the dignity of the human person, of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, destined from eternity for eternity—every human person, no matter how weak or how strong, no matter how young or how old, no matter how productive or how burdensome, no matter how welcome or how inconvenient. Nobody is a nobody; nobody is unwanted. All are wanted by God, and therefore to be respected, protected, and cherished by us.

We shall not weary, we shall not rest, until every unborn child is protected in law and welcomed in life. We shall not weary, we shall not rest, until all the elderly who have run life's course are protected against despair and abandonment, protected by the rule of law and the bonds of love. We shall not weary, we shall not rest, until every young woman is given the help she needs to recognize the problem of pregnancy as the gift of life. We shall not weary, we shall not rest, as we stand guard at the entrance gates and the exit gates of life, and at every step along the way of life, bearing witness in word and deed to the dignity of the human person—of every human person.

Against the encroaching shadows of the culture of death, against forces commanding immense power and wealth, against the perverse doctrine that a woman's dignity depends upon her right to destroy her child, against what St. Paul calls the principalities and powers of the present time, this convention renews our resolve that we shall not weary, we shall not rest, until the culture of life is reflected in the

rule of law and lived in the law of love.

It has been a long journey, and there are still miles and miles to go. Some say it started with the notorious *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 when, by what Justice Byron White called an act of raw judicial power, the Supreme Court wiped from the books of all fifty states every law protecting the unborn child. But it goes back long before that. Some say it started with the agitation for “liberalized abortion law” in the 1960s when the novel doctrine was proposed that a woman cannot be fulfilled unless she has the right to destroy her child. But it goes back long before that. It goes back to the movements for eugenics and racial and ideological cleansing of the last century.

Whether led by enlightened liberals, such as Margaret Sanger, or brutal totalitarians, whose names live in infamy, the doctrine and the practice was that some people stood in the way of progress and were therefore non-persons, living, as it was said, “lives unworthy of life.” But it goes back even before that. It goes back to the institution of slavery in which human beings were declared to be chattel property to be bought and sold and used and discarded at the whim of their masters. It goes way on back.

As Pope John Paul the Great wrote in his historic message *Evangelium Vitae* (the Gospel of Life) the culture of death goes all the way back to that fateful afternoon when Cain struck down his brother Abel, and the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And Cain answered, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” And the Lord said to Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground.” The voice of the blood of brothers and sisters beyond numbering cry out from the slave ships and battlegrounds and concentration camps and torture chambers of the past and the present. The voice of the blood of the innocents cries out from the abortuaries and sophisticated biotech laboratories of this beloved country today. Contending for the culture of life has been a very long journey, and there are still miles and miles to go.

The culture of death is an idea before it is a deed. I expect many of us here, perhaps most of us here, can remember when we were first encountered by the idea. For me, it was in the 1960s when I was pastor of a very poor, very black, inner city parish in Brooklyn, New York. I had read that week an article by Ashley Montagu of Princeton University on what he called “A Life Worth Living.” He listed the qualifications for a life worth living: good health, a stable family, economic security, educational opportunity, the prospect of a satisfying career to realize the fullness of one’s potential. These were among the measures of what was called “a life worth living.”

And I remember vividly, as though it were yesterday, looking out the next Sunday morning at the congregation of St. John the Evangelist and seeing all those older faces creased by hardship endured and injustice afflicted, and yet radiating hope undimmed and love unconquered. And I saw that day the younger faces of children deprived of most, if not all, of those qualifications on Prof. Montagu’s list. And it struck me then, like a bolt of lightning, a bolt of lightning that illuminated our moral and cultural moment, that Prof. Montagu and those of like mind believed that the

people of St. John the Evangelist—people whom I knew and had come to love as people of faith and kindness and endurance and, by the grace of God, hope unvanquished—it struck me then that, by the criteria of the privileged and enlightened, none of these my people had a life worth living. In that moment, I knew that a great evil was afoot. The culture of death is an idea before it is a deed.

In that moment, I knew that I had been recruited to the cause of the culture of life. To be recruited to the cause of the culture of life is to be recruited for the duration; and there is no end in sight, except to the eyes of faith.

Perhaps you, too, can specify such a moment when you knew you were recruited. At that moment you could have said, “Yes, it’s terrible that in this country alone 4,000 innocent children are killed every day, but then so many terrible things are happening in the world. Am I my infant brother’s keeper? Am I my infant sister’s keeper?” You could have said that, but you didn’t. You could have said, “Yes, the nation that I love is betraying its founding principles—that every human being is endowed by God with inalienable rights, including, and most foundationally, the right to life. But,” you could have said, “the Supreme Court has spoken and its word is the law of the land. What can I do about it?” You could have said that, but you didn’t. That horror, that betrayal, would not let you go. You knew, you knew there and then, that you were recruited to contend for the culture of life, and that you were recruited for the duration.

The contention between the culture of life and the culture of death is not a battle of our own choosing. We are not the ones who imposed upon the nation the lethal logic that human beings have no rights we are bound to respect if they are too small, too weak, too dependent, too burdensome. That lethal logic, backed by the force of law, was imposed by an arrogant elite that for almost forty years has been telling us to get over it, to get used to it.

But “We the People,” who are the political sovereign in this constitutional democracy, have not gotten over it, we have not gotten used to it, and we will never, we will never ever, agree that the culture of death is the unchangeable law of the land.

“We the People” have not and will not ratify the lethal logic of *Roe v. Wade*. That notorious decision of 1973 is the most consequential moral and political event of the last half century of our nation’s history. It has produced a dramatic realignment of moral and political forces, led by evangelicals and Catholics together, and joined by citizens beyond numbering who know that how we respond to this horror defines who we are as individuals and as a people. Our opponents, once so confident, are now on the defensive. Having lost the argument with the American people, they desperately cling to the dictates of the courts. No longer able to present themselves as the wave of the future, they watch in dismay as a younger generation recoils in horror from the bloodletting of an abortion industry so arrogantly imposed by judges beyond the rule of law.

We do not know, we do not need to know, how the battle for the dignity of the human person will be resolved. God knows, and that is enough. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta and saints beyond numbering have taught us, our task is not to be successful

but to be faithful. Yet in that faithfulness is the lively hope of success. We are the stronger because we are unburdened by delusions. We know that in a sinful world, far short of the promised Kingdom of God, there will always be great evils. The principalities and powers will continue to rage, but they will not prevail.

In the midst of the encroaching darkness of the culture of death, we have heard the voice of him who said, “In the world you will have trouble. But fear not, I have overcome the world.” Because he has overcome, we shall overcome. We do not know when; we do not know how. God knows, and that is enough. We know the justice of our cause, we trust in the faithfulness of his promise, and therefore we shall not weary, we shall not rest.

Whether, in this great contest between the culture of life and the culture of death, we were recruited many years ago or whether we were recruited only yesterday, we have been recruited for the duration. We go from this convention refreshed in our resolve to fight the good fight. We go from this convention trusting in the words of the prophet Isaiah that “they who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

The journey has been long, and there are miles and miles to go. But from this convention the word is carried to every neighborhood, every house of worship, every congressional office, every state house, every precinct of this our beloved country—from this convention the word is carried that, until every human being created in the image and likeness of God—no matter how small or how weak, no matter how old or how burdensome—until every human being created in the image and likeness of God is protected in law and cared for in life, we shall not weary, we shall not rest. And, in this the great human rights struggle of our time and all times, we shall overcome.

APPENDIX B

[The following statement, published on January 19, 2023, was drafted by Jonathon Van Maren (Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform), Eric Scheidler (Pro-Life Action League), Charles Camosy (Creighton University), and Josh Brahm (Equal Rights Institute) after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* ruling was handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court. Hundreds of pro-life leaders, authors, and scholars have signed on. To add your name, use the link following this article.]

A Joint Statement for Building a Post-Roe Future

Jonathon Van Maren, Eric Scheidler, Charles Camosy, and Josh Brahm

It’s time for the pro-life movement to embrace bold, new pro-family policies.

With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the pro-life movement finally has the opportunity to extend legal protection to unborn children, and legislatures in several states have already begun to do this. But we believe limiting or even banning abortion is not enough.

We are pro-life conservatives, moderates, and liberals united in our conviction that every human life has value—including the lives of both the unborn child and that child’s mother. We believe that our society should prioritize the needs of both, and that ultimately this can only be achieved by significant changes in public policy.

The pro-life movement has always recognized the importance of supporting women facing unplanned pregnancies, with millions donated over the years to a vast national network of pro-life pregnancy centers. But in the new landscape emerging after *Roe*, with some states limiting abortion while others expand their abortion license, support from non-profits will not be enough.

State and federal governments must take action to eliminate or reduce the significant economic and social pressures that we know drive women to seek abortion in the first place.

Among the policies that should be broadly embraced by the pro-life movement and advanced by elected officials are:

- Accessible and affordable healthcare for parents and children—including expanding Medicaid funding for prenatal care, delivery, and postpartum expenses—to reduce the financial barriers to welcoming a new child;
- Expanded child tax credits that promote family formation and lift children out of poverty;
- Paid parental leave that ensures every infant can receive the close attention and nurturing care they need from their mothers and fathers in the early months of life;
- Flexible work hours to enable families to establish a tranquil home life, with predictable work schedules and better options for meaningful part-time employment;

APPENDIX B

- Affordable childcare options that support working parents, without disincentivizing the choice to raise young children at home that many families say they would prefer;
- Fully enforce existing prenatal child support laws while seeking effective new ways to demand that all men take responsibility for children they father.

We realize that not every government has the fiscal capacity to enact every measure that might reduce abortion, and that these policies must be carefully crafted to empower families without disincentivizing work or promoting unhealthy dependence on government.

Nevertheless, meeting the needs of mothers and children at this historic moment is too important for us not to try bold, new, transformative policies, find out what really works, and continue to reform our society on behalf of the American family.

Sign the form!

<https://postroefuture.com/#signon>

APPENDIX C

[Michael J. New is an assistant professor of practice at the Busch School of Business at the Catholic University of America and a senior associate scholar at the Charlotte Lozier Institute. This column was posted on April 12, 2023, at National Review Online. © 2023 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.]

New Data Show a Large Decline in Abortions Post-*Dobbs*

Michael J. New

Yesterday, the #WeCount project of the Society of Family Planning released new data on the number of abortions that have been performed in the United States since the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision. The #WeCount project compares abortion declines in states that have enacted pro-life laws with abortion increases in other states. Overall, they have found, 32,260 fewer abortions were performed in the United States in the first six full months after the *Dobbs* decision. That is an average of 5,377 fewer abortions every month. Good news for pro-lifers.

As I have commented before, the #WeCount estimate likely understates the actual abortion decline resulting from state-level pro-life laws. This is for two reasons. First, some states were already enforcing strong pro-life laws prior to the *Dobbs* decision. Texas started enforcing a Heartbeat Act on September 1, 2021. My Charlotte Lozier Institute analysis of Texas birth data found that the Heartbeat Act alone was preventing approximately 1,000 abortions from taking place in Texas every month. Additionally, Oklahoma started enforcing a Heartbeat Act in May 2022, which also resulted in a large pre-*Dobbs* abortion decline.

Second, the #WeCount analysis fails to account for the fact that abortion numbers were already increasing in many politically liberal states prior to *Dobbs*. This is partly due to the trend in rising abortion rates that started in 2018, driven by an increase in chemical abortions. It is partly due to policy changes. In recent years, pro-life parental-involvement laws were repealed in Illinois and weakened in Massachusetts. Also, state Medicaid programs in Illinois and Maine have started covering elective abortions. Some of the abortion increases in these blue states is due to trends and policy changes. It is not all due to women from conservative states seeking abortions in states where abortion laws are more permissive.

All in all, the #WeCount report is good news for pro-lifers. Supporters of legal abortion often try to downplay the effects of pro-life laws. It is heartening to see a group that supports legal abortion publish a report acknowledging that pro-life laws lower abortion rates. Pro-lifers should take heart. Laws legally protecting preborn children in 13 states have already saved tens of thousands of lives. Furthermore, we can be confident that future legislative efforts to protect the preborn will result in even more lives being saved.

APPENDIX D

[*John Murdock is an attorney who writes from Boise. This column, reprinted with permission, appeared on firstthings.com on April 7, 2023.*]

Sing Your Abortion

John Murdock

Jean Rohe really wants you to know that she had an abortion. In the dehumanizing song “Animal,” for which the folk singer earned a 2022 songwriting award at the long-running Kerrville Folk Festival, Rohe recounts her trip to the Bleeker Street clinic where eugenicist Margaret Sanger blazed the trail for Planned Parenthood. Invoking a garden metaphor, she embraces the power to uproot her offspring.

*O, the morning glory is beautiful
But it strangles the tomatoes and chives
So I pull the weeds to save the vegetables
It's the gardener who decides
Oo, body of an animal
Oo, power of a god*

One inevitably thinks of the original garden, which Adam and Eve were tasked to care for: “cultivate it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Accompanying promotional art for the song incorporates the serpent and forbidden fruit of Eden. Like Eve, Rohe wishes to “be like God.” But unlike Eve, she does not slink away in shame.

Rohe is not the first to sing of her abortion. For example, Stevie Nicks wrote the Fleetwood Mac song “Sara” in part about a child who lived briefly in her womb. The shift in sentiment from the veiled lament of Nicks to the explicit defiance of Rohe mirrors our culture—from “safe, legal, and rare” to the “shout your abortion” and “abortion on demand and without apology” placards of today.

While Rohe has sadly embraced the tempter’s lie, she is still frustrated by the limits of her power.

*Seven months later I sat in a hospital
Helplessly watching as my father died
I called out for mercy, kindness, a miracle
I don't always get to decide*

Thus, at the time she would have been preparing to give birth to a child, Rohe faced the passing of the man who gave her life. It’s a sorrowful juxtaposition. Rohe is a child battered by death but trumpets the power to batter her own.

I was unaware of Rohe before I heard her sing in Portland, Oregon, where she was the opening act at a David Wilcox concert. The remainder of the lyrics, and a lengthy concert introduction, left no doubt regarding the topic. The progressive West Coast crowd dutifully applauded—though only about two-thirds, leaving me

some hope that even here a remnant of respect for human life endures.

A clear occupant of the religious left who sprinkles in events at liberal churches as he tours, Wilcox had previously always produced shows that were thoughtful, humorous, and uplifting. Songs like “Hold It Up to the Light” showed a trust in God’s good guidance when prayerfully sought. One wishes that, upon learning of her pregnancy, Rohe had followed Wilcox’s musical advice. Instead, she “raged in the car” at pro-lifers as she “called every clinic in every town I would be passing through.”

Wilcox’s decision to amplify Rohe’s work was a stunning disappointment to this longtime fan but is perhaps indicative of abortion as nonnegotiable for those catering to left-leaning audiences. While some voice discomfort over abortion despite supporting pro-abortion Democrats, most seem to have gotten the “all in on abortion” memo.

Bill Clinton’s “safe, legal, and rare” trilogy was a lie at every step, the kind of misdirection designed to soften the hard edges of the reality of abortion. Rohe will not stand for the obfuscations. She bluntly proclaims that, yes, children, like morning glories, are beautiful in certain circumstances—but she is more powerful, and her will alone determines who lives or dies. The garden of her life will be the better for it.

Give her points for honesty, but it is a stark brutal honesty. For decades, the pro-life movement has worked tirelessly to bring the humanity of the unborn child front and center. “Face it, abortion kills” says the sign. Now, rather than hide behind platitudes, many like Rohe are willing to bluntly acknowledge what they are doing.

In this age of “all publicity is good publicity” and at a time when claims of victimization are used as tools for advancement, I pondered whether to call out Rohe by name. She might well wear critique in a conservative religious publication as a badge of honor, and Rohe herself had no problem reducing pro-lifers in her song to faceless “men without a clue.” Yet, protest as she might, Rohe is no mere animal but a creature bearing the image of God and called in Genesis to the work of godly stewardship rather than the shedding of innocent blood. She deserves the dignity of a name, as did her child whom she reduced to a weed. In the future, may Rohe tend her garden well and be blessed with the gift of abundant life.

IN MEMORIAM
Damian Jon Geminder
1989-2023



Damian Jon Geminder died on April 20, after suffering a massive heart attack on March 1. He was 33 years old. The Director of Public Education at Feminists for Life, as well as editor of their publication the *American Feminist*, Damian was the right-hand man and beloved colleague of FFL president Serrin Foster, who wrote the following after his death:

Brilliant, hilarious, and kind, he was raised in a home first owned by a suffragist. He was introduced as a teen to Feminists for Life by his big sister, Jessica, who shared copies of our magazine. Since college, he was dedicated to serving those at greatest risk of abortion, first as one of our interns, then as a volunteer. After achieving his master's in journalism, Damian became our editor on February 15, 2016, Susan B. Anthony's birthday.

For the last decade, he devoted his life to making the lives of women and children better. Damian would tell you if he could that shepherding 300 articles on our WomenDeserveBetter.com helpsite was one of his biggest accomplishments.

On behalf of the Board and staff, with heartfelt condolences, we dedicate the upcoming issue titled "Legacy" of *The American Feminist*, to his memory.

Damian was a good friend to the *Human Life Review*, attending many of our events. He was always ready to contribute his support to a project, and his friendly, joyful presence was endearing. We will miss him. *Requiescat in Pace.*

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Children's life situations begin with the situation of their parents at the moment of their conception. Pro-lifers thus should be asking them whether it's fair for adults to proceed to make children when they have no earthly intention of taking care of them, and might even be tempted to kill them.

—Helen Alvaré, “Where Do We Go from *Dobbs*?”