



VOLUME LI No. 2 ♦ SPRING 2025

◆ FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE ◆

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THE TIME OF TRUMP

John Burger on
RESCUERS WILL RESCUE

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PLAYING POLITICS WITH THE ABORTION PILL

Julia Duin on
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Appendices by: Julia Duin and Margaret Hickey

. . . Unsurprisingly, Americans' trust in the media is at an all-time low. A Gallup poll in October found that only 31 percent had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of confidence in what's reported in the news. Also not surprising, Democrats tend to trust the news much more than Republicans, which is related to the pro-life movement's huge challenge in getting our message out. Not only do the "reproductive rights" proponents have the major media's allegiance, they also have many more times the funds to spend on media buys. In "The Selling of Kate Cox" (p. 72), Julia Duin investigates the press coverage of a woman from Texas who felt "forced" to go to another state to abort her unborn child, who had been diagnosed with Trisomy 18. Duin discovered that those who wrote about the case "never did fact checks about problem pregnancies, never questioned the narrative about aborting fetuses with handicaps, and never bothered to search out opposing points of view."

But it is not always the "other side," is it? In our hyper-partisan culture, biased media often manipulate the news to emphasize the faults of the "enemy," while underplaying the negative news about their own. In "Pope Francis for Life" (p. 5), author Dawn Eden Goldstein points out that Francis was deceptively portrayed by media on both "sides" of the culture wars. His initial comments that "we cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and contraception" became the narrative to describe a progressive pope, while the things he did say about abortion and euthanasia—quite as dogmatic as those of his predecessors—got scant attention. Irish contributor Margaret Hickey agrees: In Appendix B, "Media 'Gaslighting' and the Popes," she writes that the words of Pope Francis and his predecessor were either spun or selectively ignored by the media to serve their agenda.

Civil discussion is our preferred way to ferret out the truth, exemplified in this issue's symposium, beginning on p. 27. We asked our contributors if the pro-life movement can successfully move forward without explicit belief in God. The 14 responses are fascinating, offering a diverse range of reflections, some on the religious question, some with hard-hitting critiques of the movement and suggestions for how we can do better. Which we welcome! Unflinching truth-telling is the path to progress as well as to a freedom that cannot be stolen. We have such inspiring examples of this in the profiles of the pardoned pro-life rescuers—in John Burger's "Rescuers will Rescue" (p.16) and in Bernadette Patel's interview with John Hinshaw, who was incarcerated for 17 months (p.21). You'll read that, though the rescuers lost their physical freedom, their hearts and souls remained free not only to offer up their sufferings for the unborn, but to minister in mercy to their fellow prisoners.

Please take note of our Great Defender of Life dinner announcement on p.16, and visit our website often for news, Foundation updates, blogs, and pastoral reflections, at www.humanlifereview.com.

Finally, our *Review* family mourns the death of the vice-chair of our board, Dana Hendershott, whom we remember on p. 80. He was a champion for life who always encouraged us to persevere in hope. As we will, with your support.

MARIA MCFADDEN MAFFUCCI
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INTRODUCTION

As I write, news accounts of the pope's early-morning death on April 21 still ricochet around the internet. This bit from the *Wall Street Journal*: "Pope Francis, who sought to refocus the Catholic Church on promoting social and economic justice rather than traditional moral teachings . . ." Well, yes, Francis did push for "social and economic justice," taking a hard line on immigration and the environment. But some of his most startling rhetoric reinforced those "traditional moral teachings," especially the Church's hard-line position on abortion. "He made support for the weakest among us the rhetorical centerpiece of his papacy," the *Journal* observed in a subsequent editorial. Yes, again, though the writer hardly had the aborted in mind. Our first article, and the column from our website by Margaret Hickey in Appendix B, pay tribute to this outspoken but rarely acknowledged defender of unborn life.

Written a few months before the pope's death, Dawn Eden Goldstein's "Pope Francis for Life: One Year in the Holy Father's Defense of the Unborn" surveys pronouncements that may, she suggests, "surprise those who have chosen to tune him out" since early in his pontificate when he chided conservative Catholics for talking about abortion (and gay marriage and contraception) "all the time." When Francis did talk about it, Goldstein writes, he "built upon the solid pro-life legacy" of his predecessors; to "abortion rights advocates [he was] a complete disappointment." No wonder. There aren't many pro-life leaders these days who publicly call abortion murder, as Francis often did: "Whether you like the word or not," he told reporters during an inflight press conference last September, "it is murder . . . the Church forbids abortion because it kills." In another notable departure from the soft discourse that prevails today, Francis routinely compared doctors who murder the unborn to "hitmen."

Donald Trump rattled Hillary Clinton with the raw truth about abortion in their 2016 debate (see George McKenna, page 32). But today, as proliferers reckon with the second-term president whose first-term Supreme Court picks crashed the *Roe* regime, his rhetoric has softened: "I know your hearts are warm and your spirits are strong," Trump told tens of thousands of March for Lifers in a video message two days after his inauguration last January, "because your mission is just very, very pure: to forge a society that welcomes and protects every child as a beautiful gift from the hand of our Creator." It sounded, muses William Murchison in our next article ("The Time of Trump") like "the kind of thing Ronald Reagan used to say." Trump's early pro-life initiatives, which our senior editor neatly recounts, have included (of course) restoring Reagan's Mexico City Policy, only, as Murchison reports, he made it "even better," having "ordered that the plan's requirements be extended to global health assistance provided by all U.S. departments and agencies"—in other words, defunding the deep state's abortion agenda.

Trump also used the March for Life video to announce his pardon of 23 proliferers unjustly consigned to long prison terms for peacefully engaging in civil disobedience.

We follow with two pieces featuring some of their stories: John Burger's article "Rescuers Will Rescue" and Bernadette Patel's interview with 70-year-old John Hinshaw, an "active prolifer" for going on five decades. "Rescues," Hinshaw tells Patel, "are completely non-violent . . . When I sat down inside the late-term abortion mill of Cesar Santangelo, I knew I was trying to stop the murder of children . . . Little did I know that federal law enforcement was already conspiring against us." His and other accounts of how pro-life miscreants were treated by jailors (and fellow inmates) are revealing. "Some had access to chaplains," writes Burger, "others not." Paulette Harlow, under house arrest due to health problems, "was permitted to go out for shopping and doctor's visits, but not for church."

"Many," Burger continues, "said that they 'offered up' their confinement and whatever hardships they endured for the unborn." Jean Marshall—who in her mid-70s was "full body-slam pushed into the hall" during her arrest—told him "being in prison is part of the rescue." Will Goodman "looked at the prison as a monastery as well as a mission field." "Rescuing," he reflects, is "a gift of self," which begins "at the abortion center" and "continues through the arrest, through the trials, through prison." Today, concludes Burger, the pardoned are still determined to block abortions, "even though the law that put them in prison is still on the books." And, he predicts, if the Trump administration "refrains from enforcing it the way previous administrations did, we could be seeing much more rescue activity in the coming months and years."

Meanwhile we are seeing more . . . murder. And even if "sometime soon the Supreme Court holds that the unborn are constitutional 'persons,'" writes Gerard Bradley, "no one should think that ruling would end abortion." Especially, he adds, "in our era of mail-order abortion-by-pill." Bradley is one of 14 participants, mostly familiar but some new voices too, in "What's God Got to Do with It?"—the symposium that covers over a third of this issue. (Unprecedented in our experience, all but one of those we invited to join accepted!) As you will see, our prompt (page 26) provoked a veritable feast of commentary: Do you agree, we asked potential respondents, "that for most people a conversion to belief in an objective morality that applies to everyone and therefore does not derive from political institutions or authorities but from a transcending authority—let's say it, from God—is necessary for the pro-life cause to succeed nationally"? "Duh," says W. Ross Blackburn. "The goal of the movement must be to save lives, not souls," says Wesley Smith. "It's complicated," says Bradley.

"Mail order abortion-by-pill," as Bradley and other symposium contributors noted, has been a game changer. Today, over half of abortions are chemically induced, and the number is bound to go up as more women in states with bans opt to abort in the bathroom instead of an out-of-state clinic. Mifepristone, the pill that makes it possible to dispose of a tiny human being in a toilet, has a long history. In "Playing Politics with the Abortion Pill: A Quarter Century of Abuse of Power at the FDA," J. Marc Wheat and Timothy Harper lay out in painstaking detail how a cancer drug came to be prescribed for abortion when "the statutory mechanism used by the

FDA to approve mifepristone for abortifacient use clearly did not permit the drug's approval." Since its approval in 2000, they write, "despite consistent evidence" of dangers to women's physical and mental health—and no matter what party was in the White House—"the FDA has repeatedly reduced the safety measures it had initially put in place" in order to "advance the pro-abortion political agenda."

In "The Selling of Kate Cox: How the Media Failed to Report the Full Story," Julia Duin examines the pro-abortion political agenda of the press as they railed against Texas's restriction of abortion. "[D]ozens of reporters" wrote "fawning articles detailing (in their view) the near martyrdom" of Kate Cox, "the first woman in the country to sue for the right to an abortion" since *Roe* was overruled. It was, Duin says, "one of the savviest PR efforts in America's 52-year-old debate over legalized abortion." Cox's unborn daughter, prenatally diagnosed with a condition highly likely to cause her death either before or shortly after birth, was (we were assured in mainstream stories) "endangering [Cox's] health, her fertility, even her very life." Duin wasn't assured. Her subsequent investigation introduced her to women who, unlike Cox, had accepted their troubled pregnancies. "*Why am I not reading about these people?*" Duin asked herself as she discovered networks of women "who had decided not to abort" and the medical centers and perinatal hospices dedicated to helping them and their babies. Thanks to Duin you can read about them, in this article and in another she did for Religion Unplugged, which we reprint in Appendix A.

“Whether Catholic rulers can influence the State for the good of the Church as well as the common good,” writes Edward Short in our final article, “is a nice question”—one he first considers with America’s new vice president (“converted to the Church by America’s wonderful Dominicans”) in mind. In “JD Vance, Maria Theresa, and Catholic Rule,” Short looks at the “instructive life” of an 18th-century Catholic empress and mother of 16 children (among them Marie Antoinette) who ruled “her Hapsburg lands as she ruled her family, in a spirit of devout maternalism.” Instructive for the VP, as he considers such “lively” questions as “whether the loyalty on which Trump insists will result in Vance mitigating what ought to be his ethical opposition to his chief’s policy regarding IVF.” Instructive too for us: In a letter to her daughter Maria Carolina (who became Queen of Naples in 1768), Maria Theresa urged the young monarch to “lead by example, especially in this perverse age, when our holy religion is practiced and loved so little” and “the great are ashamed to profess their faith, while the people are mostly mired in superstition.” Sound familiar?

ANNE CONLON
EDITOR

Pope Francis for Life:

One Year in the Holy Father's Defense of the Unborn

Dawn Eden Goldstein

In September 2013, Pope Francis made international headlines when, in his first major interview as pope, he challenged Catholics to move beyond the culture wars in the way they spoke about abortion.

Francis told Father Antonio Spadaro, SJ, “We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that. But when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context. The teaching of the church, for that matter, is clear and I am a son of the church, but it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time.”¹ In light of Francis’s earlier comments during an in-flight press conference when he made his famous comment about how he would respond to a gay person who “is searching for the Lord and has good will”—the pope said, “who am I to judge him”—many commentators at left-of-center outlets read his words on abortion through a political lens.² They concluded, in the words of the headline of Will Saletan’s analysis in *Slate*, “Pope Francis Is a Liberal.”³ Over at *The American Conservative*, Rod Dreher, a former Catholic who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy, offered a similar view but added a note of condescension: “I am sure the liberal pope has been very, very naive in his words here.”⁴

But, twelve years later, there is no escaping the conclusion that the Cassandras who predicted a softening of the Church’s stance in defense of unborn life were clearly wrong.⁵ To abortion-rights advocates, Pope Francis is a complete disappointment. Conversely, to pro-life Catholics who follow his statements on abortion, IVF, and other threats to human life and dignity, he is a hero. Through manifold interviews, letters, and official Church teaching documents, including those of the highest magisterial (teaching) weight, Francis has consistently built upon the solid pro-life legacy of the papacies of Benedict XVI, John Paul II, and all the others who preceded him.

Sadly, however, not every Catholic, let alone every pro-life one, is aware of the teachings of Francis’s magisterium with respect to life issues. The “liberal pope” narrative that took hold early in Francis’s papacy has held fast

Dawn Eden Goldstein, SThD, is the award-winning author of several books, most recently *The Sacred Heart: A Love for All Times* and the Christopher Award-winning biography *Father Ed: The Story of Bill W.’s Spiritual Sponsor*. This article was written before Pope Francis’s death.

among many in the conservative world, even as actual liberals, such as the leaders of Catholics for Choice, complain that, under Francis, “the church continues to ignore and deny her people” who favor abortion.⁶

To remedy this lack of understanding of the pope’s resolute stand for life, I would like to share some examples of Francis’s teaching that may surprise those who have chosen to tune him out since the day he discouraged speaking about abortion “all the time.” For reasons of space, I am choosing only examples from March 2024 through February 2025, and of them, only ones from the Vatican website that use the word “abortion.” Even with those limitations, these examples are not comprehensive; others could have been included. Most of these examples are from Francis himself; those that are not, nonetheless, speak with his voice, as he authorized them either directly (as with *Dignitas Infinita*) or indirectly (as with the address of his Cardinal Secretary of State to the United Nations General Assembly).

Our survey of Francis’s recent magisterium begins with *Dignitas Infinita*, a document he commissioned and authorized from the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith, which is the Vatican department charged with elucidating authoritative teachings on Catholic faith and morals.⁷ This wide-ranging document, issued on April 2, 2024, provides a holistic understanding of Catholic teaching on what is popularly called a consistent ethic of life. It mentions abortion by name eight times, addressing the issue directly in paragraph 47. After quoting extensively from John Paul II’s encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (The Gospel of Life), the document incorporates two quotations from Pope Francis’s 2013 encyclical *Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) to reinforce John Paul’s teachings:

Unborn children are, thus, “the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays, efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this.” It must, therefore, be stated with all force and clarity, even in our time, that “this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, ‘every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the Creator of the individual.’” In this context, it is worth recalling St. Teresa of Calcutta’s generous and courageous commitment to the defense of every person conceived.

On September 13, 2024, Pope Francis held an in-flight press conference while returning to Rome from his Apostolic Journey to Indonesia, Papua

New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Singapore.⁸ CBS News reporter Anna Ma-tranga asked him to comment on the hot-button issue of the day: the U.S. presidential election.

Your Holiness, you have always spoken in defense of the dignity of life. In Timor-Leste, which has a high birth rate, you said you felt life pulsing and exploding with so many children. In Singapore, you defended migrant workers. With the U.S. elections coming up, what advice would you give a Catholic voter who must decide between one candidate who is in favor of the interruption of pregnancy and another who wants to deport 11 million migrants?

In his reply, Francis maintained the longstanding papal tradition of refraining from endorsing political candidates, even as he proclaimed the Catholic Church's perennial teaching on the dignity of human life.

"Both are against life," Francis said, "the one who throws out migrants and the one who kills children. Both are against life. I cannot decide. I am not American and I will not go to vote there."

After stating in clear terms that "sending migrants away, denying them the ability to work and refusing them hospitality is a sin, and it is grave," and expounding upon the biblical prohibition against such mistreatment, Francis turned to condemn the other sin that the reporter named: "Science says that at one month after conception, all the organs of a human being are present, all of them. Having an abortion is killing a human being. Whether you like the word or not, it is murder. The Church is not closed-minded because it forbids abortion; the Church forbids abortion because it kills. It is murder; it is murder!"

Just over two weeks later, on September 28, 2024, Vatican Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin addressed the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at its General Debate.⁹ In his address, he quoted a speech Pope Francis gave earlier that year to the Diplomatic Corps of the Holy See:

The path to peace calls for respect for human rights, in accordance with the simple yet clear formulation contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [...]. These principles are self-evident and commonly accepted. Regrettably, in recent decades attempts have been made to introduce new rights that are neither fully consistent with those originally defined nor always acceptable. They have led to instances of ideological colonization, in which gender theory plays a central role; the latter is extremely dangerous since it cancels differences in its claim to make everyone equal. These instances of ideological colonization prove injurious and create divisions between states, rather than fostering peace.

Parolin added, in his own words (but expressing the mind of Francis's magisterium) that the pope's critique of "ideological colonization" extended to attacks on human life: "In this regard, it is also inconceivable to associate the concept of 'right' with the practice of abortion, which involves the taking

of an innocent life. Instead, from a human rights perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge the right of the woman to find concrete and moral support when she is in a situation of distress, loneliness and abandonment during her pregnancy and in the post-natal period.”

The day after Parolin’s speech—September 29, 2024—Pope Francis answered questions in-flight while returning to the Vatican after his Apostolic Journey to Luxembourg and Belgium. His journey had included a stop at the burial site of Belgium’s King Baudouin, whose cause for sainthood has been introduced; while there, he praised the king, who resigned rather than sign a law legalizing abortion.

During the in-flight press conference, Belgian television reporter Valérie Dupont told Francis that his remarks at the royal crypt had caused “astonishment,” leading some to accuse the pope of “political interference in Belgium’s democratic life.”¹⁰ She asked, “Is the beatification process of the king linked to his positions? How can we reconcile the right to life and the defense of life with women’s right to have a life without suffering?”

Francis responded, “They are all lives. The king was courageous because, faced with a law of death, he did not sign it and abdicated. That takes courage! It takes a ‘real’ politician to do this. It takes courage. It was a particular situation and he gave a message through his actions. He did it because he was a saint. He is holy and the beatification process will continue, because he gave me proof of this.”

The pope went on to explain that “women have the right to life: to their own lives and the lives of their children.”

“Let us not forget to say this,” Francis added: “abortion is murder. Science tells you that within a month of conception, all the organs are already there. A human being is killed. And doctors who engage in this are—permit me to say—hitmen. They are hitmen. This cannot be disputed. A human life is killed. Women have the right to protect life.”

Francis’s analogy of abortionists to hitmen is not new. He has employed it many times, aware of how shocking it sounds to abortion-rights advocates.

On January 9, 2025, in his annual address to members of the Holy See’s diplomatic corps, Pope Francis, as is usual for him in such talks, made certain to reiterate the Catholic Church’s continuing responsibility to proclaim the dignity and inviolability of human life.¹¹ He did so within the context of criticizing the “‘cancel culture’ . . . that tolerates no differences and focuses on individual rights, to the detriment of duties towards others, especially the weakest and most vulnerable.”

“In this regard,” Francis continued, “it is unacceptable, for example, to speak of an alleged ‘right to abortion’ that contradicts human rights, particularly the

right to life. All life must be protected, at every moment, from conception to natural death, because no child is a mistake or guilty of existing, just as no elderly or sick person may be deprived of hope and discarded.”

Our survey ends with Pope Francis’s address “To the World Leaders Participating in the Summit for Children’s Rights,” which he delivered on February 3, 2025, shortly before he was hospitalized with double pneumonia.¹² As has long been his practice, he condemned the “throwaway mentality” that characterizes contemporary secular culture, presenting a list of examples of this harmful anti-life mindset. And, likewise according to his custom, he capped off the list by citing what is, for him, the ultimate manifestation of the throwaway mentality: “the murderous practice of abortion”:

Seeing things through the eyes of those who have lived through war is the best way to understand the inestimable value of life. Yet also listening to those children who today live in violence, exploitation or injustice serves to strengthen our “no” to war, to the throwaway culture of waste and profit, in which everything is bought and sold without respect or care for life, especially when that life is small and defenseless. In the name of this throwaway mentality, in which the human being becomes all-powerful, unborn life is sacrificed through the murderous practice of abortion. Abortion suppresses the life of children and cuts off the source of hope for the whole of society.

These examples, taken together, provide robust evidence that Pope Francis, although remaining faithful to his intention to frame Catholic teaching on abortion within the Church’s broad pastoral mission, is by no means silent about the mandate to defend unborn life. If Francis is a “liberal pope,” then “liberal,” as a political term has lost all meaning. A better way to describe him is through the self-description that he offered in the same 2013 interview with Spadaro that caused so much commotion: Francis is “a son of the Church.”¹²

NOTES

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2. “Press Conference of Pope Francis during the Return Flight,” Vatican.va, July 28, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html.
3. William Saletan, “Pope Francis Is a Liberal,” Slate, September 19, 2013, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2013/09/pope-francis-interview-forget-homosexuality-and-birth-control-hes-a-flaming-liberal.html>.
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10. Pope Francis, "To Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See," Vatican.va, January 9, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2025/january/documents/20250109-corpo-diplomatico.html>.
11. Pope Francis, "To the World Leaders Participating in the Summit for Children's Rights," Vatican.va, February 3, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2025/february/documents/20250203-summit-diritti-bambini.html>.
12. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "An Interview with Pope Francis."



The author meets Pope Francis in 2019 at St. Peter's Square

Christ is risen! These words capture the whole meaning of our existence, for we were not made for death but for life. Easter is the celebration of life! God created us for life and wants the human family to rise again! In his eyes, every life is precious! The life of a child in the mother's womb, as well as the lives of the elderly and the sick, who in more and more countries are looked upon as people to be discarded.

**Pope Francis, Ubi et Orbi
Easter, 2025**

The Time of Trump

William Murchison

The up-and-down-around-and-around-here-today-who-knows-where-to-morrow presidency of Donald J. Trump leaves a writer—not to mention the majority of us—in guessing mode, hands over eyes.

Gee, if we say something searching, something discerning about our president's second White House go-round, will that observation hold true next week? For that matter, an hour from now? As I write, no one—including, I expect, the president himself—knows what tariffs are in the offing, nor on whom exactly they will be levied, nor their likely effect on prices and jobs. The Trump regime, for all the advance work that supposedly went into its takeover, has an improvisational quality such as never seen before in this country, I do not scruple to say.

Under Trump, orders and directives fly in every direction. The *New York Times* spoke of “a hailstorm” of early policy initiatives. Hardly had he taken the oath of office than the new/old president issued some 200 executive orders and proclamations. They concerned immigration, taxes, tariffs, diversity requirements, and matters almost beyond tallying. “The exhibition of energy and self-confidence,” says the critic Roger Kimball, “was extraordinary.”

Likewise the breadth of the new administration's agenda, in which pro-life objectives and causes so far fit snugly.

There is much of a pro-life nature to enumerate, such as a presidential order restoring the U.S. commitment to the Mexico City Policy, whereby foreign non-governmental (NGO) organizations are required, as a condition of receiving U.S. global family planning aid, not to “perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning.” Nor may they use non-U.S. funds to such a purpose.

The Reagan administration initiated the policy in 1984 at the second International Conference on Population, held in Mexico City (hence the policy's colloquial name). Democratic presidents make a show of withdrawing from it, leaving Republican presidents to rejoin it, as Trump has now, following Joseph Biden's cancellation of the first Trump administration's cancellation of Barack Obama's exit . . . you see how it goes.

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.

The next Democratic president will doubtless cancel Trump's second cancellation, but for now it's like the Reagan days again, only better. Trump has ordered that the plan's requirements be extended to the global health assistance provided by all U.S. departments and agencies: such, I guess, as manage to duck Elon Musk's woodcutter's axe.

As I say, a lot of guesswork and projection goes into evaluation of the efficacy and/or do-ability of the president's actions.

Next stop: Trump's abandonment of a Biden administration lawsuit challenging Idaho's abortion ban, which narrows the window for abortion to occasions like saving the mother's life or intervening where rape or incest caused the pregnancy. This happened early on. Biden's Justice Department wanted abortion allowed not just to save the mother's life but to prevent her from grave health consequences. That's off now, what with Trump overseeing the Justice Department.

Likewise the president pardoned 23 people, their identities unspecified at the time, whom he described as "peaceful pro-life protestors." Ten are known for their participation in the 2020 blockade of a Washington, DC abortion clinic. He announced the pardons in his brief video speech to the annual March for Life, held near the White House. "I know your hearts are warm and your spirits are strong," he said, "because your mission is just very, very pure: to forge a society that welcomes and protects every child as a beautiful gift from the hand of our Creator." It sounds, does it not, like the kind of thing Ronald Reagan used to say. Then, in his first public speech since the inauguration, Vice President JD Vance seconded his boss's motion with enthusiasm.

There was some proportion to the occasion. The chief executive had promised a decade ago to shape, through nominations of new justices, a U.S. Supreme Court that would knock *Roe v. Wade* on its ugly head. It worked. This single, signal promise, expressed in October 2016 during his first presidential campaign, strikes me as having earned Donald J. Trump something odd-seeming amid the policy warfare of 2025. It has earned him, from the pro-life standpoint, a measure of tentative trust. Maybe more than that, but those who have been the longest around politics like to hedge their bets.

This, we have to bear in mind, is the president who wants to make Canada the 51st state and Gaza a sort of Mediterranean Riviera under American supervision.

I am not suggesting that bells should peal and cannons roar as the Trump of 2025 pledges allegiance to the pro-life cause the way he imagines it. That is to say, susceptible to his belief in letting each state determine its own individual abortion policy: no abortions; some abortions; who cares, as many

as you can handle.

I realize the delicacy of any Trump/pro-life alliance: dependent as it has to be on the Good of the Moment, as defined by the president, not the most recently imprisoned clutch of pro-life activists. There is in the whole idea of such an alliance more than a little ummm-hmmmm, yeah, let's see how it works.

That is a prospect due in part to the inbred changeability of Donald J. Trump, the variousness of his moods, and recollections of Trumpian pronouncements such as "I am very pro-choice. I hate the concept of abortion . . . I just believe in choice" (October 1999).

The custom of hoisting political figures atop our shoulders and marching with them around the town square is definitely out. It cannot exist in our climate of distrust as to political promises of every sort. We do not for the most part, I am guessing, really, truly expect to see political promises fulfilled. By whoever makes them.

Nor do I believe even the loudest, most intense members of the Trump cheering section really look for the Trump agenda to be fulfilled in its entirety: likely not even the greater share of it. They know, or should by now, the frustrations of electoral politics amid the social and cultural divisions of the moment.

Polls in the post-*Roe v. Wade* moment continue to demonstrate general if hardly unanimous public support for legal abortion. With whatever degree of regret, the public has come to reject what earlier publics accepted—namely, the supposition that life was a continuity; that the unborn deserved the same legal protection and security as the born.

The transition achieved main-force following the Second World War, when liberation from long-standing norms became the cultural norm—in music, dress, entertainment, social arrangements, you name it. To demands for individual autonomy over human bodies, for choice in the bearing, or the not-bearing, of life, the U.S. Supreme Court, as everyone knows, nodded in solemn agreement. Sure; take the wheel; go ahead.

Over the long haul, as perpetually happens in situations of revolution, doubts set in: more and more all the time. This new thing in the understanding of Western men and women had gone too far; it needed pulling back. And so, over time, advocates for unborn life succeeded through unceasing toil in achieving such pullback as proved possible, albeit not to the status quo ante *Roe*.

On goes the struggle into which Donald Trump now wades as—as what? Crusader-in-chief for the unborn? Hardly that.

Whatever Trump's thoughts and intentions—which it would not be a good idea to overestimate one's confidence in when the man in charge is Donald J. Trump—no objective case can be made for early reversal of pro-choice

dominance in American thinking. I stand ready to be corrected if that is wrong. I fear it is not. Not when Pew Research shows 61 percent of men and 64 percent of women favoring legal abortion. Only among conservative Republicans and the Republican-leaning is opposition to abortion strong. The rest of America takes the other side, to one degree or another. The country's elected leader is walking among fallen power lines when it comes to addressing an issue few—including the leader himself, I would guess—see as more urgent than immigration or the economy.

How do you change such an unpromising calculus, in strictly political terms? Trump's federalist approach to the problem has much to commend it, leaving Congress out of it, letting state legislatures sort it through: either restricting abortion as much as possible or loudly, proudly, in the vigilant hearing of progressive voters, refusing restrictions of any kind. The federalist approach allows the president, with plausibility, both to claim credit and deny responsibility whenever he desires to: affirming at the same time, with the voice of the Founding Fathers, the de-centralization of national power. It is no contemptible approach to a political problem.

In the time of Trump, I am guessing that pro-life lawmakers will take courage, pointing to, *inter alia*, a national trend, evidenced by the 2024 election, toward social conservatism and the need to restore cultural stability.

News stories about the falloff in the birth rate throughout the Western world are hard to miss. Among the prime explanations for the falloff: abortion, a forceful turning away from motherhood, underwritten by seekers-after and holders-of political office; however, with negative political implications, such as bigger and bigger drop-offs in the number of workers contributing to Social Security. These things seep slowly into public consciousness. They can work changes.

Howsoever that may be in the case of the abortion of human life, the perplexities of today's politics remind us how relatively little the politics of any day determine the tenor of life. Politics does no more than reflect and protect, so far as it can, the moral understandings of humanity. These underlie the surface of thought and action, not to mention legislation and regulation.

What a society does, to put it in practical terms, depends on what it believes. The value of unborn life? We believe in it? We therefore keep it from harm. We disdain that asserted value? We yawn at measures meant to safeguard it. We sometimes more than yawn.

By that reasoning a mother hostile to the prospect of admitting one more brat into the sanctuary of personal privilege is, on certain terms, a mother we should leave to do her own thing. Whose business is it but hers? Society's? Faugh. God's? When was the last time you heard from God about anything?

Such is how the run of political men and women have come to deal with the essentially moral question of abortion: so intimate a thing that the rights and wrongs of it look exotic in a legislative chamber crowded with men and women scouting the room for camera angles. It is how we do politics. It is not necessarily how, or where, we iron out questions having to do with the nature of life and duties and the responsibilities that flow from that nature.

The recapture of the high ground on abortion depends upon—it is clear to many of us after decades of trips down the political garden path—restoration of the power of moral reflection. It is not presently a power our society possesses in large quantity: noticing it, feeling it, living by it. We need it back.

And who is going to do those particular honors? The faculty of Harvard? The Ford Foundation? The American Association of University Professors? The federal Department of This-and-That? How about, to shinny a little higher, the White House?

None of that, I think. Cultural rebuilding, featuring patched-up, dusted-off understanding of our classical and religious traditions, with names like Plato and Paul and Luther and Churchill scribbled in notebooks, goes on slowly, meticulously at institutions of one kind and another across America: most of them small, hardly noticed. But that's all right, because a sense of mission, from what I observe, keeps them focused on the job at hand. That job is the mission of restoring to full view the truths our culture brought with it from Europe, and by which more or less it formerly lived; not the least of those truths being the danger of laws lacking foundation in Truth itself.

We reckon things are tough at present. It's tougher still when all the friends of the new order see you advancing and turn on the alarm system.

No one, neither these friends nor their opponents, wins forever. Such is life, the old teachers taught us; the nature of things. The past few years of U.S. history, under Republicans and Democrats alike, have shown clearly that, as T. S. Eliot observed, there are no Lost Causes because there are no Gained Causes. "We fight rather," said Eliot, "to keep something alive"—a sonorous way to put it when the question before our vexed and broken house is human life itself.

SAVE THE DATE!

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025

The 22nd Annual Great Defender of Life Dinner

at the

Union League Club in New York City

honoring

Dr. Christina Francis
President of the American Association of
Pro-Life OB/GYNS

and saluting

Anne Conlon, Editor
who retires at the end of this year.

Rescuers Will Rescue

John Burger

After a stint in federal prison—where, in addition to separation from loved ones, some experienced violent surroundings, poor food and medical care, and limited access to religious services—twenty-three pardoned pro-life activists are not retreating from their mission. If anything, their experiences have strengthened their determination to rescue unborn children at risk of being killed, even though the law that put them in prison is still on the books.

The day before the annual March for Life in Washington, DC, newly inaugurated President Donald J. Trump signed an Executive Grant of Clemency for 23 people who were convicted of violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act. The pardoned proliferers had participated in several “rescues” around the country, reviving a practice from the 1980s heyday of Operation Rescue. Rescues had mostly stopped after the 1994 enactment of FACE, which imposes stiff monetary penalties and prison time for those found guilty.

But Rescue seemed to be making a bit of a comeback during Trump’s first term. Will Goodman, who served time for his participation in an October 22, 2020, rescue at the Washington Surgi-Clinic in the nation’s capital, recalled being part of a discussion in 2017 about reviving the movement:

“A number of people suggested that the appropriate time to rescue is when a child is in danger. It’s not based on a political calculus, or even necessarily a calculus of how much time you’re looking at,” Goodman said in an interview with *Human Life Review*. “It’s a response in charity to a real human life in danger, and presenting a witness of Christ’s charity, his love, to the mother and father as well as the abortion staff, with the hope of not only saving lives but also saving souls.”

A new approach called Red Rose Rescue, where proliferers enter a clinic to counsel potential abortive mothers but don’t physically block anyone, was “seen as maybe a reasonable half-step in the right direction” to revive the Rescue Movement, said Jonathan Darnel, who spent 16 months in prison for his role in the Washington rescue. “But you trespass inside the abortion clinic until the police come and arrest you.”

John Burger is a veteran Catholic journalist and author of *At the Foot of the Cross: Lessons from Ukraine* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2023).

Civil Rights

Some of the rescuers who were pardoned by President Trump were accused of going further than that: According to the Justice Department, the rescuers at the Washington Surgi-Clinic “forcefully entered” the facility and “set about blockading two clinic doors using their bodies, furniture, chains, and ropes.”

“The evidence also showed that the defendants violated the FACE Act by using a physical obstruction to injure, intimidate, and interfere with the clinic’s employees and a patient, because they were providing or obtaining reproductive health services,” said the Justice Department.

Goodman said he was in the hallway outside the Washington Surgi-Clinic, which is on the fourth floor of an office building. He was counseling women who were waiting for an abortion and was “prepared to stand in front of the door where the staff enters When the abortionist would arrive, I would kneel down at the front door after trying to engage him in a dialogue to hopefully attempt to persuade him from harming the innocent,” he told HLR.

The rescuers also were charged with “conspiring against civil rights,” which many find ironic, as they were motivated by their desire to protect the rights of the most vulnerable and felt they were acting in the tradition of the American civil rights movements.

Joan Andrews Bell, who has a long history of pro-life activism and has spent much time in prison for similar activities, also rescued in DC. In an interview, she called FACE “a wrongful law.” She made the point that people often get arrested for nonviolent, peaceful demonstrations, “but the books are not thrown at you as if you’re a horrible criminal. You don’t do that to people if you’re going to have a free country. Our country has always stood up for the right to free speech and the right to protest.”

John Hinshaw, who turned 70 in prison, where he was serving time for his part in the DC rescue, attested that some of his fellow inmates, including those doing time for violent crimes, were “shocked that we’re put in jail for peaceful civil disobedience.”

One of the DC rescuers, Jean Marshall, denied that the rescue was violent. If anything, she said in an interview, it was rescuers who suffered violence. “I went into the waiting room, but I was full body-slam pushed into the hall,” Marshall said.

In addition to the nine arrested in Washington, seven people were convicted of obstructing the entrance to the Northland Family Planning Clinic in Sterling Heights, Michigan, in 2020. They included Eva Edl, 89, a survivor of a concentration camp in communist Yugoslavia.

Others receiving a presidential pardon included Bevelyn Beatty Williams,

who had been sentenced to 41 months for charges relating to a two-day protest in 2020 outside a Planned Parenthood clinic in New York, and Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Fr. Fidelis Moscinski.

Faith Life in Prison

Many of the rescuers said that they “offered up” their confinement and whatever hardships they endured for the unborn. Joan Andrews Bell declined legal representation in court “in solidarity with” the unborn, who have no voice.

“Being in prison is part of the rescue,” said Marshall. “We are following Christ to Calvary. . . . We are following Jesus, who rescued us first.” Both Marshall and her sister, Paulette Harlow, who also rescued at the Surgi-Clinic that day, are in their mid-70s.

Some also regarded their sentence as a time of prayer and witness to others. “I tried to approach it as a retreat and looked at the prison as a monastery as well as a mission field,” said Goodman, who served 17 months of his 27-month sentence. “As rescuers, we look at prison as an extension of the rescue, not really a different thing. It’s the continuation of the same thing. We make that gift of self at the abortion center, and that gift continues through the arrest, through the trials, through prison.”

Convicted rescuers were placed in various facilities around the country, and their ability to exercise religious practices was mixed. Some had access to chaplains, others not. While Goodman could attend Sunday Mass at the two prisons he was in—in Alexandria, Virginia, and Danbury, Connecticut—Andrews Bell said that in the Federal Detention Center in Philadelphia, there was no priest, so Catholics had to pray with a missal on their own.

Due to serious health issues, Harlow served her sentence at home. Under “house arrest,” she was permitted to go out for shopping and doctor’s visits, but not for church. Priest friends did come to her home to celebrate Mass several times, but, she lamented, “that’s not the same as going to daily Mass.”

While the ability to receive spiritual care was sometimes limited, inmates had opportunities to offer such care to others. Goodman, who turned 55 in prison, was part of what he called a “very fruitful Bible study,” which had as many as 20 men attending. He and the others would also pray the Liturgy of the Hours and the rosary.

“Some of the inmates really want to get their life together,” he said. “Some are struggling with addictions. Others realize they’ve made some really bad choices, and they want to get right with God.” Some of the men had girlfriends or wives who had had abortions. “They’re in mourning,” said Goodman, who was able to counsel some of them.

So was Lauren Handy, director of activism and mutual aid for the Progressive Anti-abortion Uprising. Handy was sentenced to nearly five years for her leading role in the Washington rescue. Serving her time in a federal prison in Tallahassee, Florida, she found “so many people who are truly the forgotten of the forgotten” and many who are experiencing “abortion grief.”

“There are no materials or resources for them,” Handy said during a webinar sponsored by the Thomas More Society, which provided legal representation to her and other rescuers. At the time she was pardoned, she was on the verge of organizing abortion grief counseling groups. She is now looking for ways she can reach out to people who are incarcerated and experiencing abortion regret.

Does FACE Have a Future?

All the pardoned rescuers who were interviewed by HLR believe that FACE should be abolished or at least amended to apply only in cases of violence and significant property destruction. “As long as children are in danger, especially in the states that continue [abortion’s legality] through all nine months, Rescue is a legitimate and proportionate response to that emergency,” said Goodman.

Rescuers like Jonathan Darnel are frustrated that some people in the pro-life movement believe the bad thing about the FACE Act is that its provision to prosecute vandals of crisis pregnancy centers is not being enforced.

“It’s absurd,” said Darnel. “What does the pro-choice side lose if the FACE Act is equally enforced? So some of them can’t go paint nasty words on the side of CPCs and throw little Molotov cocktails in there or whatever. That’s what they lose. Well, not too many people were doing that anyway. But their abortion business remains open.”

On the other hand, when FACE is enforced, he said, “it means nobody rescues. Nobody can defend children in a way that is commensurate with the dignity of those children. It turns us all into cowards again. And that’s what we lose. But mainstream proliferers didn’t seem to understand that.”

Darnel created a website, smashtheface.life, which reports news about efforts to abolish the law and includes an “action button” that leads to engagement with lawmakers. Said Darnel, “Abortion is a grievous evil that should be abolished and we have not just a right but a duty to interfere with it.”

Whether or not FACE is abolished, proliferers hope that the Trump administration at least refrains from enforcing it the way previous administrations have. If so, we could be seeing much more rescue activity in the coming months and years.

An Interview with John Hinshaw

[John Hinshaw, who served 17 months in jail after being convicted for peaceful protest at a Washington DC abortion clinic, is one of 23 proliferers pardoned by President Donald Trump on January 22, the day before the 2025 March for Life. Bernadette Patel recently interviewed Mr. Hinshaw for the Human Life Review.]

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and why you were unjustly incarcerated in the fall of 2023?

I am a Catholic husband, father of six, and active prolifer since 1974 who spent his “professional career” of 35 years working with marginalized people. In October 2020, I travelled to Washington, DC, to participate in a rescue mission at one of the most notoriously evil abortion mills on the East Coast. Pro-life rescues are *completely* non-violent civil disobedience, in the manner of sit-ins of previous generations and causes. When I sat down inside the late-term abortion mill of Cesar Santangelo, I knew I was trying to stop the murder of children, including the federal crime of partial-birth abortion. Little did I know that federal law enforcement was already conspiring against us.

Some people have criticized Trump for waiting three days to pardon everyone for the theatrics of prisoners coming out right before the March for Life. What is your take on it?

On Inauguration Day, when President Trump signed the pardons for the January 6 prisoners, I was expecting to be pardoned very soon after. But, when Tuesday was passing without the pardon, it suddenly dawned on me that Donald Trump, the master showman, was not going to waste the greatest pro-life audience of the year—those participating in the March for Life! So, I was not surprised when my fellow inmates told me late Thursday afternoon (January 23), before the March, that we were pardoned. Since being released, I have seen and read that some of my fellow rescuers, such as Lauren and Herb, were doubtful that we would be pardoned. I was never doubtful that Trump (if elected) would pardon us. Just two to three weeks after our conviction and imprisonment in August of 2023, Trump stood before the Pray Vote Stand Summit for Christians in Washington, DC, and promised them that he would pardon us if elected. He did not have to make that promise—a promise that he repeated several more times over the period of our imprisonment—unless he meant it. I may have doubted whether he would be elected and even questioned his commitment to pro-life, but I

Bernadette Patel is a pro-life activist in New York.

never seriously doubted that he would pardon us.

Do you forgive the DOJ and the Biden regime for what they did?

First of all, I must distinguish the truly difficult spiritual chore of forgiveness from the presentation of forgiveness in our cultural shallowness. Part of our problem (like so many others) is the enormous difference between men and women, which our current society denies. As a man, I accept that one of the (many) reasons women were given to us men is to help us with the virtue of forgiveness. To the masculine mind and spirit, revenge makes more sense and appeals to us more than forgiveness. I therefore expect that Joan, Paulette, Jean, Heather, and Lauren will forgive more easily than Will, Jonathan, and I. But that opens up a deeper subject than this interview is meant to serve, so I will sum up by saying that our churches have not helped us with this responsibility of every Christian. Jesus offered no exception—He demanded we forgive and keep forgiving into eternity. As difficult as I find this, I accept it from the mouth of the Savior, though I will need help in reaching it. But I think Jesus understood that forgiveness is a work that takes time, rather than occurring with magical immediacy.

Trump has become a polarizing figure for pro-lifers. On one hand he helped to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and free the pro-lifers. However, on the other hand he has vocally said he would not support a federal abortion ban and has been squishy on life issues. What is your take on President Trump in regards to his constantly shifting views on abortion?

As a politically active pro-lifer for many years, my perspective on Donald Trump is more nuanced than most. In 2016, when I supported others in the Republican primaries, I saw Trump disappoint conservatives by refusing to endorse policies that might hurt him politically. He also spoke very little about the abortion issue, but what he did say struck me as real. He merely said that he changed his position on abortion when a pregnant couple he knew were divided over whether to have an abortion; the one who wanted the child to be born prevailed and, in Trump's words: "now there is a beautiful person walking around in the world." Trump went on to do good things for the unborn as president, which gave more evidence of the reality of his pro-life "conversion." Consequently, some of the silly things he said about abortion during the 2024 campaign, while dismaying, did not discourage me. His disappointing campaign rhetoric was just another avoidance of what he perceived to be positions that would hurt his political campaign. Separate from the pardons, I expected him to help with pro-life issues, which he has already done, this early in his second administration.

Just two more quick things I wish to express here—the first being that at this time when the malevolence of the Deep State is clear to any honest person (USAID, DOJ, FBI, federal courts, etc.), we are already hearing that Donald Trump is taking “revenge” against his enemies. Despite the naivete of many Christians, Trump is not engaging in vengeance; he is merely fulfilling his oath of office to protect the American people from the destructive terror aimed at them by organs of law enforcement. The FBI *is* the largest terrorist threat in this country.

The second is a gentle admonishment to Trump that, despite his determination to “manage” the abortion issue, he will find that (like Lincoln and slavery) he is *not* the manager of the crucial issue of his time. That the Hand of God is moving was demonstrated by the experience of pro-life rescuers and, while Trump has a role to play, it is the Author of Life who has dominion.

Trump’s DOJ has recently said that they will only pursue FACE cases if there is grave bodily harm or death involved. Why do you think the FACE Act should still be repealed during this administration?

While we certainly thank Trump for his commitment not to enforce FACE, a full repeal of this unjust, unconstitutional law is mandated by justice. Having watched the hatching of this federal law in the coven of Reno and Clinton, intended by them to persecute the largest righteous civil disobedience movement in the history of this country, I have been struck with horror at how it remains beyond reform/elimination. It came about to protect the great evil of Tophet. *[Editor’s note: Tophet appears in the Bible as the location—near Jerusalem—of ritual sacrifice of children to pagan gods by fire. In Jesus’ time it was a perpetually burning garbage dump called Gehenna, a word that by extension was used to refer to hell.]* No longer a federal “right,” it was never a law at all. Back to Gehenna with it.

How did you keep your faith strong in prison?

The question of how my faith was kept in prison—let me explain that I found this perhaps the easiest thing to do. Not being an exemplary Christian, I was astonished to find the “clichés” of Christianity were realities, not clichés. That God is always present, that He is most palpable in the darkest times, that He never gives a cross that can’t be borne, that prayer is powerful, that a humble heart is most prized by Our Savior, that we are given the ability to unite our sufferings with Our Savior, that the prayers of others, living and dead, are heard and can be felt by those suffering, that unjust suffering can be redemptive and, when offered, can assist Christ in changing the world. And so much more. In the last days of our trial, before conviction, I was accompanied by some

friends to an open church for quiet prayer, and a message was laid on my heart: “If I send you into the wilderness, you will not go alone. I will go before you.” In prison, I had so much time to ponder all the unmerited blessings I have received in my 70 years of life, and the spirit of gratitude filled my days. As the days of my imprisonment dwindled down, I found a new Word spoken to my heart: “All those years I heard you plead with Me to do something to protect the babies, hear now My answer—what is it that YOU will do and give to save them? What will you risk? I called you out of the world—why are you so much in it? Understand that your faithfulness is part of My strength in the world. Where are you?”

You were unjustly imprisoned for actions based on your very vocal views on abortion. What would you tell someone who wants to be more vocally pro-life in their school, workplace, or even social life but is afraid of judgment from peers or professional repercussions?

To all those who fear dismissal, disdain, and disgust from their friends, family, employers, neighbors, co-workers, social media, and politicians for your pro-life stand—I exhort you to stand openly. The people who will mistreat you demonstrate that *they are the ones who most need to hear your message!* You may not even have to use words. Most importantly for you—find a pro-life group and join. Enfold yourself within a group of pro-life people so as to never feel alone, to strengthen your commitment and assert the rightness of your cause in your own heart. Among those previously mentioned great blessings in my life have been all the beautiful friendships with pro-life people, which have made me a better person. And so many of them were with me throughout my ordeal.

Did you find it difficult or easy to make friends in prison?

I never had any difficulty making friends while in prison and was aware of no hostility (though there may have been some). Most pro-life rescuers experience sympathetic inmates who are shocked that we are sent to jail. I certainly became more aware of the need to reform our prisons as a part of law enforcement. I was called “OG” in prison (which stood for “original gangsta”) and when they asked if I knew what the letters stood for, I said: “Old Guy.” They thought this was hilarious, but I pointed out that their designation meant the same thing.

Any stories of hope or something that touched your heart while you were unjustly incarcerated?

The reason I will be writing a book is because there were too many experiences

that touched my heart while in jail. One of the most profound involved two pro-life heroes, several members of my family, and several dear, old pro-life friends. The full story is too long to tell here, but I'll give part of it to you. The darkest time of my imprisonment was around Thanksgiving of 2023, when the sadness of missing the family holiday was compounded by the death of my dear friend, the pro-life hero Chris Slattery. Chris's wife Eileen had been a friend of mine for years before I (or she) knew Chris. I missed several nights of sleep after his death and agonized over the fact that I had not seen him since the previous March for Life, in January 2023. My grief was monstrous, and my resentment was great. Two things happened in the ensuing days to communicate Christ's enduring love to me. One was the restoration of an old friend to me in God's beauty, symmetry, and poetry of action, which I will recount in my book. The second was the early birth of my new granddaughter Charlotte Millie, referenced in my statement to the court at sentencing.

How can we pray for you?

In praying for me, please prioritize my journey toward forgiveness, as I openly admit that I will not achieve this without Christ. Please pray for the healing of the hurts my family endured. Please pray for my effort to aid the repentance and salvation of Judge Kollar Kotelly, who remains in ignorance of her peril. Please pray for the direction of my pro-life efforts moving forward.

As a very practical political activist, I will be pressuring the Trump Administration to:

- Support and enforce passage of a new Born Alive Infant Protection Act that will have real penalties against doctors who actively or passively kill babies alive after abortions.
- Support #justiceforthe five to assure just that.
- Investigate the media and political cover-up of criminal abortion practice.
- Effectively strip federal law enforcement down to the ground and replace all personnel that have shown themselves not to be trusted with such authority again. That means almost all federal prosecutors and FBI agents, not just their directors.
- Defund Planned Parenthood. If DOGE leaves intact the \$700,000,000 given annually to this lucrative "business," which also receives massive donations, then DOGE itself will be recognized as a failure, no matter its other good works.
- Fight whatever fight is necessary to reduce the scope of federal courts,

where unborn life has never been given a chance.

- Work to remove the FACE Act from law, make certain it cannot be used again.

As an old pro-life activist, I see the political goals listed above as immediate priorities for our movement. And for that movement, I plead that we all remember our common brotherhood and sisterhood in this sacred cause. In prison, I felt the unity mold around us. Whatever our differences, be they in the realm of political ideals or religious practice, let us never forget that mothers and babies unite us. I trust the pro-life heart of proliferers who belong to a different church than me. I trust the pro-life heart of proliferers registered in a different political party than me. This is the unity a Culture of Life can be built upon.

Amen.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Hinshaw.

SYMPOSIUM:

What's God Got to Do with It?

The Human Life Review editors invited the participants on the following pages to contribute a reaction to the statement below:

In the decades between *Roe v. Wade* and *Dobbs*, most pro-lifers believed that Americans were more or less opposed to legalized abortion on demand because a) this was the case in 1973; b) it was imposed on us from above by “raw judicial power,” rather than legislated; and c) surveys repeatedly showed substantial percentages of Americans being disquieted by abortion, especially when you got beyond the hard cases and the earliest weeks of pregnancy.

In the first year or so following *Dobbs*, pro-lifers got a reality check through legislative defeats even in some reddish and purple states. We can say (what is true) that massive amounts of pro-abortion money peddling scare-mongering lies played a role in such defeats. Still, it has become clear that even the non-blue states are less pro-life than many believed, particularly if we understand the term “pro-life” to include the willingness of people who would never have an abortion themselves to legally deny other women the right.

In light of this, pursuing legislative and judicial pro-life victories, while important and even necessary, seems clearly insufficient to transform America into a nation where the unborn are valued and protected by society. It seems that only a long-term campaign to convert minds and hearts not only to personally value human life from conception to natural death, but to acknowledge the objective value of the unborn's life according to something like the “laws of Nature and of Nature's God,” will suffice. In other words, for most people a conversion to belief in an objective morality that applies to everyone and therefore does not derive from political institutions or authorities but from a transcending authority—let's say it, from God—is necessary for the pro-life cause to succeed nationally.

Gerard V. Bradley

We Americans are, indeed, “less pro-life than many believed, particularly if we understand the term ‘pro-life’ to include the willingness of people who would never have an abortion themselves to legally deny other women the right.” Ample proof of the fact would include the sad results of recent state referenda, as well as the unwillingness of the national “pro-life” party—the Republicans—to entertain serious restrictions on abortion. The decisive evidence, however, is probably the firestorm backlash over the Alabama Supreme Court’s ruling that the state’s “Wrongful Death of a Minor Act” applies to “all unborn children without limitation. And that includes unborn children who are not located in utero at the time they are killed.”

The deep, deep red Alabama legislature rushed to reverse the court’s decision. President Trump has “promised to advance IVF and help American families with the associated costs so American families can have more babies”—even though everyone knows that each IVF procedure produces many more embryos than will ever be implanted, and eventually born. These tiny persons are either frozen indefinitely, or destroyed outright. At least abortions kill just one tiny person at a time.

In light of these (and other) data, is it true that, while “pursuing legislative and judicial pro-life victories” is “important and even necessary,” they are “insufficient to transform America into a nation where the unborn are valued and protected by society”?

Well, it’s complicated.

For one thing, there may be a faulty premise in the question. The *Dobbs* decision did not recognize the unborn as “persons” with a right to life. It is an “important,” but still qualified, “judicial pro-life victory.” The Justices returned decisions about abortion to the states. We have seen how that went.

But let’s imagine that sometime soon the Supreme Court holds that the unborn are constitutional “persons,” thus effectively outlawing abortion. No one should think that ruling would end abortion, any more than our present laws about homicide have ended murder. Just seriously curtailing abortion in our era of mail-order abortion-by-pill would require an enormous law enforcement exertion. It is an effort that some states would not make. Perhaps the federal government itself would not make enforcing the Court’s decision a high priority. Even with maximal enforcement, many women would continue to have abortions, and no one would be punished for it.

One might then think that it makes little sense to have sweeping protective laws unless we first conduct a successful “long-term campaign to convert minds and hearts . . . to personally value human life from conception to natural death.”

Not so. For one thing, when it comes to killing, the overriding objective is not conversion or goodwill of any sort. It is to stop the killing. We can move on from there to helping people to get their minds right.

Another thing: There will always be some—perhaps many—abortions, so long as many people who have no interest in having children have sex. Our degraded sexual mores work powerfully to rationalize these abortions. That rationalization is not so much personal, singular, insular. It is (and will continue to be) more part and parcel of our whole culture. All we can do is try to “convert” as many hearts and minds as possible. But in the meantime we must try to stop the killing.

Third thing: In our society there is no realistic prospect of changing hearts and minds if we do not restrict abortion legally as much as, and as soon as, possible. In fact, the situation after, say, a Supreme Court ruling similar to that in Alabama—*everyone* counts, born or unborn—would be much like the situation after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. There the Justices held unanimously that, in the field of education, “separate is inherently unequal.” So began a decades-long battle to actually desegregate public schools, especially but not only in the South. Enormous law enforcement efforts and no little political courage were essential to finally killing Jim Crow. *Brown* was *the* indispensable engine of change.

The central argument of the segregationists in the *Brown* case was a “hearts-and-minds” story about judicial restraint where a population was largely arrayed against what the Court might rule. That argument was wrong in 1954 about racism, and it is wrong now about abortion.

Francis Cardinal George, in a brilliant 2003 law review article called “Law and Culture,” wrote:

When it comes to abortion and other sanctity of life issues, we should not suppose that our choice is between reforming the law and working to change the culture. We must do both. The work of legal reform is a necessary, though not sufficient, ingredient in the larger project of cultural transformation. Yes, we must change people’s hearts. No, we must not wait for changes of heart before changing the laws. We must do both at the same time, recognizing that just laws help to form good hearts, and unjust laws impede every other effort in the cause of the gospel of life. Teaching and preaching that gospel, reaching out in love and compassion to pregnant women in need, all of this “cultural” work is indispensable. Without it, we will never effect legal reform or, if we do, the laws will not bear the weight we will be assigning to them. Even as these endeavors go forward though, we must work tirelessly for the legal protection of the right to life of the unborn child. It is not “either/or”—“law or culture”—it is “both/and.” Efforts in each sphere presuppose and depend upon the success of efforts in the other.

Lastly, what about religion? Is it true that, for the pro-life cause to succeed

nationally, we need a widespread “conversion to belief in an objective morality that applies to everyone and therefore does not derive from political institutions or authorities but from a transcending authority—let’s say it, from God”?

Logically? No. Practically? Not necessarily: One could and many do believe that persons with rights come to be at conception without benefit of religious belief. But practically, at scale? Yes.

The Supreme Court in the infamous *Casey* decision (which re-affirmed *Roe*) justified abortion rights by rejecting God. The Justices wrote that “[a]t the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” In other words, there is no transcendent source of meaning and value. Each one of us is his or her own source of truth—or, I suppose, “truth.” Repudiating this repudiation of God may not make certain that our society will recover its lost respect for each human life from conception until natural death. But we will almost certainly languish in this abyss if we don’t.

—*Gerard V. Bradley is Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame.*

Alexandra DeSanctis

We might summarize the most common American attitude toward abortion as something like, “I wouldn’t get an abortion myself, but I can’t tell others that it is wrong for them.” Or perhaps it is this: “Abortion is probably wrong, but if I’m in a difficult spot—or someone I love is in a difficult spot—then abortion should be available.”

The typical American arrives at these positions reflexively, as if they were self-evident articles of faith available to all of us. In truth, these statements betray the bizarre sort of tension that underlies a crisis of conscience, brought on by having wrapped ourselves in a web of lies. We know abortion is wrong, but we feel uncomfortable saying it; we are reluctant to look the truth in the eye.

But the human heart cannot overlook forever what is written on it. There is no moral defense for abortion, only rationalizations. We cannot outrun the natural law, so we invent our own twisted morality to shout down the whispers of doubt: *Abortion not for me but for thee; abortion for me if push comes to shove.*

Faced with these incoherent propositions, some of us might feel an impulse to get to the root of why abortions keep happening. We don’t understand how anyone could countenance it, so we grasp for explanations and solutions.

Many women don't have the support of the child's father, so we should encourage or require paternal involvement. Many women believe motherhood would derail their education or career, so we should help them "have it all." Many women lack community support, so we should build up pregnancy-resource centers and maternity homes.

All well and good. But if we wish to get to the root of what causes abortion, we must dig deeper still—into our own hearts. Huge numbers of people have taken it upon themselves to resolve difficulty and inconvenience by killing innocent, dependent human beings. Much of our society is implicated in promoting or otherwise supporting this practice; most of the people around us conceive of this killing as a purported solution to societal ills. We are engaged in policy fights not over an issue about which reasonable people might disagree but over the worst kind of moral depravity, what we might once have felt comfortable calling "sin."

The deepest cause of abortion is, ultimately, the fundamental brokenness that dwells in each of us—the desire to control the stuff of life, to get what we want at the expense of others, to make ourselves like God.

But even those of us who realize this have ceased to say it. Out of a sincere and well-placed desire to empathize with and support those around us, we slip into rhetoric such as, "Women face such difficult circumstances," or "If only men would step up and support mothers and children," or "Perhaps pro-family policies or community aid would help." None of these statements is mistaken, and yet they cannot take the place of calling the guilty conscience to look at its own brokenness. This is a call intended not to evoke shame but to point the way toward repentance, mercy, and conversion, to invite others to attune their ears to the voice of conscience.

To a properly formed conscience, the dependence of a baby evokes—indeed, *demand*s—responsiveness and care. Something fundamental has gone haywire if our response to a baby's helplessness is to enact violence against him to suit our own purposes. Presented to a well-formed human heart, the neediness of the vulnerable calls forth love. That it no longer does so for many in the case of the unborn is evidence of a wide-scale deformation of conscience, prompted by a disinclination to admit the evil that has been done. We accept abortion as the price of doing business in the real world and yet we refuse to look in the clinic waste bin lest we find something that looks a bit too much like a baby.

We are determined to ignore or shout down the law written on the heart, because that law condemns us. And yet it continues to whisper: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." As J. Budziszewski put it in a memorable article about conscience in this very journal, "Therefore we can

be certain that every woman carries in her heart what she has cut from the dimness of her womb, and every man wears around his neck what he has refused to carry in his arms" ("What We Can't *Not* Know," HLR Fall 1996).

The evil of abortion demands confrontation and redemption. But without embracing objective morality, without belief in God, we are left with the dreadful sense that we can never recover. The first step in healing wrongdoing and reforming the conscience is to admit our need for forgiveness. How can we face up to our guilt if we have no conception of mercy—or of the God who is mercy itself?

Each of us harbors the instinct to double down on our errors and kill our conscience, while lurking in our hearts is the damning knowledge of our faults. We struggle to admit, even if only to ourselves, that we've done wrong. Acknowledging our fundamental brokenness becomes possible only when we believe that the wrongs can somehow be righted, that those we have harmed are open to forgiving us. Indeed, we must believe that something called forgiveness exists and might be available to us, that wrongs outside our power to rehabilitate can nevertheless be healed.

While some of us might muster the strength to forgive one another imperfectly, none of us can offer perfect mercy to those who have sinned, for we too are sinners. True mercy, forgiveness, and redemption are impossible without God. Perhaps this is why so many former abortionists say embracing Christianity was the necessary first step in admitting that they had done wrong; they first had to believe that forgiveness was possible. Likewise, some of the most effective pro-life ministries for post-abortive women, such as the Sisters of Life, take mercy as their starting point.

In a 1984 letter to Jim McFadden, founder of this publication, President Ronald Reagan wrote, "Respect for the sacred value of human life is too deeply ingrained in the hearts of our people to remain forever suppressed." This much is certainly true. What remains to be seen is whether we can relinquish our hearts broken by sin into the hands of the One who can heal us.

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Wesley J. Smith

The pro-life movement has always been closely associated with belief in God generally and in Christianity specifically. Indeed, explicit religiosity is one of its greatest strengths, infusing proliferers with energy, goodness, and courage as they unyieldingly pursue an often-unpopular cause.

But that isn't the end of the pro-life story. Explicit religiosity is also one of the movement's greatest weaknesses in the wider society, and indeed, may be the primary reason why in recent decades pro-life views haven't attained majority support among the American people.

A 2024 Gallup poll illustrates the problem. It found that 54 percent of respondents "identified" as "pro-choice" versus 41 percent who embraced the "pro-life" cause. Of these proliferers, only 12 percent believed that abortion should be "illegal in all circumstances." In contrast, a depressing 35 percent of those who described themselves as pro-choice believed that abortion should be legal "in any circumstance."

Gallup poll findings also illustrate Christianity's ongoing decline in the United States. Last year, 68 percent identified as "Christian." That may sound good, but that is down from 87 percent in 1973. The importance of religion in peoples' lives was also measured, with an anemic 45 percent of Americans saying that religion is "very important." Notice how this "very important" response tracks closely with the 41 percent of those who identify as pro-life. It seems to me these figures indicate that people who are devoutly faithful likely already support the pro-life cause.

So, how do proliferers persuade people beyond the already convinced to *care* about abortion, assisted suicide, radical reproduction technologies, embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, biotechnology, medical conscience, et al., in an era in which Christianity and religious belief are in decline? I wish it were otherwise, but I don't think it can be accomplished by further binding pro-life advocacy to religion or "God's" natural law.

And if pro-life principles are about "natural law," how many hours-long symposia will activists have to sponsor just to explain the concept? How many podcasts will they have to produce? How would that deep subject be discussed in a five-minute television interview? And, at a time of social media-driven shrinking attention spans, how many people would even pay attention to such pedagogy? No. *Practicality* must be the watchword. And that means agreeing on the best way to reach and persuade liberals, conservatives, the indifferent, and everyone in between.

Toward that end, I think the movement's focus should be on universal human rights, a secular concept and principle that still holds sway in a society

riven by deep political division. Indeed, this was the late, great prolifer Nat Hentoff's approach. He became pro-life after coming to understand that unborn babies—as a *matter of science*—are human beings and on hearing civil rights leader Jesse Jackson equate pro-choice belief with pro-slavery advocacy. These two understandings caused Hentoff to switch sides at great cost to his own career, writing in the *Human Life Review*: “I have learned the most fundamental human right is the right to life—for the born, the unborn, the elderly who refuse to give up on life.”

The successes achieved over the last few decades in impeding the assisted suicide juggernaut demonstrate the wisdom of this approach. After Oregon legalized assisted suicide in 1992, most observers thought it would sweep the country. But it hasn't. Yes, ten states and the District of Columbia permit doctor-prescribed death. But even many of the most liberal states have—so far—refused to join the death parade.

Why? Because proliferers understand that while their influence holds sway in conservative parts of the country—proliferers, for example, just passed a constitutional amendment against legalizing assisted suicide in West Virginia—in progressive states their visible opposition could push people bitterly opposed to pro-life advocacy into the pro-assisted suicide camp. In those cases, wise pro-life leaders have willingly assumed a less prominent public role to make room for activists who are more acceptable to politically liberal voters.

This has usually meant relying on disability rights activists, who (generally) are fiercely secular, politically progressive, and not pro-life on abortion. But they understand that the euthanasia movement targets disabled and other vulnerable people for death, so they have fiercely engaged the issue—while proliferers shored up cultural conservatives. That coalition of politically strange bedfellows works brilliantly, to the distinct frustration of assisted suicide ideologues. This model has also been deployed successfully by proliferers working alongside feminists to prevent the legalization of commercial surrogacy. So, it seems to me that this should be the model going forward: finding people who might not even identify as pro-life to participate in coalitions of the willing (if you will) on an issue-by-issue basis *based on human rights principles*, not religion.

The issues proliferers engage are symptoms of a profound nihilism that has infected society. And I do agree that religious revival is the only solution to that crisis. But restoring religious faith to the center of society is not the purpose of pro-life advocacy. Rather, the goal of the *movement* must be to save lives, not souls, which will be best achieved through an explicitly human rights perspective.

—Wesley J. Smith is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism.

Jack Fowler

The terrible thing about abortion, beyond the dire bloodshed and the psychological trauma it exacts, beyond how it changes the nature of our society to one now aptly described as embracing a “Culture of Death,” beyond how the acceptance of abortion pays demonic dividends, such as the tolerance of, and the advocacy for, infanticide and euthanasia and the disappearing of those with Down syndrome and other infirmities that surely imbue those so burdened with a special closeness to the Almighty—the terrible thing is abortion’s relegation to the confines of politics and courts.

Stay in your lane!

It seems the Churches have embraced this diminishment, this demotion of the most pressing moral issue of the last half century.

My own experience, as one who attends church weekly (and then some), is that the clergy have largely gone silent—or confined themselves to whispering—on abortion. I cannot recall the last time I heard a distinct sermon on its evils or, on the flip side, a thorough articulation of why life is sacred, why it must be protected and cherished, and why it is our duty to help those women and families in crisis.

In Catholicism, my tribe, October is Respect Life month (and the first Sunday of the month Respect Life Sunday), with the expectation that homilies will jibe with the theme. However, the designation, which seemed a positive thing when it was made in 1973 (*Hooray! We’ve got our special month!*), maybe lapsed into being remanded to a . . . ghetto. A message that needed regular—not annual—repeating was actually minimized in importance by being relegated to one month.

What if your leans-liberal pastor—allergic to this particular “controversial” subject (maybe permanently stung by an angry pro-abortion parishioner who stormed out of Mass during a sermon)—checked this box (a former one of mine did) on that assigned October Sunday by making a barely tangential “pro-life” reference in a homily (of otherwise gobbledygook). Such as: “Pregnant women should not eat fish caught in the Long Island Sound because they may get mercury poisoning.”

This indeed happened. Not the rallying cry you hear at the March for Life.

Whither the pew sitters, padre, who consist of sinners, who will face occasions of? There are single women (pregnant), married men (side hustling, impregnating), the faithful (among them elementary school girls whose future should not involve getting pregnant in high school), young men (unattached, intent on wild-oats sowing, oblivious to the biological aftereffects),

couples in financial doldrums (and the pregnancy test was positive), or the middle-aged bemoaning the obligations brought on by infirm, in-dotage parents (*I visited Mom last Christmas*)—all these people, and all people, deserve from their pastors regular, repeated articulation of the love God has for the unborn (the thee He knew in the womb), the aged (“gray hair is a crown of splendor”), and all who fit in between, and about life’s inherent sanctity, and about our very real obligation to know this, *and* to act upon it.

There is no excuse for any pulpit passivity and timidity here.

Political matter? Judicial matter? True, but abortion has always been even more a cultural and societal matter—the province of our moral leaders. Those who claim as their life’s role societal engagement, especially through churches and from pulpits, need to drop the shame, fear, and de facto embarrassment that widely persist among them and fulfill their duty to address abortion.

For abortion and those varied behaviors that lead to it are very real realities—in the case of abortion, bloody ones—dealt with by those sitting in emptying pews, that dwindling flock that nevertheless depends on Father’s or Reverend’s or Rabbi’s guidance in life’s grim and difficult matters.

Of course, it is hard to make a cultural dent in abortion when those pews continue their emptying—this is the colossal challenge facing all of our churches and houses of worship.

What to do while awaiting the next Great Awakening? Let us turn to the TCM channel.

When Father O’Malley comes to Saint Dominic’s in *Going My Way*, the pastor, Father Fitzgibbon, chides him for being lax in visiting parishioners. Say what? Priests actually visited the homes of their parishioners as part of their S.O.P.?

Maybe this quaint practice of yore could stand a reboot in 2025.

The customer—or the parishioner—may be fickle, an oh-ye-of-tenuous-faith believer. But then small things, little things (mustard seeds!), do mean a lot, even in matters of faith. Maybe especially in those. The pastoral call—*We miss you*—or the Monsignor’s unscheduled Saturday morning visit—*I just want you to know I care and invite you to come back, we are incomplete without you*—to the home of the absentee parishioner is the kind of concrete, intimate, direct action needed to play a role in returning many to practice and worship.

Quite viscerally, people want to know they are known—and wanted. It matters that their spiritual leader cares, that he might even be quite aware that *I no longer go*. That he actually cares for *my* soul. So . . .

There is a redux. They show up. The flock unscatters. And then . . .

More people are in pews to hear uncowering sermons—not necessarily marked by fire and brimstone (there is something to be said for attracting

more with honey than vinegar)—about life’s profound sanctity; sermons that come with greater frequency than the Leap Year or the Great Pumpkin, for how else to call upon a world where there are over 70 million abortions annually, and a country that allows over a million of them per year, while its states incubate the growing movement perversely branded “Death with Dignity”—to return to a culture of life.

If this seems a tall order, it is. But it is a feasible strategic plan—with the cooperation of the ordained.

Unless this happens, how can the political and judicial succeed? Can we expect pro-life referenda to prevail, and laws to be passed, and suits to be upheld, if the people who populate our Republic know no better, and are untaught by their moral teachers?

Will we succeed? That’s God’s assignment—it is in good hands. Our job is to aid and abet, through our own families and community, with the full participation of our houses of worship. Preach!

The reigning culture of death no doubt is having its long moment. But with heartfelt articulation by believers of the reasons why abortion is not only bad, but abhorrent, why euthanasia is not only bad, but repugnant, and why life is not only good, but sacred, death will experience its own sting.

—*Jack Fowler is a contributing editor at National Review and a senior philanthropy consultant at American Philanthropic.*

Monica Snyder

It’s true that people who believe humans are made in the image of God have a compelling reason to value humans. It’s not true that belief in Imago Dei is necessary to value humans, including our prenatal children.

There are strong correlations between being a practicing Christian and opposing abortion, and likewise between being an atheist and being pro-choice. According to Pew Research, Catholics who attend Mass at least weekly are vastly more likely to say abortion should be illegal than those who attend less often. At the same time, 80 percent of those unaffiliated with religion (including 95 percent of atheists) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

Both Christians and atheists have argued that these data indicate that belief in God is necessary to oppose abortion. I disagree.

I’m an atheist and I oppose abortion. I’m also the Executive Director of Secular Pro-Life (SPL), an anti-abortion organization led by atheists and supported by people of a wide variety of religious backgrounds (atheist, agnostic, Wiccan, Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish, Buddhist, and many more).

I’ve been with SPL since its founding in 2009. In the ensuing years, countless

non-religious people have told me their stories of moving from pro-choice to pro-life, all while remaining secular. SPL began publishing these testimonials once a month in our “Ask an Atheist” series. Examples:

“As someone who has had a tough life and spent time in foster care, I was disturbed by pro-choicers making eugenicist arguments that ‘unwanted’ people like me would benefit from abortion. I still believe my life matters and I’m so thankful for the opportunity to be alive and experience the world.”—Brandon, pro-life atheist

“[I became anti-abortion with] my first pregnancy. The moment I felt him move and saw his little foot slide across my stomach, like a little ‘Hello my darling, hello my ragtime gal’ alien, I realized exactly what fetuses are. Before that I was mega pro-choice.” —JW, pro-life atheist

“I started to be pro-life when I was a theist. As I grew less and less convinced of anything supernatural, I became more convinced of my pro-life stance. Abortion indisputably kills a living human and I don’t believe it’s justified homicide whatsoever.” —Dylan, pro-life atheist

“My wife and I lost our first child due to a miscarriage at 15 weeks. Up until this point, I had been pro-choice, not really giving much thought to when life truly began. This all changed for me when the doctor came to me and asked if I wanted to hold my son to say goodbye.” —Ryan, pro-life agnostic

“Over the last few years, I’ve moved from being neutral or nominally pro-choice to being anti-abortion, in part due to a relationship with a strongly pro-life [atheist] friend who got me thinking about the issue.” —Jesse, pro-life atheist

Over the years, many Christians have expressed curiosity and confusion when I talk about atheists who oppose abortion. They often assume atheists think morality is subjective, and further assume that people who think morality is subjective have no strong reasons to oppose abortion. Both of these assumptions are mistakes.

First, many non-religious people think morality is objective. Philosophers such as Erik Wielenberg, Shelly Kagan, and Michael Huemer, among others, have all argued for non-theistic moral realism. It is a mistake to assume non-religious people, by definition, believe morality is subjective.

We can see this perspective within the abortion debate. Recent Pew Research polling found that about 1 in 5 non-religious people say abortion should be illegal in most or all cases, suggesting they oppose abortion not only personally but politically. The other 4 often view abortion itself as a human right, specifically as the manifestation of the right to control who can access and use our bodies. They typically defend bodily autonomy not as a subjective ideal but as an objective moral precept.

Second, even people who think morality is subjective still usually conclude

that human beings have value, and their rights should be protected by law and societal norms. We can see this when we look at other human rights issues outside the abortion debate. For example, non-religious people regularly defend politics and policy supporting LGBT people, immigrants, and racial minorities.

Subjective morality is the idea that values are based on individual or cultural perspectives; it doesn't require believing all actions are permissible. We don't have to persuade people to believe in objective morality in order to get them to oppose abortion. We need only relate opposition to abortion to the values they already hold dear.

The pro-life movement does need to convert more hearts and minds. We want all people to value embryos as our prenatal children. But we don't have to convince others to believe in God to believe the pro-life message. Prioritizing religious conversion places Christian framings at the center of the abortion debate, which can sometimes help but often backfires. A more effective approach is to understand pro-choice audiences—their language, priorities, and perspectives—and communicate pro-life messages within those contexts.

This is where non-traditional proliferators (those who passionately oppose abortion but deviate from Christianity or political conservatism) can serve as translators. We're a key resource: ambassadors bringing the pro-life perspective to social circles the larger movement rarely connects with.

At SPL we have found that discussions of post-viability abortion, early fetal development, abortion coercion, and grief over miscarriage are all points of entry into a broader conversation. Framing the debate around equal access to motherhood, opposition to medical ableism, and the promotion of equality and nonviolence can also give people pause.

There are many paths that lead people to oppose abortion. We just need to invite them to take a few steps down the nearest one.

—*Monica Snyder is Executive Director of Secular Pro-Life.*

George McKenna

Let's start with the good news. In 2022 the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* held that our country's Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. The previous cases on this issue, *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, were overruled, and the authority to regulate abortion was returned to the people and their elected representatives in the several states. Abortion, then, is no longer a federal right. The question of whether to allow it is back in the hands of the people—where it was before the *Roe* and *Doe* decisions of 1973. This was a promising event for the pro-life movement.

But unfortunately, *Dobbs* did not culminate in a nationwide ban on abortion. In some places abortion may even have strengthened its hold. It was on the ballot in five states in 2024, and in all five, abortion advocates won, even some states thought to be reliably pro-life. More worrisome, it appeared that abortion had found favor with growing numbers of young people.

Before we despair, let's dig deeper by examining an important feature of American public opinion: its fluidity. In 2020, when Biden was declared winner of the presidential election, Trump claimed that it was stolen and encouraged his supporters to "peacefully" protest by marching on Washington. That set off four years of congressional investigations, FBI raids, and courtroom dramas, all culminating—in what? In a second term for Donald Trump! Now his approval rating is higher than ever: He attracts crowds of worshipers in bars, baseball parks, neighborhood cafeterias, and even the Waldorf-Astoria.

But I'm not primarily interested in the merits and defects of Donald Trump. My focus is on the volatility of public opinion in American politics, how quickly the pendulum can swing from praise to scorn—and back again—in short order. In 1973, at the time of *Roe v. Wade*, many prominent *Democrats* were opposed to abortion. Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy insisted that the right to life begins at "the very moment of conception." At that time it was more likely that it was *Republican* politicians, like Nelson Rockefeller, who were the champions of "abortion rights." Within a 20-year period, *both* parties had flipped—in two opposite directions—on the abortion issue.

At the beginning of his first two runs for the White House, in 2016 and 2020, Trump must have realized that he probably wouldn't get many votes from hardcore abortion supporters, so the smart move would be to throw in support for their arch-enemies. Which he did. In his televised debate with Hillary Clinton, he found just the right moment when the debate moderator asked whether late-term abortions could ever be justified. "Well," he said, "I think it's terrible. If you go with what [Clinton] 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 [Clinton] can say that that's OK—but it's not OK with me." I had never before heard any candidate, Democrat or Republican, talk like that. It clearly rattled Clinton, who accused Trump of "scare rhetoric," but it may have helped to bring to the polls many dedicated proliferers who might otherwise have stayed home.

On the eve of the 2020 election, perhaps because he looked back on that 2016 debate with Clinton and remembered how it had gotten her on the defensive with his talk about ripping a baby out of the womb, Trump announced that he'd support a nationwide ban on abortion at 15 weeks of pregnancy. (Later, perhaps under pressure from abortion lobbyists, he moved it up to 16 weeks.) But 2020

marked the election he lost. He blamed it on Democratic cheating and spent the next four years fighting off Democrat “lawfare” aimed at putting him into jail.

But Trump wasn’t just fighting Democrats during those four years. He was also *courting* groups he had won over back in 2016. One of them was the pro-life community. It played an important role in Trump’s 2024 reelection.

Trump wasted no time in continuing his friendship with proliferers. He left a pre-recorded video message at the annual March for Life thanking pro-life activists for their “tireless working and devotion across five decades,” and standing up for “precious little babies who cannot stand for themselves.” He sent his Vice-President there in person to deliver his own rousing speech of thanksgiving. Shortly before those speeches Trump pardoned 23 pro-life activists, some of them serving long prison terms, for blocking access to abortion clinics. He also issued executive orders enforcing the Hyde Amendment, which bans any use of federal funds for abortion, and has sought to cut funding of Planned Parenthood.

From a pro-life standpoint this is all good. But what happened to Trump’s *national* ban on late-term abortions? It disappeared. It’s gone, at least for the time being. But . . .

Let’s start to put our cards on the table. At some point between four and twelve weeks after sexual intercourse, a woman may discover that she is pregnant. How pregnant? Let’s say four weeks. A four-week child in the womb doesn’t *look* much like a baby, but wait: Eleven *weeks* after that, the *same* child, now fifteen weeks old, doesn’t look like anything *but* a baby. Now, let’s say its mother suddenly decides she doesn’t want that baby. Well, she can relax, because eight states—mainly in the East and the far West—have *no* time limits on killing children in the womb. Not surprisingly, abortions at 14 weeks have been known to produce live babies. I will spare you a physician’s account of what can happen then. Anyone interested can find it in my article in the Spring 2020 edition of the *Human Life Review*.

Nevertheless, I remain optimistic about the future, and here is why. People can’t continue to lie about reality. I mean they can, but they can’t without seriously damaging their thinking apparatus. Show me a color photograph of an eight-week-old fetus and tell me it’s not a human being. I would laugh at your ignorance because I know for certain that it is. It may not be as pretty as an already-born baby (though that’s arguable) but it’s unmistakably human. Long ago I learned that you’re not supposed to kill innocent human beings. It’s as simple as that, so simple that I can imagine a time in the future when people will ask, “Did they really do that? And to children?”

—George McKenna is professor emeritus of political science at City College of New York.

Helen M. Alvaré

The 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Center* decision ripped open the curtain that had been concealing nearly 50 years of evolving U.S. opinion about legalized abortion. What appeared was often disheartening. It seems that abortion's ready availability for decades has accustomed many Americans to it. Consciences have darkened. Hearts have hardened.

Self-described pro-life lawmakers, accustomed to having their hands tied—that is, unable to pass protections for the unborn due to *Roe v. Wade*—suddenly feared self-described feminists claiming that legal abortion is the *sine qua non* of freedom and happiness for women.

And then citizens in places like Ohio—*Ohio!*—enacted constitutional amendments going way past recklessly pro-abortion. And I don't use the adjective pro-abortion lightly. My lawyerly self usually sticks to "pro-legal-abortion." But these laws deserve it. For example, in Ohio, it is legal to obtain an abortion for any reason up to birth. "Health abortions" for any reason a doctor can imagine must be permitted even after fetal viability. Parents of minors and fathers of the children to be aborted have no say whatsoever over the lives of their children, with the law prohibiting actions that "directly or indirectly, burden, penalize, prohibit, interfere with" "any individual" getting an abortion. I remember hearing about constitutional provisions like these long before voting day and thinking "No sweat—we're not talking about *California* for goodness sake! This is *Ohio*." I was so wrong.

Is there a way forward? Of course, there always is where truth is concerned. But how to discern this and move forward in an organized fashion?

My dream is to excise the abortion issue from the current "categories" in which it's presently mired and to insert it in a new framework that might gain a more favorable hearing. Currently the categories dominating people's reflections on abortion are these: empowered; freedom-loving women; Democrats, and rational, nonreligious persons are "pro-choice"; clueless Neanderthal men, Republicans, and irrational religious fanatics are "pro-life."

These are not categories that provoke thoughtful conversation let alone a readiness to embrace a pro-life worldview. So I propose rather to frame the abortion issue differently—as one of the constellation of questions that Americans pose themselves when asking: "How are we doing as a nation?" How are we living up to our founding history and ongoing boast about being a beacon of mercy and freedom? For welcoming all kinds of people—no matter their age, race, circumstances, or condition? For being a place where everybody is given a fair chance to realize the inalienable right to a dignified life? For being a place where the thought of having a baby doesn't send a

woman into a stone-cold panic because she can't imagine how a baby could mesh with her need to earn a living?

Why should abortion be such a subject? Because of what it *is*, frankly, as brilliantly limned by Pope Saint John Paul II in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. This is not pretty to say, but legal abortion is a state-issued license for one family member to arrange for the killing of another. And the one empowered to arrange for or perform (via the abortion pill) the killing is not just *any* family member, but the mom—the person nature-made to be the prime-protector. And the one whose life is taken is not just her child, but a person at one of his or her most vulnerable possible moments in life, before (as John Paul II highlights) he or she can even cry out or struggle. Why shouldn't this constellation of facts frighten those who worry about “where our country is headed”? Are children *not* our future? Is our society, our economy, so structured that motherhood is nearly impossible? Have we lost our moral appreciation for innocence? Is killing no longer naturally repugnant?

And to add insult to injury, proponents call abortion a “human right” as if the human on the killing end of the instruments is not there. They call abortion a necessary means to women's financial and social freedom. They fight to hide pictures of the unborn child from the mother, as if they don't respect her intelligence or can't risk her emotions. And while they're at it, they ridicule and denounce any effort to help post-aborted women heal emotionally and spiritually.

The accumulated insults—to intelligence and human decency—of these aspects of legal abortion are not sufficiently countered when we resort to the usual language about the right to life of the unborn. This fails to evoke all that is morally at stake in the case of every abortion: *family bonds*, especially the *mother-child relationship*, the *intensely vulnerable* condition of the child, and the question whether motherhood is an insurmountable burden in one of the richest nations on Planet Earth. Hard as it is to be the person who uses the word “killing” in a conversation about abortion, I believe that this new framing of the issue could help put abortion alongside other markers of our success or failure as a nation that might resonate more deeply and more emotionally in a nation that has heard about the “right to life” for a very long time.

—Helen M. Alvaré is a Professor of Law and the Robert A. Levy Chair in Liberty and Law, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University.

Joseph Bottum

In 1983, in a speech at Fordham University, Cardinal Bernardin, the archbishop of Chicago, argued that issues of life and death form what came to be called a seamless garment—a claim that Catholic moral thinking points toward a consistent life ethic, uniting public concerns that might otherwise seem unrelated. Bernardin was not the originator of the idea, nor was he the first to deploy it in the abortion debate that had roiled the country since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973. His Fordham speech, however, brought the seamless garment to wider public notice and gave the idea of a consistent life ethic a prominent place in Catholic moral discourse in the United States.

Unfortunately, that effect was mostly baleful. Yes, Bernardin himself was solidly opposed to *Roe*. But over the next decades—in the hotly contested middle portion of the nearly 50 years of the *Roe* regime—pro-life Catholics became divided into two camps. On one side were the seamless-garment types, who folded abortion in with capital punishment, nuclear armaments, euthanasia, and social-justice issues. On the other (and much larger) side were the anti-*Roe* types, who kept abortion—then occurring around 1.5 million times a year—at the focus of their opposition.

To many of these anti-*Roe* activists and writers, the consistent life ethic looked like a way to diminish the significance of abortion. The death penalty, whatever one thinks of it, has taken 1,605 lives since 1977, when the Supreme Court walked back its essential ban in *Furman v. Georgia* (1972) and began allowing capital punishment again. No one has died from the deployment of nuclear weapons since 1945. In 2022, medically assisted deaths were estimated to have reached over 5,000 total since 1998. Meanwhile, over 63 million babies were aborted under the *Roe* decision from 1973 to 2022.

Worse than this numeric imbalance, the seamless-garment argument required equating prudential judgments with absolute judgments. Poverty may be a life issue within a certain way of understanding Catholic moral teaching, but the question of how to alleviate poverty remains open. The best way to prevent worldwide thermonuclear war—a real concern in 1983—may well have been what America's 1991 victory in the Cold War suggests it was: by maintaining an unused nuclear arsenal, rather than by unilateral disarmament. To many in the pro-life movement over the *Roe* decades, a demand for a consistent life ethic seemed a dodge—a way of paying lip-service to abortion while speaking to Catholics, but even more a way to maintain liberal credentials while speaking to Democrats in an era in which abortion was rapidly becoming a Republican preserve. Abortion was dissolved in a general leftist sea.

Then came *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* in 2022. The nationalizing of abortion under *Roe*, the raising of the issue to the level of a constitutional right, damaged American law in fields as distant as free speech, and the Supreme Court, now with a Catholic majority, had finally had enough of it. The pro-life movement's insistence on fighting *Roe*, nurturing generations of pro-life legal figures, had succeeded.

Like the dog that at last caught the car it was chasing, the pro-life movement then faced the question of what to do with the overturning of *Roe*. The effects since 2022 have not been what anyone who is pro-life would want. The number of abortions in the United States has gone up by over 10 percent, after more than twenty years of general decline. State after state added access to abortion to its state constitution. Abortion is generally thought to have eliminated the large Republican gains predicted by pollsters for 2022, and ten states had pro-abortion referendums on the ballot in 2024 (with only three—Florida, Nebraska, and South Dakota—defeated).

To some degree, this was anticipated. As pro-life figures from James McFadden to Richard John Neuhaus knew, Americans always say they want change, and then react badly to the change when it arrives. Over the 49 years of *Roe*, polls showed pro-life support rising among the general public when pro-abortion law seemed to gain ground and falling when opposition to abortion made some small legal advance. But the effect of *Dobbs* has been particularly bad, and the question of how we should proceed is urgent.

The answer, I suggest, may lie in revisiting the thought of Cardinal Bernardin, particularly as developed in his 1988 book, *Consistent Life Ethic*. This is difficult for someone like me, and there are passages in that book, particularly about the Cold War, that make one cringe at their datedness and lack of awareness that the Soviet Union's eastern European empire was about to collapse. But perhaps an undated vision of a life ethic is possible—and if it is possible, then this may be the path that should be followed by newer generations of those who are pro-life.

Certainly some of the life issues have already grown entwined. It's easy to forget that in the 1990s there were prominent commentators (Wesley J. Smith and Leon Kass among them) who were opposed to euthanasia without being fully against legalized abortion, and yet now I know of few, if any, who separate them morally. And if euthanasia and abortion can be joined, then why not other objective moral judgments?

Legalized abortion on demand licenses a crime that cries to heaven, and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has left our culture still ankle-deep in blood. Having won the fight against the claim that abortion is a right at the highest level of law, we need to take the fight to the states—and we need to make

converts for that to happen, since abortion has become the political fight that the Supreme Court preempted in 1973. And for persuading others of objective moral judgment—born not of positive law, a gift from government, but transcendental authority, a gift from God—the consistency of our vision of life becomes the key element.

—*Joseph Bottum is the 2025/2026 Visiting Scholar of Conservative Thought and Policy at the University of Colorado and a founder of the Substack newsletter Poems Ancient and Modern.*

Anne Hendershott

In 1997 pro-life obstetrician Dr. John Willkie and his wife Barbara, a nurse, published *Why Can't We Love Them Both? Questions and Answers About Abortion*. The Willkes, generally considered “founders” of the pro-life movement, were adept at messaging and imagery. They were the first to use the phrase “unborn human” and, at a time when abortion advocates were talking about “clumps of cells,” they understood the power of fetal images to verify the humanity of the unborn child. Even before *Roe* was decided, they had developed effective educational tools including slide sets, brochures, billboards, and videos, which have been used throughout the world to counter disingenuous claims about abortion.

The Willkies have died, but their legacy lives on in Life Issues Institute, the non-profit they co-founded (with Bradley Mattes) in 1991 and whose many pro-life educational efforts today include daily radio commentaries. Carried by more than 1,300 outlets, these thoughtful one-minute messages, focused on “what it means to be pro-life in post-*Roe v. Wade* America,” reach all 50 states and 18 million listeners each week, over 900 million listeners a year. The reach is impressive, but it is unlikely the spots are reaching the TikTok generation—young people just beginning to form their opinions on the unborn while being bombarded with pro-abortion messages on social media. This generation is not listening to the radio. Or even watching TV.

Social media is where we can reach them. Using visual imagery that captures the beauty of pregnancy and the promise of new life, proliferators can tell young people that we can protect both mother and child, that we can indeed “love them both.” Social media—including TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram—can convey relatable “Choose Life” messages to women—and men—facing unplanned pregnancies. Personal stories, inviting visuals, and respectful outreach will foster empathy for unborn children and openness to information about abortion alternatives. An unemotional approach that appeals only to the intellect isn't enough to effect the beginning of a paradigm

shift on abortion.

The pro-abortion side knows the persuasive power of emotion. They have spent the past fifty years using inflated statistics and graphic images to convince us that before *Roe v. Wade* thousands of women died from “coat-hanger” or botched illegal abortions. The late Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a one-time abortionist who later denounced his advocacy and converted to Christianity, debunked the inflated statistics years ago. In his 1973 book *Aborting America*, Nathanson revealed that he and other activists had made up the numbers to alarm the public and stir up abortion support.

The truth hasn’t stopped pro-abortion propagandists from continuing to use Nathanson’s deliberately inflated statistics on abortion-related deaths before *Roe*. These data are often accompanied by an oft-published gruesome photo of a woman named Gerri Santoro who died in a dirty motel room in 1964 from a self-induced abortion. In 2022, *Ms. Magazine* used the photo to accompany an article warning of what would happen if Donald Trump were to become president again.

This “death-of-countless women-from-abortion” narrative is a familiar one on TikTok and YouTube. It is enhanced through enlisting the testimonies and warnings of pro-choice celebrities like Amy Schumer. The comedian gained fame when her online “abortion tourism” video—in which she attempts to convince women living in states with abortion bans to travel to states like Colorado to end their pregnancies—went viral. The ad, in which Schumer, wearing a cowboy hat, frolics in a mountain-framed meadow, was designed to be entertaining. In it she reassures viewers that traveling across state lines for an abortion can be fun—just like a vacation.

The pro-abortion side has had the advantage in social media, but the pro-life generation can also make ads that are creative and engaging—by *telling the truth* about pregnancy and motherhood. My own students at Franciscan University of Steubenville can generate this kind of content. They just need to be encouraged to do so and provided with some direction. I can envision them doing “Ask Me Anything” sessions on social media or even a podcast in which students ask women who have used pregnancy center services (or even Franciscan University’s on-campus Guadalupe House, which is designed to shelter and provide services to pregnant Franciscan students) to share their experiences and answer questions. These sessions would emphasize the loving support available to women experiencing a crisis pregnancy and showcase the success stories of women who said yes to life. I can envision these students encouraging women to share their pregnancy stories through social media posts, using positive and hopeful language. And, most importantly, I can imagine my students helping to humanize the unborn child

by presenting imagery that conveys the wonder of new life, the miracle of the child in the womb.

In the early days of the pro-life movement, there was an over-reliance on using gruesome photos of aborted fetuses to change minds about abortion. And although there is still some debate as to whether these photos were effective or not, over the years the pro-life side has largely abandoned emotional shock in favor of unemotional intellectual persuasion. Perhaps now is the time for a communications strategy that favors positive stories with pictures of happy babies and happy mothers—because this is how we show that we really do “love them both.”

—*Anne Hendershott is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.*

Victor Lee Austin

In the fall of 1989, the annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York had a strong pro-choice resolution on its docket. To wide surprise, on the day of the convention the movers withdrew it. It was whispered that they had learned others were ready to offer a substitute resolution. I was one of them, part of a small group prepared to move that the diocese affirm the more moderate position of the national Episcopal Church. Those responsible for pulling the original resolution did not want to have the discussion that ours might have provoked.

Subsequently, I was asked (by a similarly small group) to produce an occasional newsletter on abortion. We called it *Care and Community* and gave it the tagline “By Episcopalians, for the Life of the Church.” Our focus was on the effect of abortion as a church matter—on the care we ought to have for one another and the kind of community we wanted the church to be. We deliberately avoided politics, and published no arguments for changing the law.

The position of the Episcopal Church then was (and, to an extent, still is) that abortion is regrettable. Life is sacred from its inception to natural death. Perhaps most importantly, whenever members of the church are consulted about a proposed termination of pregnancy, they are to encourage alternative, positive courses of action, including adoption and so forth. Nonetheless, the Episcopal Church was and remains opposed to any legislation that would limit the ability of a woman to reach an informed decision in this matter. My bishop at the time summarized our position as “pro-choice politically but pro-life theologically,” which of course is inconsistent—it is impossible to maintain a line between politics and theology. Still, a lot of life involves

such contradictions.

With help from many sources (I might mention the late Linda Bridges [the managing editor of *National Review* at the time] for particular example, the late J.P. McFadden for moral encouragement, and the late Richard John Neuhaus for inspiration, including the newsletter's title), we produced a pro-life publication without touching on what abortion law should be. *Care and Community* came out two or three times a year for nearly a decade. It had an effect. No abortion resolution was submitted to our diocesan convention during those years. Pro-choice colleagues would offer that, although they did not agree with us, they appreciated the spirit with which we carried forth.

* * * * *

It seems to me that the United States today needs a large-scale, focused effort under the rubric of "Care and Community." We need, patiently yet persistently, without slur or slander, to point out what abortion acquiescence has done to our society. We need to enlist a body of people of goodwill to share their concern about what happens to *care* and *community* when abortion is accepted, promoted, even celebrated. There will be no lack of material, alas. We want to build a wide network of people who may well disagree on what the best legal arrangements might be; the uniting discernment will be that abortion is devastating to our society.

Such a project would stand implicitly on a natural-law basis, at least in the rough sense that abortion, being an offense against humanity, cannot help but be manifestly bad. We need to help people see the deep harms that abortion inflicts upon humanity and human society, wounding our communities and desensitizing us to the need for care.

And what are those harms? For one, abortion atomizes society. With abortion on offer, pregnant women are often left to face their situation alone. Light needs to be shed upon this nonpolitical reality. Precisely at a point in life when a woman needs a community of friends to support her, she is abandoned with a prescription for harsh chemicals to ingest at home or an appointment at an abortion facility. Where are her friends, her boyfriend or husband, her parents? She has a "right" to abortion, but the way in which that right is practiced amounts to a solitary choice. It is a sad truth that those of us around her may feel relief; since it is her decision alone, none of us will have to be greatly inconvenienced. It is her decision, and she will have to live with it.

But in truth—and this is a truth most people recognize once it is pointed out to them—human beings are relational, always; we are not atoms, and we

should never abandon one another. We show our connectedness when we help one another in trouble, when we eschew the “easy out” (which hardly turns out to be easy) provided by some pills or a “procedure.”

Another social effect of widespread abortion practice is that it encourages us to see human beings, not as individuals with dignity, but as products we can select for existence or termination. Prenatal testing often turns into a search-and-destroy operation for unborn humans who don't measure up to our desired standards. A child with Down syndrome today is followed through his or her life with questions: Why weren't you aborted? Why has this inferior, awful life been forced upon you?

I once had a priest tell me of a parishioner who was in a hard place. Her son was impossible for her to handle. At one point she told her son, “I should have aborted you,” which is indeed what “everyone,” years before, had urged her to do. This is a small glimpse into the world abortion has brought about—our world.

Such thoughts only scratch the surface of what could be said about the effect abortion has had on our society, our communities, our care for one another. Examples abound in everyday life. Researchers are writing about this, as are novelists and playwrights. There are TV episodes that, intentionally or not, show how abortion negatively influences the way we live together. There are moments in film that do the same. The mounting evidence of societal damage demands our concerted attention. To highlight and broadcast it is an important part, at least, of our effort to nurture a culture of life.

—*The Reverend Canon Victor Lee Austin is the theologian-in-residence for the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas, Texas.*

Charles Camosy

Overall and in the main, I agree with the statement. But with a few significant caveats.

First, getting folks to objectively agree in some abstract way about the transcendent value of the humanity and/or moral status of the prenatal child—while not unimportant—will not get us where we need to go. I've been struck by stories from both pro-life sidewalk counselors and pro-abortion escorts that more often than we might think the woman going to get an abortion identifies as pro-life. Stories from Shout Your Abortion indicate that some women reconcile their abortion with the fact that the fetus is a baby with objective moral status. Probably the most influential pro-choice argument ever made—the “violinist” argument made by Judith Jarvis Thompson in 1971—at least tries to presume that that fetus is a baby with objective moral status.

Economic, social, familial, and other kinds of desperation push women and girls to have abortions—even when they know the individual being killed, expelled, sent back to heaven, etc., is a baby with objective moral status. To the extent they have any argument or explanation in defense of their action, they think of abortion as more like a refusal to help someone with their body, or (for proliferers) necessary to address such a dramatic/emergent situation that is somehow different now that they are in it. They could be facing marginalization by their family and other social circles. They could be facing the prospect of having to tell their spouse of their infidelity. They could be facing the loss of their job and/or their academic program, both of which might be necessary to care for children already born. The partner with whom they hooked-up in a casual way may (perhaps because of desperation on his end) implicitly or directly threaten her limb or even her life if she does not have the abortion.

Laws protecting prenatal justice are absolutely essential, not just because they protect babies (the number one reason to pass such laws), but also because they often protect women from the social expectation that they will have abortions in difficult circumstances. To be clear, however (and especially in the age of abortion-pill-by-mail proliferation), even if we are successful in getting laws protecting prenatal justice, we will still have lots and lots of illegal abortion. Especially from women in these desperate circumstances who will have relatively easy access to mail-order abortion pills.

So, in changing hearts and minds, we need to address the desperate circumstances which lead to so many abortions. We need to support and protect pregnant girls and women at work and school. We need to help build stronger and healthier families and marriages. We need to address the fact that the number one killer of pregnant and postpartum women and girls is homicide—and that intimate partner violence correlates strongly with abortion. We need to emphasize that the overwhelming majority (over 9 in 10) of women do not regret it down the road after being denied an abortion.

And we need to do more than write these facts down in an opinion piece and hope that the right people see it. Instead, we need to get much, much better at story-telling—especially when it comes to social media, podcasts, and other new media. We need to put serious resources into this storytelling, doing it well, and pitching it to the right people who can help amplify it. This means taking time to form the right relationships.

Of course, this is often easier said than done. Our opponents have far more resources: access to journalists, access to capital/donors, communications infrastructure, governmental support, and more. And, post-*Dobbs*, these deeply unfair circumstances have become dramatically exacerbated. I was

visiting Montana recently and met with proliferers there who estimated that on their recent abortion ballot measure they were outspent 100 to 1 (including by out of state and even international folks) and had few friendly voices in the local public discourse. They lost badly, but they never had a real chance. This basic story could be told in many other states as well.

We need a long-term plan to change hearts and minds by building better ways to tell our (much better) stories. We need to build trust with gatekeepers of our public discourse, something that will just take time. Vice President JD Vance has said in multiple contexts that this rebuilding of trust takes priority; without this, we simply cannot change hearts and minds.

We need to build trust with regard to so many claims! That we have the science on our side and our opponents (largely) do not. That we care for women and our opponents (largely) do not. That we care about applying our principles (like nonviolence, human equality, and care for the most vulnerable) consistently and our opponents (largely) do not. That we have beautiful stories of hope and our opponents (largely) do not.

Any serious attempt to do this will involve massive, long-term projects that will still be in process long after I have departed this earth, so obviously we need to think beyond the short-term thinking of the next election cycle or even the next decade. What kinds of stories will our pro-life children be telling and how will they be heard? That's the key question for us to be thinking about right now. And, to get a bit meta here, perhaps we need to think of ourselves as Moses in this story. We may be able to help lead proliferers through the desert of our current situation to the promised land. But we may not be the ones to enter it.

—Charles C. Camosy is a professor of medical humanities at the Creighton University School of Medicine.

Cecily Routman

“Choose life, that you and your children will live.”

The Jewish nation's founding document is the Torah, a morally based legal contract between God and humankind. The terms are simple: Be a moral people, bring this moral way of life to the rest of the world, and God will protect and prosper humanity. Do otherwise, and expect trouble.

This is explained clearly in Deuteronomy 30:15-28:

Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil, inasmuch as I command you this day to love the Lord, your God, to walk in His ways, and to observe His commandments, His statutes, and His ordinances, so that you will live and

increase, and the Lord, your God, will bless you in the land to which you are coming to take possession of it. But if your heart deviates and you do not listen, and you will be drawn astray, and you will prostrate yourself to other deities and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you will surely perish, and that you will not live long days on the land, to which you are crossing the Jordan, to come and take possession thereof.

The moral law is rooted in the belief that all life is sacred, created by God, and worthy of protection—especially the life of the unborn. This belief is fixed in *Pikuach Nefesh*, a Jewish legal principle declaring that the preservation of human life overrides every other religious rule in Judaism.

America's founding document, the Declaration of Independence, declared the right to life on July 4, 1776. Our Constitution reiterated this fundamental right upon ratification on March 4, 1789. John Adams emphasized the need for America to embrace moral standards when he wrote to the Massachusetts Militia on October 11, 1798: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

The right to life in America disappeared on January 22, 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* granted a constitutional right to kill an unborn human baby until birth. Over 65 million unborn babies died horrible deaths during the following 50 years. On June 22, 2022, the *Dobbs* decision revoked *Roe* and *Doe*, returning abortion legislation concerning the right to kill innocent humans in the womb to the individual states. Many states have passed laws or voted for constitutional amendments that allow abortion homicide, sometimes up to birth.

As reported by the Guttmacher Institute (GI), annual abortion numbers fell below 1 million in 2012. According to the GI's Interactive Map: US Abortion Policies and Access After *Roe*, since the *Dobbs* decision, 12 states have banned abortion outright and three others now ban it after six weeks gestation. Despite these restrictions, because of successful political action in many states, interstate travel, and access to abortion pills, in 2023 the number of U.S. abortions once again topped 1 million.

We find ourselves in perilous times when human ideas rather than biblically based morals and ethics inform our attitudes, laws, and lifestyles. Since 1973, Americans have been deliberately taught that abortion is: a civil right; a requirement for financial equity; a solution to childhood poverty and abuse; a healthcare entitlement that's good for women.

Many in our leadership class disregard or endorse this horrific human rights abuse. At every level of culture and government, injudicious judges, lawyers, activists, and politicians perpetuate a death culture. Even well-meaning policy makers lack the courage and moral clarity to stop this loss of life, this

critical threat to our nation.

While legal abortion persists everywhere in America, national moral integrity eludes us. The right to life, the foundation of the American spirit, must guide policy and law. Without it, America's future remains uncertain.

To get federal legislation passed that will end this great human rights tragedy, we need a renewed embrace of traditional American moral standards, reflected by a polled majority of voters who see the baby in the womb as an innocent human being who deserves the right to life under law. This majority must denounce torturing babies in the womb to death as morally wrong, dangerous for women, harmful to fathers, destructive to society, racist, genocidal, and evil.

Leading up to the midterm elections, pro-life advocates must collaborate on aggressive media campaigns that flood the entire country with ethical, intelligent, impactful images and messages. If morally centered religious and secular leaders follow suit, we can change how Americans vote on life.

On Flag Day 1954, President Eisenhower signed House Joint Resolution 243 that added "under God" to our Pledge of Allegiance.

Bipartisan support for this national spiritual infusion grew out of a need for reassurance from Heaven after the horrors of war and its aftermath. Politicians who opposed inserting these two words capitulated. President Eisenhower said:

Over the globe, mankind has been cruelly torn by violence and brutality and, by the millions, deadened in mind and soul by a materialistic philosophy of life. Man everywhere is appalled by the prospect of atomic war. In this somber setting, this law and its effects today have profound meaning. In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or in war.

A growing number of Americans are waking up to the brutal reality of abortion death and its aftermath on families and communities. Now is the time to once again offer them the spiritual support they need to face the future. By protecting the life of human life in the womb, we can save America's soul and her future.

—Cecily Routman is the President of the Jewish Pro-Life Foundation, a non-profit founded in 2007 to provide Jewish communities with Torah-based pro-life education and healing after abortion.

David Mills

I have three responses to the question the prompt asks about the way the pro-life movement should think about its work. What members of the movement should do, as in acts of kindness, is another question.

First, belief doesn't mean practice when conditions don't favor it, and conditions never did. Second, the pro-life movement assumed an ideologically convenient answer to why the current conditions didn't favor it, and as a result chose to understand the problem moralistically and respond politically. Third, the moralistic understanding led inevitably to the convergence of the pro-life movement with rightist politics and the Republican party.

Always in Favor

First, the majority was always going to favor abortion to some extent. What people tell pollsters often differs from what they will do or support when the belief affects their own lives.

Our culture assumes that you must be able to enjoy sex as and when you want to. It's ideally spontaneous and carefree, as natural and normal as eating, a recreation like any other. You may choose to limit your experience, as in choosing to enter a monogamous marriage, but you don't have to.

That belief is so pervasive that many, perhaps most, overtly religious and morally conservative people hold an attenuated version. Look at old Evangelical books on sex, which taught that once you had the ring, you could enjoy your own God-approved bacchanal. Many Catholics think the same way, using a peculiar idea of the theology of the body.

Implicit in this idea of sex is the belief that the act should not bring consequences you don't want, particularly disease and pregnancy. How can anyone truly enjoy sex if they have to worry about a baby? That belief requires available abortion.

When lots of people enjoy sex, some of them will become mothers and fathers when they don't want to be. That makes abortion necessary. Hence the response to *Dobbs*.

The Unasked Question

Second, the pro-life movement did not ask deeply enough what creates this culture. The general conservative answer, held by most proliferers, was and is the loss of religion (sometimes secularized into a loss of "morals and manners" or "civilization"): that Americans have rejected God, lost belief in an objective morality, etc.

But that still leaves the question: Why did we lose religion, etc.? The main-

stream pro-life movement didn't recognize the question, much less answer it. The answer would have required a conclusion most proliferers did not want: that a large part of the reason was America's economic culture and its supporting beliefs. Broadly put, American capitalism (to which mainstream proliferers couldn't imagine themselves objecting) produced the culture of which abortion was an essential part.

For one thing, sex sells. A sexualized culture encourages consumption. (C.S. Lewis noted this in *Mere Christianity*.) Maximizing shareholder value justifies almost anything.

For another, the individualized idea of sexuality dissolved the binding ties and institutions that inhibited the most efficient and profitable operations of the market, most importantly the family. G.K. Chesterton pointed this out over 100 years ago in *What's Wrong With the World*, as have scholars like Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation*.

That would take another article to argue, but for evidence, look at how America's major corporations immediately responded to *Dobbs* by spending money on helping their employees get abortions. That was a business decision, not an altruistic one. Pregnancy hurts the bottom line.

Proliferers didn't recognize this, because the recognition conflicted with their ideological commitments, which ignored economics and elevated a moralistic understanding of human behavior. In the moralistic understanding, people choose to do wrong and they need to do better, but we know they're not going to be better left on their own, so we must change the laws to force them to be better. To stop abortion, you just change the law.

At the same time, the Democratic party went all in for legal abortion without restrictions and began to insist on it as a human right, one that required government funding and protection so that everyone who wanted could exercise that right. The party—just as capitalist a party as the Republicans—turned away from economic issues to the lifestyle concerns of its increasingly elite constituencies.

The effect narrowed the pro-life movement to concern for the unborn. The movement later broadened its concern to the ill, disabled, and aged, and more recently to others like the sexually-trafficked. But in practice it's still bound by its original focus and its original political commitments. A concern for universal human dignity, as articulated by the "whole life" movement, would have delivered the mainstream from its political captivity.

Political Capture

Third, this failure to recognize the economic source of the demand for legal abortion and the rejection of human dignity as the intellectual foundation and

constriction of attention to the unborn, allowed—in fact invited—rightist political partisans to capture the official or mainstream pro-life movement. The Democrats' movement to the other side made the division stark and permanent.

These partisans, and the Republican party, used pro-life fervor to bolster other causes and to elect Republicans who had no real commitment to ending legal abortion. That includes Donald Trump, as he recently made clear.

A movement led by people ideologically and politically enmeshed with a bigger movement of people and institutions who did not believe the same things about human dignity was never going to succeed in fundamentally changing a culture in which sex was understood as it is in ours, and what legal victories it won would prove to be partial and impermanent.

Given that reality, I can understand the hope for a deep national conversion to a belief in a transcendent morality, but it seems to me a counsel of despair, because we won't get it. We won't eliminate poverty by hoping people become more generous or prevent domestic violence by hoping people learn anger management skills.

The question is what to do now, in the society we have. That requires undoing the errors of the past, particularly recognizing the disastrous failure to understand the source of the cultural support for abortion, founding the movement on a "whole life" belief in human dignity, and breaking with the Republican party.

—*David Mills is Associate Editorial Page Editor at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.*

W. Ross Blackburn

When my son heard the symposium topic, he suggested a one-word response: "Duh." Though a bit flip, he is right. Let me suggest three reasons, in order of importance, why the pro-life movement must appeal to God.

First, secular reasoning has proven to be a dead end. It is not difficult to see why. Apart from God, it is impossible to make a case for morality, for in saying something is immoral, the question inevitably arises, "According to whom?" The appeal to rights (which both sides engage in) also goes nowhere: What rights? Whose rights? Who says? If there is no God, Dostoyevsky famously observed, everything is permitted. We are left with "might makes right." Which is why abortion has become so politicized: Apart from God, we turn to government to force compliance upon others. This is not to say politics is irrelevant, only that it is insufficient.

What we don't hear, in our political world, are words like these of William Wilberforce:

Policy . . . is not my principle, and I am not ashamed to say it. There is a principle above everything that is political; and when I reflect on the command which says, "Thou shalt do no murder," believing the authority to be divine, how can I dare to set up any reasonings of my own against it? And . . . when we think of eternity, and of the future consequences of all human conduct, what is there in this life that should make any man contradict the dictates of his conscience, the principles of justice, the laws of religion, and of God. . . . The nature and all the circumstances of this [slave] trade are now laid open to us; we can no longer plead ignorance—we cannot evade—it is now an object placed before us—we cannot pass it; we may spurn it, we may kick it out of the way, but we cannot turn aside so as to avoid seeing it. . . .

Speech in the House of Commons, May 12, 1789

Wilberforce spoke against slavery, but his argument also applies to abortion. He understood that policy was not enough to end slavery. He did not just argue that slavery was wrong; he warned that God would judge the nation. More powerful than politics, he insisted, was the witness of the church.

Let true Christians then, with becoming earnestness, strive in all things to recommend their profession, and to put to silence the vain scoffs of ignorant objectors. Let them boldly assert the cause of Christ in an age when so many, who bear the name of Christians, are ashamed of Him: and let them consider as devolved on Them the important duty of suspending for a while the fall of their country, and, perhaps, of performing a still more extensive service to society at large; not by busy interference in politics, in which it cannot but be confessed there is much uncertainty; but rather by that sure and radical benefit of restoring the influence of Religion, and of raising the standard of morality.

The second reason why secular reasoning is inadequate is because it sacrifices beauty and wonder. By artificially reducing abortion to a rights issue, we sideline other matters that bear upon it—particularly sex. Consider our cultural obsession with sexual consent. Do an internet search on "sexual consent," and you will find a mind-numbing number of suggestions and rules concerning what constitutes consent in our sex-saturated culture. On the other hand, listen to John Milton in *Paradise Lost* as he imagines Adam first gazing upon Eve in Eden. Bear with the old spelling—it's worth it:

*Under his forming hands a Creature grew,
Manlike, but different sex, so lovely faire,
That what seemd fair in all the World, seemd now
Mean, or in her summ'd up, in her containd
And in her looks, which from that time infus'd
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,
And into all things from her Aire inspir'd
The spirit of love and amorous delight...*

*Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her Eye,
In every gesture dignitie and love.
I overjoyd could not forbear aloud.*

*This turn hath made amends; thou hast fulfill'd
Thy words, Creator bounteous and benigne,
Giver of all things faire, but fairest this
Of all thy gifts, nor enviest. I now see
Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my Self
Before me; Woman is her Name, of Man
Extracted; for this cause he shall forgoe
Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere;
And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soule.
(Book 8, lines 470-499)*

Adam beholds Eve—her eyes, the grace in her steps, the dignity in her gestures. As love awakens in him, he is overwhelmed, forever ruined for life without her. But he need not fear, for God himself presents her to him, a gift from his generous hand. Vulnerable and dependent, Adam is yet made complete in the one-flesh union of marriage. This wondrous gift we have exchanged for condoms, consent, and role playing in sex-ed classes—our birthright for a bowl of pottage. Our impoverished culture will not be won to sexual sanity (to say nothing of sexual delight) by enforcing a regimen of rights and consent, but rather by embracing a vision of the wondrous gift of male and female in marriage. Then boundaries around sex and procreation will make sense, as we trust God who gave them for our good.

Finally, and most importantly, we must appeal to God because our world is abortion-weary and burdened. Over 65 million children have been slain in America and tens of millions of women wounded in the half century since *Roe*. And every wounded woman stands in a circle of complicity, joined by the baby's father, grandparents, friends, and/or any others—clinic workers, politicians who promote abortion, church members—who either encouraged her to destroy her child or remained silent. Conservatively, well over one hundred million people in the U.S. alone are burdened in one way or another by the sin of abortion. No wonder it is intractable—to look at abortion honestly forces us to acknowledge what we would rather deny, what we cannot take back.

Yet God forgives sinners. The world needs to know that God forgives the sin of abortion specifically. Abortion isn't an academic or political debate—it's not a debate at all. Those involved with slaying a child *must* support

abortion; otherwise their burden is crushing. They will do so until they know there is a place—really, a Person—where they can turn and be received. Christ, the Lamb of God who bears the sin of abortion (John 1:29), bids the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him (Matthew 11:28), where we can face our sin honestly. At this point, it is not enough to cite “the laws of Nature and Nature’s God,” if by so doing we obscure Christ. For God offers forgiveness, and therefore healing and peace, in Christ. “Shout Your Abortion” isn’t a cry of peace, but rather the self-justifying cry of those who know of no other way to find peace.

Abortion has always been a religious matter. To insist that abortion is necessary to ensure economic and social “benefits” which are threatened by children is to incite child-sacrifice. What else should we call killing children so we may live as we wish? This is how far we have fallen, how deeply lost and disordered our culture has become. Our recovery, then, will not come from outlawing abortion, but from repentance—a cultural reorientation to Christ. The abolition of abortion, should it happen, will be the fruit of a renewed people, a people who forgive because we have been forgiven, who love because we have been loved, and therefore who do good because we are becoming good. If the failure of *Dobbs* to change abortion culture causes the pro-life movement to reorient toward Christ, then *Dobbs* will have been a resounding success.

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Playing Politics with the Abortion Pill: **A Quarter Century of Abuse of Power at the FDA**

J. Marc Wheat and Timothy Harper

Introduction

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? (Juvenal, *Satire VI*, lines 347–348). For some 2,000 years, the problem of “who guards the guardians” has challenged good governance. The fundamental rights of every person, including the right to life, depend on a government properly constrained. The history of the FDA’s approval of the abortion drug mifepristone is a cautionary tale of what happens without such constraints.

Congress has delegated its regulatory authority over the medical field to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a responsibility it is required to fulfill on the basis of sound science. In the case of the chemical abortion drug mifepristone, the FDA approved it not because doing so was supported by the evidence but because it advanced the pro-abortion political agenda.¹ Further, the statutory mechanism used by the FDA to approve mifepristone for abortifacient use clearly did not permit the drug’s approval. The deaths of young mothers like Candi Miller, Amber Thurman,² and Alyona Dixon³ are among the tragic consequences of the FDA’s reckless approval of chemical abortion drugs.⁴ The danger those drugs pose to women’s health was clear at the time of their approval by the FDA and has not abated in the intervening decades. Yet, the agency has repeatedly reduced the restrictions it had once implemented to mitigate some of the risk.

In 2006, the United States House of Representatives Government Reform Committee’s Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources culminated a year-long investigation with a hearing on mifepristone entitled *RU-486: Demonstrating a Low Standard for Women’s Health?*⁵ (“Congressional Hearing”). One of the witnesses was Monty Patterson, the father of Holly Patterson, who was killed by mifepristone just after her eighteenth birthday.⁶ At the hearing, Mr. Patterson testified that:

[T]welve days after Holly’s 18th birthday, on September 10, 2003, she walked into a Planned Parenthood clinic to be administered an RU-486 medical abortion regimen. By the 4th day, she was admitted to the emergency room of a local hospital. She was examined.

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She was given pain killers. She complained of bleeding, cramping, constipation, and pain, but subsequently, she was sent home. Seven days after taking RU-486, Holly returned to the same emergency room hospital complaining of weakness, vomiting, abdominal pain. Hours later, I was called to the hospital, where I found her surrounded by doctors and nurses, barely conscious and struggling to breathe. Holly was so weak she could barely hold onto my hand. Feeling utter disbelief and desperation, I watched Holly succumb to a massive bacterial infection as a result of a drug-induced abortion with RU-486.⁷

The resulting report, also entitled *The FDA and RU-486: Lowering the Standard for Women's Health*⁸ ("Congressional Report"), summarized the congressional investigation into the scandalous scientific flaws in the FDA's clearly political September 28, 2000, approval of RU-486 ("mifepristone") as a chemical abortifacient.⁹ Following upon years of political pressure from Democratic congressional chairmen Ron Wyden, Ted Weiss, and Henry Waxman in the early 1990s, the Congressional Report showed the deep Clinton White House involvement in pushing the FDA to find a way to get mifepristone introduced into the American market even before a new drug application was received.¹⁰ The Congressional Report details the uncontroverted dangers of chemical abortions—dangers of which the FDA was aware when it approved mifepristone as an abortifacient under the Subpart H approval process.

The House Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations sent two letters to the FDA seeking documents on the data integrity in clinical trials of the safety and efficacy of mifepristone sponsored by the Population Council, and a third letter related to the FDA's unusual consideration of mifepristone. There is no record that the FDA or the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) ever responded to these oversight letters, and neither agency has produced them under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Judicial Watch is representing Advancing American Freedom in a FOIA lawsuit in federal court to obtain copies of these records first requested by Congress in 1996. Thus far, neither agency has been forthcoming.¹¹

Finally, however, after years of stonewalling Congress and complainants, the FDA is being called to account and states are exercising their authority to safeguard the well-being of both mothers and their preborn children by restricting the use of chemical or surgical abortion.¹² Further, the new presidential administration presents the opportunity for the FDA to take a more serious look at the dangers of chemical abortion. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. testified in his confirmation hearing that President Trump had asked him to "study the safety of mifepristone" and committed to following the President's lead on life.

The FDA has spent decades avoiding public and judicial review. Just as pro-mifepristone partisans tried to withhold FDA documents over months

from Congress, and just as Danco, the company that sponsored mifepristone for approval, declined to testify under oath,¹³ FDA senior bureaucrats have manipulated the agency to extend a 180-day review to nearly two decades. Clearly, as the federal court for the Northern District of Texas explained, the “FDA [has] stonewalled judicial review,” *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA*, 2:22-CV-223-Z at *1 (N.D. Tex. 2023), because it knows that approving mifepristone for abortifacient use violated its own rules in 2000. Too many victims, named and unnamed, have been harmed as a result.

I. The FDA Approved Mifepristone Without Regard for the Significant Safety Concerns Apparent at the Time of Approval.

The FDA approved mifepristone for use as an abortifacient under Subpart H. To be approved under Subpart H, a drug must provide a “meaningful therapeutic benefit over existing treatments.” 21 CFR § 314.500. But there was ample evidence prior to the FDA’s approval of mifepristone in 2000 that chemical abortions provided no such benefit over the existing procedure, surgical abortions.

In 1981, human trials of mifepristone took place in Geneva, Switzerland, after seventeen months of animal research.¹⁴ Even those initial human trials indicated the dangers of mifepristone when used as an abortifacient. Those trials resulted in two unsuccessful abortions out of eleven attempts. Two additional women required further medical intervention, including, in one case, emergency surgery and a blood transfusion.¹⁵ The next round of trials, conducted in several different countries, produced widely varied success rates from as low as 54 percent to as high as 90 percent.¹⁶ That success rate increased to 94 percent in one trial when doctors in Sweden began to administer prostaglandin alongside mifepristone, though it remained significantly lower than the 99 percent success rate of surgical abortion at the time.¹⁷ *Id.*

After mifepristone was approved in France,¹⁸ a committee of experts reviewed data on 30,000 women who had used mifepristone as an abortifacient and found numerous significant risks associated with use of the drug.¹⁹ Further, the World Health Organization released a study in 1991 finding that just under 3 percent of women with completed abortions and almost 30 percent of those with incomplete abortions “had to be given ‘antibiotic therapy to prevent or cure suspected genitourinary infection’ during the six-week follow-up period.”²⁰

Writing before mifepristone’s approval, the FDA’s medical reviewer found that chemical abortions were of limited value given the short time period during which they were available, the need for three visits to a medical facility during the process, the need for a follow-up visit to ensure that surgical

intervention was not required, and the shortcomings of chemical abortion in comparison to surgical abortion.²¹ In particular, the reviewer noted the higher failure rates, greater frequency of symptoms (including cramping, nausea, and vomiting), and increased blood loss associated with chemical as opposed to surgical abortions.²²

Further, the FDA medical officer's review found that for women with pregnancies up to seven weeks, the original gestational limit approved by the FDA, the failure rate was almost 8 percent, with the percentage increasing at longer gestational periods, up to 23 percent for pregnancies between eight and nine weeks.²³ Because these failure rates were higher and the symptoms associated more frequent, and because chemical abortion provided no significant benefits over the alternative—surgical abortion—improved efficacy and safety could not have justified the FDA's approval of mifepristone for abortifacient use under its own regulation.

II. The FDA's Approval of Mifepristone for Use as an Abortifacient Violated the Plain Language of Subpart H of CFR Part 314.

Federal executive agencies derive whatever power they may have from Congress by legislation empowering them to exercise legal control over a particular policy domain. Subpart H, an FDA regulation promulgated to address the AIDS crisis and entitled *Accelerated Approval of New Drugs for Serious or Life-Threatening Illnesses*, allows the FDA to approve new drugs to treat “serious or life-threatening illnesses” if the drugs provide a “meaningful therapeutic benefit to patients over existing treatments.” 21 CFR § 314.500. Further, the FDA may approve the new drug only “on the basis of adequate and well-controlled clinical trials.” 21 CFR § 314.510. Thus, the purpose of Subpart H is to allow for expedited approval of new drugs when doing so would improve treatment of patients whose illnesses are serious and who need better treatment options. The FDA, in approving the mifepristone regimen for chemical abortions, acted outside of this clear purpose and violated the plain requirements of the regulation's text. The language of Subpart H is unambiguous, and the FDA's interpretation of that language is just as clearly contrary to that language in several ways.

As explained, Subpart H exists to allow for the approval of new drugs for the treatment of “serious or life-threatening illnesses.” 21 CFR § 314.500. But pregnancy is not an illness. As noted by the Subcommittee report, the FDA's letter to the Population Council²⁴ (which licensed mifepristone to Danco) referred to “the termination of an unwanted pregnancy” as the “serious condition” to be addressed by the approval of mifepristone.²⁵ However, the language of the regulation does not provide for approval of drugs for se-

rious *conditions* but rather for *illnesses*. Although pregnancy may occasionally result in serious or life-threatening conditions, pregnancy itself is neither serious nor life-threatening.

Subpart H requires that new drugs approved through its process “provide [a] meaningful therapeutic benefit to patients over existing treatments.” 21 CFR § 314.500. The regulation gives examples of such therapeutic benefits as the “ability to treat patients unresponsive to, or intolerant of, available therapy, or improved patient response over available therapy.” *Id.* Even if abortion constituted a treatment with therapeutic benefits, it was clear from the evidence at the time of approval in 2000 that chemical abortion was both more dangerous for the woman and less effective than surgical abortion.

The Congressional Report quotes the FDA’s Approval Memo to the Population Council describing the supposed therapeutic benefit of chemical over surgical abortions as the “avoidance of a surgical procedure.”²⁶ The Congressional Report identifies four problems with this idea.

First, the report notes that mifepristone was not approved only for use for women intolerant of surgical abortions, as would be expected for a less safe, less effective form of abortion.²⁷ According to the report, “[the] FDA baldly asserted that there was a clinical benefit for chemical abortion and made no effort to produce statistical evidence of an actual benefit.”²⁸

Second, the report notes that a substantial portion of women using mifepristone to induce an abortion ultimately required surgical intervention, casting doubt on the supposed benefit of chemical abortions, because “women must be able to tolerate the surgical procedure” if they are going to attempt a chemical abortion.²⁹ As the report notes, the FDA must show that there is, in fact, some clinical benefit to an approved drug, which they did not do in this case. *Id.*

Third, the report notes that the fact that some patients may prefer one form of treatment over another is not itself a clinical benefit.

Finally, the report notes that the FDA medical officer, prior to approval of mifepristone, commented that bleeding was a significantly more prevalent and serious issue in multiple studies comparing chemical to surgical abortions. “Given these comments,” the report summarizes, “it is impossible to conclude that [mifepristone] medical abortions provide a meaningful therapeutic benefit over surgical abortion.”³⁰

Subpart H also requires the FDA’s approval of a drug to be “on the basis of well-controlled clinical trials.” Further, 21 CFR 314.126(e) says, “Uncontrolled studies or partially controlled studies are not acceptable as the sole basis for the approval of claims of effectiveness.” In this case, the data relied on by the FDA was not concurrently controlled.³¹ As the Congressional

Report notes, the trials the FDA relied on were not concurrently controlled against first-trimester surgical abortion.³² As part of the investigation for the report, the subcommittee held a hearing in which the FDA Deputy Commissioner for Operations, Dr. Janet Woodcock, explained that a historical control was used in assessing the trials of mifepristone.³³ In other words, the trials were controlled against the existing data on pregnancy, miscarriage, and abortion.

The Congressional Report points out three problems with the FDA's assertion of non-concurrent control as a basis for the approval of mifepristone. First, the "FDA's assertion that the French and U.S. trials were historically controlled appears to be a *post hoc* assertion."³⁴ The study that reported on the American trials did not mention a control group, and a statement from an FDA statistician who reviewed the French trials suggested a lack of concurrent control groups in those trials as well.³⁵

Second, the American studies of mifepristone excluded women with numerous medical issues, but the FDA acknowledged that the historical data, the control group, was drawn from the general population and thus did not exclude women with those health problems.³⁶ As a result, the apparent safety of mifepristone relative to surgical abortion was likely inflated, because the data on chemical abortions was gathered from relatively healthy women, while the data on surgical abortions included women with health problems who would have been excluded from the studies of chemical abortion. Regardless, because the trial and control groups were not matched in terms of their health background, they are not a "meaningful control."³⁷ As the report concludes, "If it was not possible to match the populations with the historical data set, then a concurrent control should have been used." *Id.*

Finally, the report notes that using historical data rather than a concurrent control group results in "defining the clinical endpoint too restrictively."³⁸ In other words, surgical abortions and miscarriage are not binary; they do not "produce only simple zero or one outcomes." *Id.* As the report notes, "A control should have been used in the [mifepristone] trial that compared different methods of producing the experimental outcome—first-trimester pregnancy termination—while assessing each method's ability to manage highly predictable, regular complications of medical abortion (i.e., hemorrhage, incomplete abortion)." *Id.*

In sum, the FDA only claimed that its studies were controlled after approval, the American cherry-picked studies of mifepristone excluded women with numerous medical issues, potentially inflating the apparent safety of chemical as opposed to surgical abortion, and the historical data that was used as a non-concurrent control provided at best a low-resolution picture

of the safety and effectiveness of chemical as opposed to surgical abortions. Mifepristone, therefore, clearly did not meet the strict requirements for approval under Subpart H.

III. Chemical Abortion Continues to Pose a Significant Safety Risk for Women, Made Worse by the Lax Reporting Requirements Approved by the FDA.

As discussed above, the FDA knew about the significant negative health consequences of mifepristone before approving it for abortifacient use in the United States. Despite the continued danger of chemical abortion since its approval, the FDA has simultaneously removed protective limitations on the prescription of chemical abortion drugs and weakened the reporting requirements for adverse events caused by those drugs, casting doubt on its claims about the safety of mifepristone.

Currently, adverse events are widely underreported because the FDA requires prescribers to report only deaths, not other less-than-lethal adverse events associated with mifepristone. Back in 2000, the FDA approved mifepristone with certain safeguards and requirements to decrease the dangers mifepristone could pose to women, consistent with Subpart H. *See* 21 C.F.R. § 314.520. Although compliance with them was still insufficient to prevent adverse events, those requirements were much more stringent than the ones imposed today. Among those earlier requirements was one obligating prescribers to report non-fatal but serious adverse events to the drug manufacturer.³⁹ Beginning in 2016, prescribers need report only deaths associated with the drug, not other serious adverse events.⁴⁰ The FDA's intentional blinding of itself and the public from accurate knowledge of the full range and extent of adverse events associated with mifepristone, along with its claims that chemical abortion is safe because there are so few reports of adverse events, is a through-the-looking-glass approach to public health that obscures mifepristone's true dangers. Such reckless disregard for women's well-being is politics, not science.

The FDA's inexplicable removal of most adverse event reporting requirements forces researchers to look overseas for data on mifepristone's harm to women. Even recent experience with mifepristone indicates that it continues to be more dangerous than surgical abortion, contrary to the requirements of Subpart H. As British researcher and medical doctor Calum Miller explains:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a small minority of countries permitted abortion providers to send abortion pills—usually Mifepristone and misoprostol—by post to women after a remote consultation by video or telephone (hereafter, “telemedicine” refers to either)—that is, without any in-person contact throughout the process. This was an unprecedented move since full telemedicine had not been studied in legal,

experimental conditions prior to this . . . In the United Kingdom . . . ambulance calls and responses relating to medical abortion also increased dramatically between 2018 and 2021, following the introduction of [chemical abortion] at home and then full telemedicine.⁴¹

Further, according to British researchers:

Data obtained from five NHS Ambulance Trusts in England, show that emergency ambulance responses for complications arising after a medical abortion are three times higher for women using pills-by-post at home, compared to those who have their medical abortion in a clinic.⁴²

Not only did the FDA remove the adverse event reporting requirement, but it also removed the previously required in-person doctor assessment. At the time of the FDA's initial approval, a woman seeking a chemical abortion was required to visit the doctor three times to receive a chemical abortion prescription. In 2016, that number of visits dropped to one.⁴³ Then in 2021 the FDA removed the in-person visit requirement altogether, meaning that a woman can obtain mifepristone through the mail without in-person examination, sonogram, or laboratory analysis.⁴⁴

Prescribing chemical abortion drugs via telemedicine exposes women to several risks, one of the most significant of which is a ruptured ectopic pregnancy. Ultrasounds, which require an in-person assessment, are critical in identifying gestational age and ruling out ectopic pregnancies. Chemical abortion is ineffective in cases of ectopic pregnancy, yet, as the federal court for the Northern District of Texas explained, “there is simply *no requirement* that *any* procedure is done to rule out an ectopic pregnancy—which *is* a serious and life-threatening situation.” *Alliance for Hippocratic Med. v. FDA*, 2:22-CV-223-Z at *51 (N.D. Tex. Apr. 7, 2023). The current REMS require only that the prescriber have the “[a]bility to diagnose ectopic pregnancies,” not that a doctor actually assess whether the patient has one.⁴⁵

Finally, telemedicine may not allow for a thorough discussion of the patient's medical history or assessment of her needs, potentially missing important details that could impact the procedure's safety. Telemedicine also leads to uncertainty and the inability to confirm that a woman is not being coerced into undergoing an abortion. Further, “We can expect that 1-in-17 women using the abortion pills at home, will subsequently need hospital treatment for complications arising from the medical abortion treatment failure, presenting with retained products of conception and/or hemorrhage.”⁴⁶ Thus, the FDA's loosening of standards puts women at greater risk of harm without any counterbalancing interest to justify that increased risk.

By 2006, the dangers of chemical abortion had become even more evident

than they were in 2000, when the FDA approved the drugs for that use. In her testimony in a Congressional Hearing in May of 2006, Dr. Donna Harrison said,⁴⁷

In my experience as an ob-gyn, the volume of blood loss seen in the life-threatening cases is comparable to that observed in major surgical trauma cases like motor-vehicle accidents. This volume of blood loss is rarely seen in early surgical abortion without perforation of the uterus, and it is rarely seen in spontaneous abortion.

Dr. Harrison added that no risk factors predicted such hemorrhage, and that it was life threatening for women without access to immediate medical care.⁴⁸ Such dangers have been ignored by the FDA in its effort to push mifepristone over the past 24 years.

Information that has become available since the publication of the Congressional Report in 2006 is no more encouraging. Several studies have shown the medical risk associated with the use of chemical abortion. One study found that 10 percent of women, after use of chemical abortion, require follow-up medical treatment for failed or incomplete abortion,⁴⁹ and 20 percent of women who use mifepristone to induce abortions will have an adverse event, including hemorrhaging and infections.⁵⁰ This rate of adverse events is four times greater than the adverse event rate of surgical abortion. *Id.*

Abortion, including chemical abortion, also risks harm to the woman's mental health. A comprehensive review of the literature on abortion and mental health found that at least some women experienced negative mental health outcomes as a result of their abortions and that "[t]he ability to identify women who are at greater risk of negative reactions has resulted in numerous recommendations for abortion providers to screen for these risk factors in order to provide additional counseling both before an abortion, including decision-making counseling, and after an abortion."⁵¹ The dangers to women posed by chemical abortion are many. Yet the FDA, despite consistent evidence of these dangers, has repeatedly reduced the safety measures it had initially put in place to protect against those harms.

Conclusion

The question at the heart of this issue is what is of greater importance to government regulators: the health and safety of women and the unborn or the political advantage of greater abortion "access." Surgical abortion is safer than chemical abortion, at least for the mother. Yet the FDA has repeatedly loosened safety requirements for mifepristone's prescription. It's time for the government to prioritize safety and science over politics. Until it does so, women like Amber Thurman and Candi Miller will continue to suffer the consequences.

NOTES

1. The FDA's approval of mifepristone for abortifacient use demonstrates the danger of bureaucracy and its tendency to hide politics behind a veil of supposed expertise. Advancing American Freedom (AAF) has repeatedly drawn attention to the danger. This testimony summarizes AAF's work on this issue and the work of others to call attention to the FDA's prioritization of politics over women's safety. AAF's own work and other important resources on this issue can be found at the links below. The Judicial Watch Special Report provides some of the most striking evidence that the approval of mifepristone for abortifacient use was a political, not a scientific, decision.

Amicus Briefs

- *Bryant v. Moore* (Fourth Circuit) (August 2024): <https://tinyurl.com/52k345f6>
- *GenBioPro Inc. v. Kristina Raynes* (Fourth Circuit) (April 2024): <https://tinyurl.com/bdh73fth>
- *FDA v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine* (Supreme Court) (February 2024): <https://tinyurl.com/vzszsubm>
- *FDA v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine* (Fifth Circuit) (May 2023): <https://tinyurl.com/678zz8xd>
- *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA* (Supreme Court) (April 2023): <https://tinyurl.com/3j9d98cm>
- *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA* (Fifth Circuit) (April 2023): <https://tinyurl.com/yskwk5wf>
- *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA* (District Court) (February 2023): <https://tinyurl.com/4ccjmwdy>

AAF Memos

- How Chemical Abortion Harms American Women and Children (Feb 2024): <https://tinyurl.com/4xsy9ybr>
- The Truth About the Georgia Abortion Death (Sept 2024): <https://tinyurl.com/yc5ftebj>

AAF Letter to Congress on Mifepristone

- Restore Safeguards on Mifepristone in Agriculture Appropriations Bill (Sept 2023): <https://tinyurl.com/5acjw2rr>

FOIA Requests

- FOIA Request for FDA Records on Mifepristone: <https://tinyurl.com/2n85njv6>
- FOIA on FDA Approval of Mifepristone: <https://tinyurl.com/yfz2f9k7>

Online Resources

- Judicial Watch Special Report: The Clinton RU-486 Files: <https://tinyurl.com/2hzbncm3>
- Congressional staff report "The FDA and RU-486: Lowering the Standard for Women's Health": <https://tinyurl.com/48pdx2hn>
- Congressional Hearing "RU-486: Demonstrating A Low Standard for Women's Health?": <https://tinyurl.com/3bxx5mdy>
- 2. Kavitha Surana, Abortion Bans Have Delayed Emergency Medical Care. In Georgia, Experts Say This Mother's Death Was Preventable, ProPublica (Sept. 16, 2024) <https://www.propublica.org/article/georgia-abortion-ban-amber-thurman-death>
- 3. Carole Novielli, Woman's Death from 'Septic Abortion' Days After Obtaining Abortion Pill Sparks Lawsuit, Live Action (September 25, 2023) <https://www.liveaction.org/news/womans-death-septic-abortion-pill-lawsuit/>
- 4. The Truth About the Georgia Abortion Death: <https://advancingamericanfreedom.com/aaf-the-truth-about-the-georgia-abortion-death/>
- 5. RU-486: Demonstrating a Low Standard for Women's Health? Hearing before the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Res., Committee on Government Reform, 109th Cong. (May 17, 2006), available at <https://archive.org/details/gov.gpo.fdsys.CHRG-109hrg31397>. Video available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?192580-1/ru-486-health-safety-standards#>

6. “I said I wanted to show you a picture of my daughter so at least you see what I have lost and actually what she lost. I owe and dedicate my presence here to those who have no voice and particularly to my daughter, Holly, who died at 18, and the other women who have died or have been seriously hurt by taking the RU-486 medical abortion drug regimen as a solution to their unplanned pregnancy. I am here to testify about my personal experience as the father of a victim of this drug and my consequent knowledge, experiences, and views pertaining to RU-486, the drug.” Congressional Hearing at 120.
7. *Id.*
8. The FDA and RU-486: Lowering the Standard for Women’s Health, House of Representatives Government Reform Committee; Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources (Oct. 2006), available at <https://www.liveaction.org/news/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SouderStaffReportonRU-486.pdf>
9. Hannah Levintova, “The Abortion Pill’s Secret Money Men: The untold story of the private equity investors behind Mifeprex—and their escalating legal battle to cash in post-*Dobbs*,” *Mother Jones* (March/April 2023), available at <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2023/01/abortion-pill-Mifepristone-mifeprex-roe-dobbs-private-equity/>
10. Congressional Hearing at 3-66.
11. Copy of the lawsuit and the Congressional oversight letters are available at <https://advancingamericanfreedom.com/aaf-foundation-files-foia-lawsuit-against-hhs-on-Mifepristone/>
12. The states’ legitimate interest in protecting the life of the unborn and the safety and health of the mother is recognized by the Court today and was recognized at the time of the FDA’s approval. See *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, 142 S. Ct. 2228, 2284 (2022); *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 846 (1992). See AAF amicus briefs defending state laws to restore FDA protections on mifepristone in West Virginia (<https://advancingamericanfreedom.com/genbiopro-inc-v-kristina-raynes/>) and North Carolina (<https://advancingamericanfreedom.com/bryant-v-moore/>).
13. Congressional Hearing at 68.
14. Congressional Report at 10.
15. Congressional Report at 10.
16. Congressional Report at 10-11.
17. Success was defined as fetal death without the need for further medical intervention.
18. A French manufacturer handed over the technologies and patent rights to Population Council. The plan for this donation was first recommended to president-elect Clinton by Ron Weddington (co-counsel with his wife Sarah in *Roe v. Wade*) in a 1992 letter where he proposed expanding access to cheap chemical abortions “to eliminate the barely educated, unhealthy and poor segment of our country” since “26 million food stamp recipients is more than the economy can stand.”[54] Weddington JR. Letter to President-To-Be Clinton, Jan 6 1992. In: Rasco C, editor. OA/Box OA7455, File Folder: RU-486 [Internet]. Clinton Library; 1992. p. 54–8. Available from: <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/files/original/f8977047aefa0c1f90a24665cabf95bc.pdf>
19. Congressional Report at 11-12.
20. Congressional Report at 12, n. 63.
21. Congressional Report at 29-30.
22. Congressional Report at 29-30.
23. Congressional Report at 31.
24. “The Population Council is a nonprofit founded in 1952 by John D. Rockefeller III to address supposed world overpopulation.” Population Council, <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/population-council/> (last visited Feb. 9, 2023). As pro-abortion activist Lawrence Lader noted, “In a larger sense, each woman who decides whether or not a fetus should become a child affects the population charts.” Lawrence Lader, *Abortion*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill; 1966. 212 p.
25. Congressional Report 19, n. 99.
26. Congressional Report at 21, n. 106 (internal quotation marks omitted).
27. Congressional Report at 22.
28. Congressional Report at 22.
29. Congressional Report at 22.
30. Congressional Report at 23.
31. See Congressional Report at 15-19.
32. Congressional Report at 14.
33. Congressional Hearing at 92.

34. Congressional Report at 17.
35. Congressional Report at 17.
36. Congressional Report at 18.
37. Congressional Report at 18.
38. Congressional Report at 18.
39. Food and Drug Administration, Approved Labeling Text for Mifeprex (Sept. 28, 2000), https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2000/206871bl.htm
40. Food and Drug Administration, Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (March 2016), <https://www.fda.gov/media/164649/download>. Food and Drug Administration, Risk Evaluation and Management Strategy (May 2021), <https://www.fda.gov/media/164651/download>.
41. Calum Miller, “Telemedicine Abortion: Why It Is Not Safe for Women,” in Nicholas Colgrove, ed., *Agency, Pregnancy and Persons: Essays in Defense of Human Life* at 288, 296 (forthcoming, 2023). ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wfu/detail.action?docID=6998328> Even the most zealous advocates for mifepristone did not countenance that: “Prescribing RU 486 will maintain the same doctor-patient relationship that accompanies the use of an antibiotic or any drug.” Lader 1995 at 17.
42. Id.
43. Information on Mifeprex Changes and Ongoing Monitoring Efforts, Government Accountability Office at 7 (Mar. 2018) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-292.pdf>
44. Information about Mifepristone for Medical Termination of Pregnancy Through Ten Weeks Gestation, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (Mar. 2023) <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/postmarket-drug-safety-information-patients-and-providers/information-about-Mifepristone-medical-termination-pregnancy-through-ten-weeks-gestation>
45. Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) Singla Shared System for Mifepristone 200MG, Food and Drug Administration at 1 <https://www.fda.gov/media/164651/download?attachment>
46. FOI Investigation into Medical Abortion Treatment Failure, Percuity at 4 (Oct. 2021). <https://percuity.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/foi-ma-treatment-failure-211027.pdf>
47. Congressional Hearing at 142.
48. Id.
49. Maarit Niinimäki et al., Comparison of rates of adverse events in adolescent and adult women undergoing medical abortion: population register based study, *BMJ*, April 20, 2011, at 4.
50. Maarit Niinimäki et al., Immediate complications after medical compared with surgical termination of pregnancy, 114 *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 795 (2009).
51. David C. Reardon, The abortion and mental health controversy: A comprehensive literature review of common ground agreements, disagreements, actionable recommendations, and research opportunities, 6 *Sage Open Medicine* 1, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2050312118807624>.

The Selling of Kate Cox:

How the Media Failed to Report the Full Story

Julia Duin

Kate Cox should be cradling a little boy right now—a three-month-old at this writing and very much a wanted child.

In late 2023, the Dallas-area mother of three (living) children became the focal point of one of the savviest PR efforts in America's 52-year-old debate over legalized abortion. Articulate and attractive, with a compelling story, she rose from anonymity to a seat of honor beside former First Lady Jill Biden at then-President Joe Biden's State-of-the-Union address in early 2024. When the president referred to her in his speech, Cox got a standing ovation.

In this article I will not so much rehash her story as question the dozens of reporters who published fawning articles detailing (in their view) the near-martyrdom of this north Texas mom with the bad luck to have a dire pregnancy in a state that (post-*Dobbs*) has become something out of *A Handmaid's Tale*. These were writers who—as far as I could determine—never did fact checks about problem pregnancies, never questioned the narrative about aborting fetuses with handicaps, and never bothered to search out opposing points of view.

Cox was 20 weeks pregnant with a girl when she learned the child had Trisomy 18, a genetic condition that is often—but not always—fatal. One famous example of a survivor is Bella Santorum, eighth child of former Sen. Rick Santorum, who is now a dark-eyed, dark-haired sixteen-year-old.

Cox was told that her child had a “full” Trisomy 18, and had no chance of survival. Moreover, Cox was experiencing cramping and some leakage from her uterus and feared her daughter would eventually die in her womb or at birth. Neither scenario appealed to her, so, in the words of her court petition to abort the pregnancy, “It is not a matter of if I will have to say good-bye, but when. I do not want to continue the pain and suffering that has plagued this pregnancy . . . I desperately want the chance to try for another baby . . .”

Thus, Cox became the first woman in the country to sue for the right to an abortion since the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision overturned *Roe v.*

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Wade in 2022. She was ultimately turned down by the Texas State Supreme Court—but in the interim, she left the state to get an abortion in New Mexico.

Meanwhile, the activist Center for Reproductive Rights, which Cox had approached for help, had spread the word about her situation. The media pile-on started right away. From *The Guardian*, we hear how “in a state like Texas, [pregnancy complications] have become newly dangerous, threatening women with potentially disfiguring health complications, along with unimaginable heartbreak, as the state’s multiple bans have mandated grotesque and inhumane treatment of doomed pregnancies.”

“Disfiguring health complications?” There’s nothing I found in the court record that even hinted at that.

Then there was a breathless advocacy piece by Monica Hesse (formerly gender columnist for the *Washington Post* until early this year, when her employer did away with the position and transferred her to the opinion section).

Hesse’s article was topped by a lovely portrait of the blond-haired Cox in a black dress or tunic covered with an ornate leaf design. She is shown gazing down at her stomach, with both hands protectively placed where her unborn child should be. Although—depending on when the photo was taken—it’s possible the child (whom she had named Chloe) had already been terminated.

The pregnancy “severely compromised” Cox’s health, Hesse wrote. Cox’s physician, Dr. Damla Karsan, had given a statement to the court saying—and this wording is important—that it was her “good faith belief and medical recommendation” that Cox should be granted permission to have an abortion. Cox, the doctor wrote, “has a life-threatening physical condition aggravated by, caused by, or arising from her current pregnancy that places her at risk of death or poses a serious risk of substantial impairment of her reproductive functions.”

The Texas State Supreme Court ruled that Karsan was hedging as to whether her patient’s condition was truly life-threatening. Karsan knew the law, the judges said; if it *was* life threatening, the law allowed the doctor to abort the pregnancy.

Why did the doctor not go ahead? For starters, State Attorney General Ken Paxton had threatened with massive fines, imprisonment, and loss of medical licenses any doctor or hospital that helped Cox abort her child. A court authorization would give Karsan and her staff the necessary cover.

Using phrases like “Cox’s battered body” and “unspeakable anguish,” Hesse concluded that what happened to Cox was a “travesty of justice.”

Clearly, this was a complicated case, so I began looking about to see how other journalists had covered the story. What I found were a number of assertions—some of them contradictory—that Cox and her advocates made and that journalists never bothered to fact check. They included:

- That bearing this child would destroy her fertility;
- That if she continued with this pregnancy, her uterus would rupture;
- That Trisomy 18 was almost always a “lethal abnormality.”

Incidentally, Trisomy-18 itself is not dangerous to a mother’s health. A simple read of the Trisomy Foundation’s website states that it is very rare for such pregnancies to endanger the mother.

According to a transcript of the hearing that I accessed through the *New York Times*, Cox’s lawyer stated that if she were denied the abortion, doctors would either have to induce labor (if she miscarried or if the child died in utero) or administer a C-section (if the child survived until birth). Because C-sections cause scarring, there would be a chance that her future fertility might be affected, meaning she might not be able to have more children.

At this point, Hesse should have seen an obvious gap in logic. It’s not unheard of for women to have multiple C-sections (Ethel Kennedy had five), so what’s all this clamor about her “future fertility” being affected? Hadn’t Cox gone into the pregnancy unfazed by the knowledge that she could have a third C-section—until she learned that the child was handicapped?

And if a C-section causes scarring, what about a D&E (dilation and extraction) abortion, which is what you get at 20 weeks when the unborn child is the size of a banana? There are risks to a D&E as well, including perforation of the uterus and severe bleeding; dilators are put into the cervix the night before to widen it, so it’s no picnic. Why was Cox willing to risk the well-being of her uterus, aka future fertility, in a second-trimester abortion, but not in a C-section?

Simple answer: Because Cox wanted to try again and was open to undergoing a C-section for a healthy future baby. She just didn’t want to have a C-section for *this* baby.

As she tellingly said near the top of the transcript: *There’s no outcomes at the end of this, where I take home a healthy baby girl.*

I glanced at another long piece about Cox in *Time* magazine that repeated Karsan’s narrative: that if the baby died in utero, Cox could get a significant infection; that a third C-section brought increased risk of uterine rupture; that being induced (instead of aborting the child) or having a C-section might mean she would never have more children, etc.

Reporters swallowed this narrative hook, bait, line, and sinker. Not one article I read was honest enough to state that Cox was cutting her losses in favor of a healthy child, and if she had to abort one to do so, that was her pragmatic choice.

Instead, reporters wrote up scenarios where Cox’s unborn daughter was endangering her health, her fertility, even her very life, though her life was

never in danger. Story after story simply ran with this one point of view, with no attempt to even consider that there might be another truth out there. The temptation to portray a distressed, highly likeable, and attractive woman telling the compelling story that she was being forced to bear a highly flawed child was too strong to turn down.

The one reporter who offered a very different narrative on Trisomy 18 was Jennifer Brookland, a children's health reporter with the *Detroit Free Press*. She wrote a long article on local kids who also had full Trisomy 18, but whose mothers brought them to term. The families were patients at the University of Michigan's C. S. Mott Children's Hospital in Detroit, which took an aggressive approach to saving such children. The result: 90 percent of Trisomy 18 kids born there were able to go home from the hospital.

One wonders what would have happened had Cox lived in Detroit instead of Dallas.

After learning about Cox, I, like Brookland, wondered if I was hearing the entire story. Then I heard about Yessica Guerrero, then 34, a woman living just north of Houston. She was pregnant with a daughter with anencephaly, where much of the brain and part of the skull is simply missing. The child was due in September 2024, and the mother was planning to bring her to term. Guerrero had four living children; another daughter, who also had anencephaly, died at birth in 2017.

For a woman to weather not just one horrific tragedy, but two, floored me. I called Guerrero to ask if I could follow her along in her pregnancy, and I learned she was part of a network of other Texas women who'd had the same experience—and who also had decided not to abort. Next I learned of yet another group, an Austin-based network called carrytoterm.org, that offers advice on “pregnancy continuation” for “life-limiting conditions.”

Why am I not reading about these people? I thought. If I, living in Seattle, can find out about these networks, why aren't Texas journalists digging them up? I tried pitching Guerrero's story to one national magazine, but my editor contact didn't think it was original or fresh enough. Not long before, this publication had profiled abortionist Warren Hern, who's been written up a zillion times. But my idea didn't cut it.

Fortunately ReligionUnplugged did pick up my story (please see it in Appendix A), but that one response showed me the secular media aren't racing after narratives that show women choosing their handicapped children.

This wasn't the first time I'd noticed such blindness. During the 16 years I lived inside the Beltway (1995-2012), I read more than enough pieces in the *Washington Post* and other mainstream media about the noble efforts of nurses and doctors in abortion clinics to keep said clinics open, but I could

count on the fingers of one hand sympathetic profiles of pro-life figures. Working for the comparatively understaffed *Washington Times*, I unearthed Isaiah's Hope, an organization based in Silver Spring, Md., that encouraged women to bring endangered pregnancies to term. It began when Anna Lise "Cubby" LaHood found out in the spring of 1988 that her unborn son Francis would die shortly after birth from polycystic kidney disease. What saved Francis from an abortion was a Catholic priest telling her husband Dan that even the birth of a stillborn child had meaning. I wrote about them in 2009.

I wondered at the time: *Why aren't reporters covering the experiences of women who have brought these kids to term?* Isaiah's Hope was not a tough group to find. Nor were other groups around the DC area with similar stories. But they were too conservative. Too Catholic. Too counter-cultural.

A lot of reporters cannot bring themselves to question pro-abortion assumptions. For the Cox story, I found one writer who did so: Delaney Coyne's analysis for the Jesuit publication *America*. Coyne is the one writer who did observe that it was a bit iffy whether Cox's life was actually in danger and noted that some doctors may exaggerate how life-threatening a pregnant woman's condition actually is so she can get an abortion. Still, in the battle for public opinion, voters will side with a sympathetic Kate Cox-like character every time, so proliferators need to change their strategy in such cases.

But this is hard to do when so much confidential medical information is involved that the public has no access to.

While I was working on the Yessica Guerrero article and interviewing her doctor about methods of delivering infants with poor life expectancy, with the Cox case in mind, I asked whether induction can rupture a uterus.

"It's very rare but it can," the doctor replied. "Outside of a patient with a prior surgery on her uterus, it's almost unheard of."

Cox had had two C-sections, so yes, that's a type of uterine surgery. But it was not a given that rupture would happen. That was the scenario Cox's Dr. Karsan drew, but I began to wonder how disinterested a participant she was, as Karsan is one of two physician plaintiffs in another abortion rights suit *Zurawski v. State of Texas*. Although the lawsuit does say the two women met, and Karsan had reviewed Cox's records, nothing specified that the two had a doctor/patient relationship, nor that Karsan had examined Cox before the latter filed the lawsuit.

One other factoid I picked up from Guerrero's maternal medicine specialist: Texas Children's Hospital in Houston was where people who wanted to keep their Trisomy-13 and Trisomy-18 babies came for support. The clinic is called the Texas Children's Fetal Center, and it lists just about every birth defect and fetal anomaly there is.

Had Cox even been told such a place was available if she chose to bring her daughter to term? Had she even wanted to know? I wonder if Cox projected into the future, saw nothing but pain and suffering, and decided she didn't want to go there. A second-trimester abortion was the fastest way to solve this problem.

But first, she and her doctor and lawyers had to persuade everyone that she had no other choice. This is where I castigate the media for failing to say there were other choices and refusing to present them.

Or, if they did present them, it was in such an unattractive way that no sane person would want to follow in their footsteps. When the *Texas Tribune* did a piece on an east Texas woman who brought her non-viable twins to term, the gritty narrative dwelt on the repulsive nature of the infants, who died soon after birth. And to be sure, the deformities the twin boys had were not pretty.

But abortion isn't pretty, either.

One light in the journalistic darkness I've discovered is Amy Kuebelbeck, a copy editor for the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* whose son Gabriel died soon after birth in 1999 of hypoplastic left heart syndrome. What she discovered in her grief was not only other parents walking the same path, but hospitals that had palliative care for a newborn who is expected to die within a few hours or days. These places are known as perinatal hospices.

Kuebelbeck realized that it could make a huge difference to parents who were trying to decide whether to abort such a child or bring him or her to term if they knew that many hospitals offer this service. So she began compiling a website: perinatalhospice.org, and a list—now at 273 perinatal centers in the United States and 96 abroad. Hospitals don't tend to advertise these places, she told me, because they don't wish to sell themselves as places where people die.

These places are still worth a story, I replied. Why do so few reporters go there?

"If you've never been in this situation or known someone who has, the entire thing is so foreign to you," she said. "You see this situation as so horrific, the only solution is to help someone to get out of it as soon as possible. That's what they see as compassion."

And some doctors don't help.

Judging from the parents she's heard from, "There's a strong expectation among medical professionals that the only rational thing . . . was to end the pregnancy. I continue to hear from people who felt pressured or dismissed because they wanted to continue."

Within six months of her abortion, Cox was pregnant again. She announced her pregnancy at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where the

late Cecile Richards of Planned Parenthood fame introduced her as “another great Texas heroine.” The last we saw of the mother was in mid-October in a televised ad that ran on behalf of U.S. Rep. Colin Allred (D-Texas), who was running against Sen. Ted Cruz. She was wearing a forced smile and appearing in a black dress. The camera only briefly touching on her very pregnant belly, Cox spoke out against her state’s “devastating” abortion ban that had forced her to flee to New Mexico. Allred, she promised, “will restore common sense to our health care laws.”

Allred lost to Cruz, and the reaction to Cox when the video was posted on YouTube video was testy. Typical comment: “Why is she smiling when talking about killing her kid?”

Since then, Cox has totally dropped off the media radar. She turned down my interview request, even to confirm the birth had gone well. She desired privacy, I was told, after a nearly two-year media blitz. With the election, the mood around the country has shifted, and the hero’s welcome she enjoyed a year ago is an echo now.

NOTES

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8. Delaney Coyne, “There are no black-and-white answers in the Texas trisomy 18 abortion case,” *America*, Dec. 21, 2023.
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Dana Hendershott
October 24, 1949 ~ March 19, 2025



Dana joined us in 2015 as a volunteer; being an experienced operations manager, he soon saw where we needed help and stepped right in to assist. Did he ever! He became the coach of our team. When he eventually took on the role as a member of our Board of Directors, he still remained an invaluable leader in our day-to-day operations. But most of all, we all soon came to love him for his immense kindness, wonderful sense of humor, and generosity of spirit. He and his amazing wife Anne welcomed us into their home as family. His memory will always be a blessing.

JD Vance, Maria Theresa, and Catholic Rule

Edward Short

I

Recently, I attended the Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, and was struck by the enthusiasm in certain quarters for what the guest speaker—Vice President JD Vance—might portend for improved relations between the American Church and the American State. Of course, in one sense, such enthusiasm can be regarded as almost comically misplaced. Whether it is on such controversial issues as illegal immigration or in vitro fertilization (IVF), the Trump-Vance administration and the American bishops are hardly enjoying any improved relations, despite the welcome presence of a vice president who has been converted to the Church by America's wonderful Dominicans.

And yet, in another sense, the fact that the first Catholic convert in the American vice presidency should inspire enthusiasm is understandable. After all, Vice President Vance could yet attempt to persuade President Donald Trump to shape his administration's policies to advance what ought to be the shared interests of the Church and the State. Indeed, one suspects that he is probably already doing as much. Certainly, if he is being guided by the Dominicans, he must know, to quote St. Thomas Aquinas, that "as doctrine is sound when consonant with reason so law is just when consonant with right reason." He must also know that as children of God we have a natural affinity for reason. "Man as such is a rational animal," the Angelic Doctor reminds his readers, and "it follows that his good should be a reasonable good. Take him as an artist, then what is good will be found in his work of art. Take him as a citizen, then in the well-being of the commonwealth . . ." Consequently, for St. Thomas, "An artist has to be trained to love works of art, a citizen educated to love political probity." Is it improbable to imagine that Vance could be himself an agent for such salutary education? We can only hope, but certainly his very decision to enter government might well have come from St. Thomas' own recognition that "Government is conducted to a scheme directed to an end . . . Its purpose . . . is what is conceived to be good. There cannot be a ruling sovereignty which seeks evil for its own sake."

Edward Short is the author, most recently, of *Newman and his Critics*, the final volume of his trilogy on St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, and *What the Bells Sang: Essays and Reviews*.

Along similar lines, St. John Henry Newman recognized that the Church, if granted her rightful autonomy, could actually support and complement the State. "I repeat," Newman argued, "the great principles of the State are those of the Church, and, if the State would but keep within its own province, it would find the Church its truest ally and best benefactor. She upholds obedience to the magistrate; she recognises his office as from God; she is the preacher of peace, the sanction of law, the first element of order, and the safeguard of morality, and that without possible vacillation or failure; she may be fully trusted; she is a sure friend, for she is indefectible and undying." At the same time, Newman also appreciated that in practice the State nearly always wielded the upper hand when it came to Church and State relations because "it is not enough for the State that things should be done, unless it has the doing of them itself; it abhors a double jurisdiction, and what it calls a divided allegiance . . ." For Newman, "*aut Cæsar aut nullus*"—*Caesar's way or the highway*—tended to be the State's motto, "nor does it willingly accept of any compromise. All power is founded, as it is often said, on public opinion; for the State to allow the existence of a collateral and rival authority, is to weaken its own . . ." Whether Catholic rulers can influence the State for the good of the Church as well as the common good is, therefore, a nice question.

II

If we look at the instructive life of the Habsburg empress Maria Theresa (1717-80), we can see that she instituted much that was good for both the Church and the 20 million people over whom she ruled in Central Europe. The daughter of Elizabeth Christine of Brunswick (one of the age's great beauties, who, alas, became an obese alcoholic after her husband, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, convinced her that throwing back red wine every night would enhance her chances of giving birth to a male heir), Maria Theresa would go on to have sixteen children of her own and to rule her Habsburg lands as she ruled her family, in a spirit of devout maternalism. She encouraged her subjects to prize their Catholic faith at every turn, especially in their devotions to the saints. She saw to it that daily Eucharistic processions impressed upon her people the glory of the Blessed Sacrament. She put an end to the vampirism that enjoyed something of a vogue in eighteenth-century Serbia, Hungary, and Transylvania. She required the parents of the peasantry to have their children educated with at least six years of schooling, a revolutionary reform at a time when the countryside was rife with illiteracy. After the reform, every child was instructed in religion, morals, and the three "Rs". When a spike in infertility, bred of intermarriage,

threatened the survival of the Habsburg dynasty, Maria Theresa became a fierce opponent of abortion. Indeed, family was central to all she did. As the historian Andrew Wheatcroft notes in his book *The Habsburgs: Embodying Empire* (1995), “Even the palace of Schönbrunn reflected this sense of family.” Despite its 1,441 rooms and opulent galleries, it was less a state than a family residence. Unlike Versailles or Potsdam, it always remained a home—a home where rearing new Habsburgs was a priority, especially Habsburgs who would be expected to turn to account the empress’s gains for the dynasty in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48). Before she passed her childbearing years, Maria Theresa had produced no fewer than four archdukes and ten archduchesses.

If conflicts arose between Maria Theresa and the papacy, they tended to stem from her insistence that the Church, not the Habsburgs, be responsible for Church reform, in circumstances in which pastoral care and catechetical instruction were woefully inadequate, though she never allowed her piety to let the Church forget that she was responsible for matters of state. Her abiding enemy, Frederick II of Prussia, might cynically claim that “The empress is not so pious as to confuse politics with religion and deceive herself about her true interests,” but the fact is that she never lost sight of her eternal interests, even if she occasionally clashed with the papacy.

In keeping with her political maternalism, Maria Theresa was an ardent believer in the Enlightenment’s trust in a natural law that obligated God-appointed rulers not simply to protect but to ensure the well-being of their subjects. For the historian Martyn Rady, author of *The Habsburgs: To Rule the World* (2020), “Natural law theory rested on two principles, both of which fed into the Central European Enlightenment. The first was that society and sociability were implicit in the human condition. The second was that government existed for the benefit of society—kings did not only rule because God had appointed them: their dominion was for a purpose . . .” and that purpose was the happiness of their subjects. If such happiness dictated that the empress Maria Theresa discountenance abortion in her lands, it also dictated that cripples be removed from public places so as not to discourage young women from childbearing. It dictated that men fond of pipe smoking supply their pipes with lids. It dictated that no candles be ignited in barns. Maria Theresa, in sum, was one of the first proponents of the Nanny State.

Here, again, Prof. Rady is instructive. Cameralism, or “treasury science” as it was known (from the word *camera* or *Kammer* meaning a “treasure chamber”), “was the study of how states and institutions might maximize revenues both for their own defense and for the benefit of their citizens, as a way of enlarging their wealth and happiness.” Some administrators might

believe that it was enough to create conditions that would give individuals the wherewithal to create happiness for themselves. Most, however, deemed men and women incapable of taking advantage of such conditions and urged government to impose its own requirements for well-being on the citizenry, even if they ran roughshod over individual liberty. Here, in other words, was the *fons et origo* of the administrative state, against which JD Vance and Donald Trump are doing such valiant battle.

The regulations to which such cameralism gave rise in Maria Theresa's lands were tentacular. In every sphere of life, regulations ruled. Utilitarianism was the order of the day, not tradition, even though Maria Theresa was naturally partial to tradition. At the university, after the banishment of the Jesuits, literature and philosophy were scorned as insufficiently useful. Two and a half million books were burned in what became the largest bonfire of books before the Third Reich. Maria Theresa also established a penal code expressly designed not only to deter but punish critics. Indeed, as Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger notes in her magisterial biography, *Maria Theresa: The Habsburg Empress in Her Times* (2021), Maria Theresa even saw to it that "particularly insistent petitioners were thrown into prison."

The nobility were particularly aggrieved by Maria Theresa's regulations, because they encroached so on their traditional prerogatives, though, eventually they fell in line. Why? Here we see the perennial upshot of sovereigns avid to make their authority impregnable: They turn their courtiers into toadies. "Because all parties had an interest in upholding the sovereign's authority," Stollberg-Rilinger nicely observes of Maria Theresa's court, "visible communication rarely deviated from protestations of devotion, consensus, and harmony. There simply was no legitimate, generally recognized avenue for open dissent. Furthermore, finding ways of expressing disagreement with the sovereign was not easy, since the rules of protecting her authority ensured that communications always ran along tightly controlled channels." While loyalty was always welcome in courtiers, the sovereign naturally did not wish to see loyalty descend into blatant toadyism, even though, as Stollberg-Rilinger notes, the two could be rather indistinguishable. If the empress was the source of all power and material goods, courtiers would necessarily compete for their acquisition by persuading her of their reliable fealty, and if doing so required protestations of dubious disinterestedness and incorruptibility, well, they would protest as best they could. The upshot of this cotillion of dissimulation is nicely encapsulated by Maria Theresa's biographer. "With its logic of personal patronage, the court was . . . inevitably marked by structural hypocrisy." Whether the loyalty on which Trump insists will result in Vance mitigating what ought to be his ethical opposition to his chief's

policy regarding IVF is a lively question.

III

What of Maria Theresa's celebrated faith? By a long chalk, it was profound. Like Newman, she was a great believer in the power of personal influence, convinced that practicing the faith we profess was an essential obligation not only of duty but of love of neighbor. When her daughter Maria Carolina, for example, became Queen of Naples in 1768, her mother gave her advice that Newman would have entirely approved. Maria Carolina, her mother urged, should discharge her religious obligations diligently "in private as well as in public." Moreover,

Since the dear Lord has predestined you to rule, you must lead by example, especially in this perverse age, when our holy religion is practiced and loved so little. It seems that the great are ashamed to profess their faith, while the people are mostly mired in superstition, which ought not to be confronted directly with the truth. Their minds should rather be guided home step by step through the appointment of dedicated priests and good schoolmasters . . . Unceasing attention to such matters is a central duty of any sovereign. The example set by the sovereign is all important.

Maria Theresa's biographer also quotes her heroine's letter to her daughter Marie Antoinette, in which she stresses how important it is that Marie exercise her personal influence to edify her French subjects. "Stay on your knees for as long as possible, that is the seemliest position for setting a good example," she writes, though she also counsels her daughter against overdoing her piety, which would savor of sanctimony. Certainly, Maria Theresa's good counsel stood Marie in good stead when her life ended at the Jacobins' guillotine, where she acquitted herself with such faithful aplomb.

Was there too much policy in Maria Theresa's piety? For the tough-minded empress, genuine piety and the most calculating policy were never incompatible. The historian Richard Bassett, in his recent book *Maria Theresa: Empress* (2025), goes so far as to argue that "in the Austrian crown lands an awareness quickly grew that cameralist statist ideas could work hand in glove with reform Catholicism to benefit both Church and State." Indeed, he is convinced that "nowhere in Continental Europe was reasoning exploited with such vigour to advance the cause of a state's progress, including degrees of religious tolerance unknown even in Whiggish England." One sees the indissoluble connection between Maria Theresa's piety and policy in a letter the empress wrote in 1778 to her son Ferdinand defending the Habsburg devotion to the communion of saints. "How many kindnesses have we not shown undeserving subjects simply to attain our political objectives," she asked her son, who was sceptical of the supernatural sanctity of saints.

Why should the saints, of all people, be left out and put us to shame? A Potemkin, Orlov, Brühl, and others [foreign ministers on whom the emperor had lavished favors for political considerations] were and are feted by the greatest rulers. Not to mention subalterns, even we reward handsomely with gifts and honors for the sake of a treaty or concession . . . You rightly point out that God almighty cannot be compared with us poor creatures. This is undoubtedly true. But God allows us to worship His saints and approach Him through their merits and intercession, and He looks down on us with loving kindness when we confess our own wretchedness in a spirit of self-abasement, and He will give us credit if we do so with humility and resignation.

IV

When the state regulations of Maria Theresa's cameralist reforms resulted in the virtual state takeover of the Church in her son's reign (Joseph II had previously been co-emperor with Maria Theresa from 1741 until his mother's death in 1780, after which he became sole ruler for the next ten years), culminating in what became known as Josephism, the empress might very well have had occasion to confess her own "wretchedness in a spirit of self-abasement."

What was Josephism? In many ways it was anathema to everything Maria Theresa had sought to exemplify in her own Catholic rule, even though her cameralism, designed chiefly by her ministers Friedrich Wilhelm von Haugwitz and Prince Ernst Christoph Kaunitz, had largely instigated it. Josephism refers to the wide-ranging reforms that Joseph II (1741-90) imposed on the Church, which included barring Austrian bishops from having any formal contact with the pope or international Catholic organizations; mutilating the Catholic liturgy; cutting the number of feast days; abolishing religious brotherhoods; regulating religious processions and burial practices; and regulating marriage as a civil contract. "Marriage among Christians," Pieter Judson writes in *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* with strenuous even-handedness, "remained a religious sacrament celebrated by a priest or pastor, but now the state stepped in to regulate an institution that had previously been regulated solely by the Church. This legislation did not create a form of civil marriage but it appeared to lead in that direction." To appreciate the extent to which such state usurpations of the Church's authority rankled the emperor's mother, we can return to something Stollberg-Rilinger says in her brilliant treatment of the matter.

If there was one constant among all the contradictions that characterized the empress' attitude towards religion and the church, one conviction from which she never wavered, then it was surely her assurance that God had given her a direct mandate to rule on the basis of dynastic succession. It followed from this, first, that the defense

of the true Catholic faith, the honor of the dynasty, and the welfare of the hereditary lands were inseparably linked; and second, that she was responsible before God for the orthodoxy of her subjects.

When her son's Austrian Gallicanism made mincemeat of that orthodoxy, Maria Theresa would have recognized, what JD Vance will someday recognize, if he has not already, that Catholic rulers cannot do the work of Church and State without encountering formidable difficulties. Certainly, St. Thomas Aquinas knew as much when he said, speaking of the difference between the two:

Bear in mind that human and divine law differ in their immediate aim. Human law, the purpose of which is the tranquility of the State, operates by policing external acts which could break the public peace. The purpose of divine law, on the other hand, is to lead us through to eternal happiness, the obstacles to which are sins, internal as well as external. The effective putting down of crime and the enforcement of sanctions suffices for human law, but not for divine law, which would adapt the whole of man to everlasting joy.

Another figure whom we can cite here to make a related point is Robert Grosseteste (c. 1175-1253), the first teacher of theology in the Franciscan school at Oxford, who later became bishop of Lincoln before being excommunicated for refusing to elevate Pope Innocent IV's Italian nephew to a canonry. Like Maria Theresa, Grosseteste was adamant that he would not allow the world to compromise his faith, until he found, as she found, that the world had other plans. According to the great mediaevalist R.W. Southern, Grosseteste lived at a time when "all serious people were conscious of the threat of a breakdown in the ordering of the Christian society of the West," and they sought to protect themselves against the threat in various ways. Some took refuge in theology, hammering home the divide between the orthodox and the heretical. Some sojourned to the Crusades. Some dedicated themselves to serving both the Church and the State in an attempt to keep the Church, as they thought, strong and sustainable. "Grosseteste's adherence to these measures varied," Southern writes.

He had no quarrel with established doctrines and he had no tenderness for heretics or sin in any shape or form. But he had no use for the secular-ecclesiastical alliance which was the practical basis of later mediaeval order. He wanted the spiritual power to be supreme, but he wanted it first to be *spiritual*. There was a contradiction here which could never be resolved. The spiritual could never continue to be spiritual and yet rule the world, for it could not rule without resorting to the compromises which make it possible to rule. Grosseteste wanted it to rule without compromise, and this was impossible.

APPENDIX A

[Julia Duin is a longtime investigative journalist and author. The following article was published on Religion Unplugged (www.religionunplugged.com) on October 24, 2024, and is reprinted with the author's permission.]

Mothers Who Keep Their Fatal Pregnancies Turn To Faith: “Who am I to kill this baby?”

Julia Duin

When Mariella Aitana Guerrero was born on a Saturday afternoon in early September, she was 6 pounds, 18 inches. She had dark hair and long eyelashes—and her life expectancy was measured in minutes.

The newborn that arrived at St. Luke's Health-The Woodlands Hospital, just north of Houston, had anencephaly, a neural tube defect. The condition causes the baby to have only a rudimentary brain stem, with parts of the brain and portions of the skull missing.

Wrapped in a white blanket with turquoise and red stripes and a tiny pink cap placed on her head, Mariella was placed in the arms of her mother, Yessica Guerrero, 35.

The first thing the mother noticed, she said, is that the child wanted to live.

“She had the strongest grip; she wouldn't let go of me or my mom,” Guerrero said. “She was not crying, but she did make noises, which we didn't think she could. She was able to eat—I could hear her belly—so I knew she was hungry, so we gave her a feeding tube.”

Guerrero was nearly giddy with joy that Mariella was clearly alive, even wetting her diaper. For the next 28 hours, family members and friends took photos, made copies of Mariella's hand and footprints, got her baptized and changed her clothes several times.

“At one point, I told my husband I felt her heart stop, and I remember hugging her and telling her it was OK for her to go; I just want you to rest, to be at peace,” the mother said. “She let out a little scream, then her heart rate was up again. She was not ready to go. She fought and fought.”

Then at 5:28 p.m. on Sept. 8, just 28 hours to the minute after her birth, Mariella died. In a bizarre twist of fate, she was Yessica Guerrero's second baby with anencephaly. The first, Gabriella, died at birth on Aug. 7, 2017.

The Kate Cox debate

Nearly a year ago, Kate Cox, another Texas woman pregnant with a handicapped child, created headlines by petitioning a Texas court to end the life of her fetus because the child had Trisomy 18, a birth defect that many in the media were calling a “lethal abnormality.”

Because Texas forbids nearly all abortions, Cox ended up flying out of state to abort her daughter at 20 weeks. She ignited a national debate as to whether severely handicapped children should be aborted and whether such pregnancies endanger their mothers' mental and physical health. This debate has been reignited this fall as Vice President Kamala Harris, who favors expanding abortion rights, runs for president. In a post-*Roe* America, she has made abortion a central part of her party's platform in the race against former President Donald Trump.

While many politicians were overwhelmingly in favor of Cox's decision to abort, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum posted a photo on X of his teenage daughter Bella in a frilly white dress with a bun and circlet of flowers atop her head. His point was that his daughter's Trisomy 18 wasn't necessarily "lethal."

"My heart goes out to the Cox family," he wrote. "I will pray for them during this difficult time. I don't know all the details, but I do know that as a father of a 15-year-old with Trisomy 18, accepting the cross of such a baby is the hardest and most wonderful thing I have ever done."

No publicity has gone to women like Guerrero who have chosen differently than Cox (who has since announced she is pregnant again). A soft-spoken woman who is an office manager of a dental office in the Houston suburb of Tomball, Guerrero and her husband, Rubén, were volunteers at their Catholic parish. The Catholic Church opposes aborting the handicapped unborn on the grounds that all life—no matter how disabled—has "inherent dignity."

Guerrero asked a deacon to baptize the deceased Gabriella, not knowing church doctrine limits its sacraments, like baptism, to the living. (Miscarried and stillborn children can receive a blessing.)

"When they told me on the phone they wouldn't baptize her, I couldn't believe that" she recalled. "I put her in a beautiful white gown, and I had some holy water, so we did it."

The couple, who already had a boy and a girl, wished for more children. Four years ago, they had twin boys.

Earlier this year, soon after the Cox incident, Guerrero was told she had a large cyst on her left ovary. When she returned to the doctor's office for a second look, it had vanished. Instead, she was told, she was pregnant again.

Her delight and anticipation lasted until the 20-week check-up in May. There, Guerrero was told the unthinkable: This pregnancy too was doomed; her unborn daughter also had anencephaly.

"I was really mad at God when I found out it was happening again," she said. "There is nothing physically wrong with either one of us. We've done all the testing to see if we're healthy, to see if we could have prevented it and there was nothing."

Feeling that not only had the Catholic Church betrayed her, but so had God, she and her husband stopped going to church.

"I thought maybe there was no God," she said. "My husband felt the same way. 'If there's a God,' he says, 'why did He take my baby?'"

When she was told the fetus was a girl, Guerrero had to think quickly. Termina-

tions except in the rarest of cases are illegal in Texas, so if she wanted to abort, she needed to book a flight out of state quickly. She grasped for what shreds of faith remained to her.

"They kept on telling me she was incompatible with life, and she could pass at any time," she remembered. "I asked: 'Who am I to kill this baby?' The only one who is going to have a say in this is God. He is going to guide me in all this."

Two things became clear. She would keep the child for as long as the baby would live, and she would use her crisis to benefit others. Immediately, she launched a GoFundMe to try to raise money for a piece of hospital equipment for stillborn or dying newborns.

Typically, neonatal hospital staff will try to keep such children comfortable during their brief lives. Once the child dies, hospital staff have been known to whisk the baby off to the morgue, to the distress of parents who want to spend more time with the infant. A cooling bed of iced water will slow the decomposing process.

There are two versions: One, manufactured in the U.K. and called a Cuddle Cot, looks like a large, refrigerated basket. It is portable, less expensive (about \$3,000) and can be loaned out to families wishing to take their child home for a day or two.

A Caring Cradle, which costs \$6,995 and is manufactured in Lakeland, Florida, is a larger unit structured like a bassinet on wheels. It stays in the hospital. The child is placed and swaddled on a cooled gel mat. Guerrero's GoFundMe campaign has raised nearly \$5,000 for a cradle, which will go to St. Luke's.

An unexpected ally

Some years before, a doctor had tipped Guerrero off to Jennie Drude, 38, of Montgomery, a suburb just to the north of Tomball and the mother of three babies who had died in utero, or just after birth. Two of them had anencephaly.

When Drude's first child, Dharma, was born on March 31, 2008, she weighed 4 pounds, 8 ounces and was 18 inches long.

"When Dharma was diagnosed, there wasn't Google, so I looked her condition up at Barnes & Noble and there was a line that kids born with anencephaly are blind, deaf vegetables," Drude said. "When she came out, she was crying and pink and comparable to my other children in behaviors. They gave her some formula. When my arm monitor went off, she cried, so she could hear. When my husband went to her bassinet, she opened her eyes, so she could see.

"She looked like a normal baby from the eyes down."

The child had a full head of dark hair that covered the area where the skull cap would be. She lived 21 hours and 22 minutes.

"I made the decision to carry my girls as long as I could," she said. "I had a great support system, health insurance, awesome doctor, oxygen available for her after she was born—some doctors won't allow that with babies with neural tube defects. I just wanted to meet them. It was just like meeting my living kids and falling in love with them."

A second daughter, whose heartbeat stopped in utero, was induced at 20 weeks in

2014. Her parents named her Stella. Drude began researching and found five other women around the country who had had two pregnancies with anencephaly and “hundreds” of women who had had one child with the condition.

At the time, she said, there was almost no support for such pregnancies, so she set up an informal photography business in the Houston area to take pictures of similar children slated to die at birth—or soon thereafter—if the family wanted a memory of their child. (A Colorado-based organization, Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, also does this service by maintaining a network of volunteer photographers who attend the delivery and provide portraits to parents experiencing the death of a baby.)

Drude has since expanded to speaking to nursing programs and medical staff on how to handle parents of newborns who have little or no chance of survival. Since so many of them are aborted, little research, she says, has been done about those children whose mothers bring them to term. A 2022 ProPublica story bears out her assertions.

More than 20,000 U.S. pregnancies ending in stillbirth, yet no national campaign has been mounted to raise awareness—despite an estimate that at least one-quarter of all stillbirths are preventable. Three agencies that could do so—the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes for Health and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists—have given out few if any guidelines to expectant mothers on signs to watch for if, say, the baby has stopped moving.

“They say anencephaly is linked to [a lack of] folic acid, but they had not studied it in 30 years,” Drude said. “Researchers don’t tend to research this.”

When Guerrero broke the devastating news to Drude of her second anencephalic pregnancy and how she felt pressured by her medical team to abort, Drude recommended she switch to Dr. Stacy Strehlow, a maternal fetal medicine physician with the Baylor College of Medicine with privileges at St. Lukes/Woodlands.

Strehlow said the pressure tactics Guerrero experienced worry her.

“It’s important to me and my colleagues that we are as nondirective as possible, and our patients know their options,” Strehlow said. “If they are not interested in termination, it’s off the table and we won’t talk about it.”

Anencephalic pregnancies are not life-threatening for the mother, although labor tends to be slower because the decreased head size doesn’t dilate the cervix enough to quickly deliver the rest of the baby—or as was the case with Mariella—the child is born breech. Where their forehead should be is where the head slopes back, usually covered by a flap of skin and often hair.

“They have a face and eyes, but for someone who is not prepared, it can be pretty shocking,” the doctor said. “So, I help people to be prepared, because it’s a baby.”

But Guerrero was square on the traditions of her church in bringing both daughters to term. Pope Francis, one of few religious leaders to speak out on the abortion of handicapped fetuses, said in 2019 such abortions were “inhuman eugenics.”

He added, “Is it legitimate to take out a human life to solve a problem?”

Families should welcome the chance to embrace the weakest of children, he said and children who could die at birth or soon thereafter should receive “extraordinary

pharmacological, surgical and other interventions.”

Moreover, “Human life is sacred and inviolable and the use of prenatal diagnosis for selective purposes should be discouraged with strength,” the pope said.

He was speaking at “Yes to Life: Caring for the precious gift of life in its frailness,” a Vatican conference comprising medical professionals, bioethicists and laity from around the world to discuss support for parents expecting a baby with grim prospects.

One of the panel moderators at the conference was Amy Kuebelbeck, a news copy editor for the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and a Catholic whose 2003 book *Waiting with Gabriel: A Story of Cherishing a Baby's Brief Life* was about the 1999 death of her son from hypoplastic left heart syndrome.

Kuebelbeck found such little support for parents like her that she founded perinatalhospice.org to help parents like herself and to list hospitals willing to provide palliative care for a newborn who's expected to die within a few hours or days. Her list has grown to 273 perinatal centers, covering most states—with the exception of Maine, New Hampshire and Wyoming—and the District of Columbia along with 96 centers in 28 other countries.

On the site, she argues that bringing these pregnancies to term is beneficial, not harmful to the mother.

“There is no research to support the popular assumption that terminating a pregnancy with fetal anomalies is easier on the mother psychologically,” Kuebelbeck wrote. “In fact, research to date suggests the opposite.”

The meaning of strong

Both Guerrero and Drude said they brought their pregnancies to term so they could meet their children, if only for a few minutes. For Guerrero, that decision also involved her oldest daughter, Isabella, 13, who couldn't stop holding her dying sister. Isabella, who was 6 years old when Gabriella was born, never got to behold her first sister alive.

Isabella, her mother said, had known nothing but loss in recent years. A beloved grandmother had moved out of the country, two of the family's pets had died one after another, a therapist she'd turned to abruptly left her and now she was losing Mariella.

The 13-year-old did what sisters do: painted the baby's nails and toes for the first and last time.

Isabella has since decided to take up playing the harp as a way to work out her sorrows through music. She is trying to raise money for lessons and harp rental.

Her mother has decided she too may make some changes, starting with finding a new church. She has been exploring a nearby nondenominational church.

“I am trying to find that bond again,” she said. “The Mormons have been coming here to the house. My doors are open to everyone. I want to get to know God again. I have felt so lost and alone. I need a little guidance now.”

Surely, she said, there's something from the births of both daughters, born seven

years apart—one on Aug. 7 and the other on Sept. 7—that she’s supposed to learn from.

“I’ve been thinking why she came to me, why this happened two times,” she said. “I think this happened for a purpose. I’d like to help other moms who are pregnant. I love babies. Pregnancy can be scary, especially when they tell you the baby is not going to make it or there is something wrong with your baby.”

Her dream is to eventually leave her office manager job and enroll at a sonography technician school so she can perform ultrasounds for pregnant women. She has no idea how she will afford the two-year program.

“We have four kids, and it will be hard,” she said. “If we have to get their clothes from garage sales, we’ll do it.”

She said she will never forget the brief time she spent with her third daughter, how she told her she couldn’t find a cure for anencephaly, but she’d share Mariella’s story, focusing on parents who are experiencing the same thing, and raising enough money for at least one Caring Cradle so parents can spend more time with their baby.

“We talked all night,” Guerrero said. “I was telling Mariella, ‘I survive this once with God and I thought I was strong. But you showed me the real meaning of strong. You fought. You didn’t quit. And I will do the same for you.’”

APPENDIX B

[Margaret Hickey, a freelance columnist, writes for the Irish Dominican publication, Alive, and reviews for the Irish monthly magazine Position Papers. The following was originally posted April 29, 2025, on the Human Life Review's website.]

Media “Gaslighting” and the Popes

Margaret Hickey

Public opinion inside and outside the Church is split three ways about the kind of leader the Church needs at this defining moment of its history: another Francis (“a continuity candidate”), a pope in the mold of John Paul II or Benedict XVI, or a hybrid, someone between the “progressive” Francis and his “conservative” predecessors.

Well, that covers just about every possibility—except that progressivism and conservatism can be reimagined and realized in different ways. Popes John Paul II and Benedict were prolific writers on many pastoral, philosophical, and theological themes and expanded the Church’s understanding of traditional teaching. That was the kind of progressivism of little use to secularists. When Francis became pope, it was the Church’s well-established teaching on mercy, love, and accompaniment that received a new emphasis, and the Francis papacy is defined by his development of this doctrine in terms of pastoral ministry. It is true there are many who argue that Pope Francis’s intentions were to go beyond that and abandon or erode the Church’s moral teaching. However, whether one wants to credit Francis or the Holy Spirit, the fact remains that the late pope did not change but in fact affirmed the Church’s position regarding what it always saw as right and wrong.

For the past several years, the term “gaslighting” has been thrown about liberally in media reporting. Drawn from a popular mid-20th-century play that was made into a movie, the term is shorthand for the psychological manipulation of people so that they come to doubt their own senses. This manipulation of perceived reality is largely the cause of the polarization of opinion in today’s society. The fact that reporting has so many disparate organs and updates and reinforces its messages with such viralizing speed leaves many of us embedded in false certainties, closed off to any other way of seeing things. The portrayal of Pope Francis offers a very good example of how gaslighting works.

He was first and foremost a pope of deep and simple piety. Perhaps our most abiding visual memories of him should be his simple gestures of devotion to Mary, bearing floral tributes to her icon in the church where his body now lies, or alone, frail and limping, in a deserted and rainswept St. Peter’s Square as he offered Benediction and the reassurance of faith to the world during the worst days of Covid and gazed with childlike trust at her icon. For many devout Catholics, these images are indeed etched in memory, but they are not the memories being carefully curated and

promoted now in the wake of his death. If such simplicity of prayer had been associated with his two immediate predecessors, they may very well have been used as evidence of naïveté and superstition. This aspect of Francis's ministry was mostly obscured, as the beams of media attention focused elsewhere.

Francis was the pope who removed abortion from the list of reserved sins (sins that require the absolution of a bishop) at a time when societies across the Western world were widening access to abortion. This raised alarm bells among orthodox Catholics, and of course the media spin was that Francis was liberalizing or softening the Church's position on the sinfulness of abortion. Of course this was not true. On the contrary, Francis denounced the killing of unborn human life in terms far more trenchant than either of his two predecessors. Among other things, he compared it to "hiring a hitman to solve a problem." Statements like this from the pope received little attention from the media, however, who had already settled on projecting him in a certain way to advance their own agenda and alienate him from orthodox Catholics. In this they appear to have succeeded.

In the same way, the media distorted the words of his predecessor, Benedict XVI, except in reverse. Anything he said that could be spun as harsh or phobic of another tradition was exploited without regard to context or nuance. His Regensburg University Address is one case in point, where his quotation from a Christian emperor of the 14th century, questioning the use of violence in the Qur'an in the cause of religion, was picked up by the media with alacrity and reported without context across all media outlets. This led to a tumultuous backlash of killings and violent protests, including the burning and bombing of churches, Orthodox and Protestant as well as Catholic, across the global Muslim community. The media continued to blame Pope Benedict and never picked up on how the reaction to his speech might be construed other than as the expression of understandable, if excessive, outrage at his "Islamophobia."

Returning to Francis, it is indeed true that he drew out the implications of divine mercy and love in a way that challenged those who find it hard to separate the sinner from the sin, stirring anxiety and even anger among many Catholics. Every era has its moral pariahs, and Francis confronted the prejudices of our time. Despite calling gender ideology "the ugliest of dangers," (another underreported remark), he reached out to transgender people in Rome, including those who worked in prostitution. Some members of that community were invited to his final leave-taking in Santa Maria Maggiore, each one holding a white rose. It was an intensely moving scene and mirrored in a 21st-century way the surprise of the crowd when Jesus reached out to the morally repugnant of his own time.

Critics of Pope Francis draw attention to his apparent tolerance of sexual abusers within the clerical ranks of the Church. In one case, it appears a known abuser was given an administrative role within the Vatican itself. Time will tell how the secular media will choose to use such stories for their own purposes, and what they will or will not disclose, now that Francis can no longer be exploited as an iconoclast of tradition and doctrine.

Like the popes before him, Francis will leave a twofold legacy. The first belongs in the hearts of those who came to know Christ, however well or tentatively, through the witness of his life. This is the most important part of any pope's legacy. The second belongs to historians who will no doubt, as the decades pass, revise the record of his life's work and the words that accompanied it. That, however, will be the small print in a receding rear mirror as the world moves on and engages with his successor, and with the Church under that successor's leadership. In any case, we can expect that, whoever is elected, he will in turn be gaslit like his predecessors.

The task now falls to the College of Cardinals, whose focus must be to elect a good and holy man. The three last popes, whatever their differences in style and emphases, were good and holy men. Electing a liberal- or conservative-leaning pope is not the task of the Church, as secular commentators seem to think. Preserving the legacy of Francis is not their task either. The Francis era is now over. The Holy Spirit waits to gift the Church in an entirely new way. The influence of the last pope and his predecessors on those whose lives they touched (and that very much includes the College of Cardinals) is significant and may have a bearing on the cardinals' choice to succeed him, but the focus of electors must be to find a successor who is marked by faith and character. If that is lacking, neither his "progressivism" or "conservatism" will count for anything.

It was the simple, holy, and prayerful witness of Francis and his immediate predecessors that captured the attention and imagination of people first. That's what made these popes worth listening to—and therefore worth manipulating and misrepresenting too.

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Legalized abortion on demand licenses a crime that cries to heaven, and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has left our culture still ankle-deep in blood. Having won the fight against the claim that abortion is a right at the highest level of law, we need to take the fight to the states—and we need to make converts for that to happen, since abortion has become the political fight that the Supreme Court preempted in 1973. And for persuading others of objective moral judgment—born not of positive law, a gift from government, but transcendental authority, a gift from God—the consistency of our vision of life becomes the key element.

—Joseph Bottum, Symposium: “What’s God Got to Do with it?”