



VOLUME LI No. 3 ♦ SUMMER 2025

◆ FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE ◆

Christina Francis on
IT'S TIME FOR A NEW PRO-LIFE PATH FORWARD IN MEDICINE

Grace Emily Stark on
FOR "MORE BABIES," FUND RRM RATHER THAN IVF

William Murchison on
THERE ARE BOYS; THERE ARE GIRLS

Richard John Neuhaus on:
TOGETHER FOR LIFE

"Life and Law in the American Experiment" by Jason Morgan
An Essay On Robert P. George's *Seeking Truth And Speaking Truth*

Ellen Wilson Fielding on
"I AM WHAT I SAY I AM" AND OTHER FICTIONS

Mary Rose Somarriba on
HOW PORNIIFIED THINKING ERASES PREBORN LIFE

Jérôme LeJeune on
"THE STORY OF TOM THUMB"

◆ ALSO IN THIS ISSUE ◆

From the Website:

Avery West ♦ Maria McFadden Maffucci ♦ Diane Moriarty ♦ Brian Caulfield
David Poecking ♦ Victor Lee Austin ♦ Jacqueline O'Hara ♦ Cecily Routman

Appendices:

Kathryn Lopez/Anne Conlon ♦ John Grondelski ♦ Wesley J. Smith

. . . This is a summer of much discontent in the US and the world, but here you will find hope amidst the woes. We start with an expert indictment of the nation's leading medical organizations by Dr. Christina Francis, CEO of the American Association of Pro-Life Gynecologists and Obstetricians (AAPLOG), who we will honor on November 7 as our Great Defender of Life. In "Why It's Time for a New, Life-Affirming Path Forward in Medicine" Dr. Francis criticizes her fellow doctors for denying the humanity of the child in the womb and deliberately using misleading rhetoric to support abortion rights, even when this puts the lives of women at risk. She then highlights the pro-life medical organizations working to transform the culture of medicine. In more pro-life medical news, Grace Emily Stark reacts to President Trump's executive order expanding access to IVF by offering an ethical alternative, restorative reproductive medicine (RRM). In "For 'More Babies,' Fund RRM Rather than IVF," she writes: "To make America fertile again, look to RRN," which treats infertility rather than circumventing it. In still more hopeful news, senior editor William Murchison cheers the Supreme Court's *Skrmetti* decision, which upholds the State of Tennessee's right to prohibit sex transition treatments for minors. A step forward, he writes in "There are Boys; There are Girls," in "combatting the really strange ideology that "we can invent our own Reality," and change our sex. The illusion of gender identity is also woven into senior editor Ellen Wilson Fielding's luminous essay on what it means to be human, "'I Am What I say I Am' and Other Fictions," which is timely yet timeless in its wisdom. And Mary Rose Somarriba tackles another enemy of a healthy culture in "How Pornified Thinking Erases Preborn Life," including strategies to push back against the sex industry.

Jason Morgan contributes a major review of the new book by Robert P. George, "arguably, the most accomplished conservative scholar the country has produced in his generation." *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth: Law and Morality in our Cultural Moment* is available from Encounter Books. Professor George was a great friend of the late Reverend Richard John Neuhaus, whose powerful speech, "Together for Life," we include from our archives, as well as the beautiful testimony about life's beginnings, "The Story of Tom Thumb," by another legendary pro-life hero, the late Dr. Jérôme Lejeune. Both Neuhaus and Lejeune, along with Cardinal John O'Connor, Faith and Jim McFadden, and Rita Marker, are being remembered at our Great Defender of Life dinner November 7 (see www.humanlifereview.com/Dinner for details). Along with Dr. Francis, we will honor our editor Anne Conlon who is retiring after 30 years!

We welcome newcomer Avery West to these pages with her column "How the Church Can Be the Village," an inspiring and practical guide for how church communities can combat "America's twin epidemics of isolation and low birth rates," which "intersect in the heartbreaking experiences of new mothers in America." Finally, we recently heard news of the passing of a great Catholic scholar and long-time history professor at St. Louis University, James Hitchcock, who contributed over two dozen brilliant articles (accessible in our Archive) to the *Review* between 1976 and 2026. *Requiescat in pace.*

MARIA MCFADDEN MAFFUCCI
EDITOR IN CHIEF



Editor in Chief

Maria McFadden Maffucci

Editor

Anne Conlon

Senior Editors

Ellen Wilson Fielding

William Murchison

Mary Meehan

Managing Editor

Christina Angelopoulos

Contributors

Mary Kenny

William McGurn

George McKenna

Jason Morgan

David Quinn

Edward Short

Wesley J. Smith

Business Manager

Rose Flynn DeMaio

Production Assistant

Ida Paz

Founding Editors

J.P. McFadden

Faith Abbott McFadden

Published by The Human Life Foundation, Inc. Editorial Office, 271 Madison Avenue, Room 1005, New York, N.Y. 10016. Phone: (212) 685-5210. The editors will consider all manuscripts submitted, but assume no responsibility for unsolicited material. Editorial and subscription inquiries, and requests for reprint permission should be sent directly to our editorial office. Subscription price: \$40 per year; Canada and other foreign countries: \$60 (U.S. currency). ISSN 0097-9783.

©2025 by The Human Life Foundation, Inc. New York, N.Y. Printed in the U.S.A.

the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

Summer 2025

Vol. LI, No. 3

Introduction

Anne Conlon 2

It's Time for a New Path Forward in Medicine

Christina Francis 5

For "More Babies," Fund RRM Rather Than IVF

Grace Emily Stark 15

There Are Boys; There Are Girls

William Murchison 22

From the Archives: Together for Life

Richard John Neuhaus 27

"I Am What I Say I Am" and Other Fictions

Ellen Wilson Fielding 39

How Pornified Thinking Erases Preborn Life

Mary Rose Somarriba 47

From the Archives: "The Story of Tom Thumb"

Jérôme Lejeune 51

A Review of Robert P. George's

Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth

Jason Morgan 54

From the Website 68

Avery West

Maria McFadden Maffucci

Diane Moriarty

Brian Caulfield

David Poecking

Victor Lee Austin

Jacqueline O'Hara

Cecily Routman

Appendices 85

Kathryn Lopez / Anne Conlon

John Grondelski

Wesley J. Smith

INTRODUCTION

In an address he gave in 2001 at a conference co-hosted by this journal, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus told attendees: “We are signed on for the duration and the duration is the entirety of the human drama, for the conflict between what John Paul II calls the culture of life and the culture of death is a permanent conflict. It is a conflict built into a wretchedly fallen and terribly ambiguous human condition” (“Together for Life,” page 27).

A fearlessly eloquent leader, Neuhaus, the Lutheran minister turned Catholic priest who died in 2009, gave the pro-life movement its marching orders: “Our goal is every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life,” a formulation so familiar it is routinely cited without attribution. He also acknowledged its limitations: “Now we know there will always be abortions.” The argument about “who is entitled to protection,” he warned, “will prevail incrementally, piece by piece, sometimes moving, it seems, more backward than forward.”

Dobbs no doubt was a great move forward. Thanks to the Supreme Court, abortion is no longer “welded to our beloved Constitution,” as George McKenna memorably put it in his 2023 Great Defender of Life speech. Still, these days it can feel like a backward move. The exuberance following the overruling of *Roe* has been overtaken by what Dr. Christina Francis calls “a multi-pronged rhetorical strategy designed to inflict unfounded fear in the American public” (“Why It’s Time for a New, Life-Affirming Path Forward in Medicine,” page 5). “Three years after my phone was bombarded with text messages from colleagues wondering what the newly released *Dobbs* decision would mean for them,” she writes, “I am dismayed at the confusion that remains among some of my fellow physicians about how to practice medicine under pro-life laws.”

Dr. Francis, CEO of the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists and this year’s Great Defender of Life, contributes an eye-opening account of how ruthless abortion activists—with major medical organizations like the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in tow—disseminate “Blame the Bans” propaganda, “pinning mothers’ negative health outcomes” on post-*Dobbs* state legislation. This was brought home to me last year when one of my sisters told me that her daughter and son-in-law were leaving a life they enjoyed in Texas because they wished to have a child and were afraid the state’s abortion ban would preclude safe treatment should there be complications. Dr. Francis’s prescriptions for curing this media-induced and alarmingly misguided mindset are urgently needed.

A “complication” facing many women today is failure to conceive, and last February President Trump chose to intervene with his own solution. Grace Emily Stark (“For ‘More Babies,’ Fund RRM Rather Than IVF,” page 15) recounts how, seeking to address the nation’s “fertility crisis,” the president who gave us the Supreme Court majority that gave us *Dobbs* “signed an executive order to expand access to in vitro fertilization (IVF).” Stark makes a medical case against IVF, not a moral one. “While IVF can, indeed, help couples *overcome* fertility,” she writes, “it does not actually

treat infertility.” There is another option, called restorative reproductive medicine (RRM), which can help effect conception by addressing an “underlying pathology [such as endometriosis] via surgical interventions, hormone balancing, and other aspects of a holistic approach.” RRM, she continues, “treats the woman’s health conditions while concurrently allowing conception to occur ‘the old-fashioned way.’”

Lest we despair of proliferating *new*-fashioned biological perversions, the Supreme Court’s recent *Skrametti* decision, says William Murchison, should make us “feel better about the future” (“There Are Boys; There Are Girls,” page 22). *Skrametti*, reports our senior editor, is “a remarkable step in the nation’s provisional, slow, and sometimes grudging movement toward plain old everyday common sense in the face of brazen, over-confident ideology.” In this case transgender ideology, whose adherents failed in their bid to quash a Tennessee law protecting children from life-altering genital mutilation and other trans medical mischief. “Relief should be our first take on *Skrametti*,” Murchison counsels. “But after that, reflection.” How have so many come to embrace “a kind of personal autonomy unknown to, unthought of, by virtually any who ever have inhabited this planet”?

Fellow senior editor Ellen Wilson Fielding ruminates along similar lines (“‘I Am What I Say I Am’ and Other Fictions,” page 39). “In recent decades,” Fielding writes, “we have chosen to extend our indiscriminate approval of choice beyond the standard moral questions to the great ontological question: What is a human being?” But there is, she observes, a modern twist: “While philosophers like Aristotle describe us as rational animals, and while the book of Genesis reveals us to be creatures made in the image and likeness of God, the claim of today’s transgender proponents is that human beings are whatever they define themselves to be.” And, she reasons, “if each of us has the power to define himself or herself (and the power to use any desired pronouns to do so), then each person becomes something like a species of one” (rarely does an insight come with such a jolt of lucidity).

At a time when “reality” has moved online, a “species of one” is uniquely vulnerable. The internet, writes Mary Rose Somarriba, harbors unhealthy cyber “communities,” such as the so-called incels, or “involuntary celibates,” single men who “harbor extreme resentment over their status and their conviction that they deserve female sexual attention and activity” (“The Culture of Objectification: How Pornified Thinking Erases Preborn Life,” page 47). Another danger is “easy access to pornography,” which “poisons young men’s brains as early as age 12 or even younger.” Repeated exposure, Somarriba goes on, “rewires viewers brains,” accustoming them to enjoying sexual pleasure “with no effort, no personal interaction, and no consequences. And that includes no pregnancies.” Planned Parenthood, she notes, seduces youngsters with masturbatory advice like this on its website: “Having a healthy sex life is taking care of yourself, whether you have a partner or not.” Planned *Un*-Parenthood, no?

“Taking care of yourself” could be a tag line for the abortion era. The Court gave women the power to “choose”; most men either quietly acquiesced or breathed a sigh of relief when an inconvenient pregnancy was terminated. Alex Loce put up a

fight. Charged with trespass for disrupting the New Jersey clinic where his fiancée had scheduled an abortion, Loce and his lawyers argued that the unborn child he had sought to save had deserved Constitutional protection. Dr. Jérôme Lejeune, a world-renowned French geneticist, testified that abortion “kills a member of our species” at Loce’s 1991 trial. We reprint here excerpts from Lejeune’s riveting depiction of “the tiny human being” who at eight weeks is already making “a symphony of two hearts” with his or her mother (“The Story of Tom Thumb,” page 51). Loce was found guilty of trespass, the judge declaring the death of his child an act of “legal execution.” An appeal to the Supreme Court was declined in 1994. (See “A Father’s Trial and the Case for Personhood” by Patrick Mullaney, HLR Spring 2001.)

One of the many lawyers associated with the Loce case as it made its way through the courts was Robert P. George, the Princeton scholar whose new book, *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth: Law and Morality in Our Cultural Moment*, inspired the following review essay by Jason Morgan (“Life and Law in the American Experiment,” page 54). George is “a towering figure,” writes Morgan, “who represents the best, perhaps the peak in many ways, of the American experiment in ordered liberty.” And now, “at the very height of his powers [George] reveals not only the moral force of the American legal tradition, but also, in many ways, its limits, even its prefigured downfall.” *Seeking Truth*, says Morgan, is “at once the moral clarion call of one of America’s greatest living legal and political philosophers, and the swan song, as I read it, of the American experiment that he holds dear.” It is a fascinating essay, about a “very important volume,” as Morgan reads it, especially as we witness morality receding from the heights it attained under Western civilization.

* * * * *

Still, we have signed on for the duration, and as Mother Teresa reminded us, we are called to be faithful, not successful. This issue offers a hearty From the Website sampling, including “RFK, Jr, Autism, Eugenics—and Pro-life Silence,” in which our editor in chief Maria McFadden Maffucci chides not only the NIH chief for dehumanizing comments he has made about people with autism but also the “pro-life and adjacent (including religious) press,” whose response was “pretty hard to find.” Brian Caulfield recalls why Cardinal John O’Connor (a prime mover in *State of New Jersey v. Alex Loce*, securing Dr. Lejeune’s presence at the trial) will be “My Cardinal Till the End.” Other FTW pieces—by Avery West, Diane Moriarty, David Poecking, Victor Lee Austin, Jacqueline O’Hara, and Cecily Routman—will also reward your attention. We finish up with three appendices: An interview I did with Kathryn Jean Lopez when *The Debate Since Roe* came out in 2012; John Grondelski’s *National Catholic Register* article on why adoption loses out to abortion, and Wesley J. Smith’s NRO column defending the “dead donor rule” in organ transplants. Alas, a recent *New York Times* op-ed has called for increasing “the number of donor organs” by expanding “the definition of death.”

ANNE CONLON
EDITOR

Why It's Time for a New, Life-Affirming Path Forward in Medicine

Christina Francis

The day the U.S. Supreme Court decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Center* was announced in June of 2022, I was on a 24-hour shift at my hospital in Indiana, where I work as an obstetric hospitalist, serving women who have been admitted either for labor and delivery or due to pregnancy complications. As a pro-life OB-GYN, this timing felt symbolic. My views on abortion are shaped by my understanding that as an obstetrician, I have two patients—a pregnant mother and her baby—and that my job is to foster the health of both, rather than intentionally ending the life of one. What a gift it was to be caring for my preborn patients on the same day that the nation's highest court overturned the ruling that has allowed their legal killing in all of the fifty states since 1973!

Within minutes of the news breaking, however, it became clear that not all my fellow physicians felt as celebratory as I did. My phone was bombarded with text messages from friends and colleagues frantically asking what this ruling would mean for their practice. Understanding that they might not think about abortion laws as often as I do, I was happy to answer their questions, even the ones whose answers seemed obvious (“Will I be allowed to treat ectopic pregnancies?” Yes, of course!). I assumed any widespread confusion on the part of physicians would quickly be cleared up nationwide. However, three years later, uncertainty and fear about practicing medicine under pro-life laws persist within the medical community.

This confusion is intentional. For the last three years, abortion advocates have relied on a multi-pronged rhetorical strategy designed to inflict unfounded fear in the American public about post-*Dobbs* pro-life laws and push them towards supporting their extreme, zero-restrictions abortion agenda. Three primary tactics have defined pro-abortion attacks on pro-life laws: abortion harm denial, preborn erasure, and ban-blaming. Unfortunately, major medical groups like the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) have been at the forefront of these efforts—to the detriment of the physicians they claim to represent and the patients we are sworn to serve.

Christina Francis, a board-certified OB-GYN hospitalist practicing in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is the CEO of the American Association of Pro-Life Gynecologists and Obstetricians (AAPLOG), and the Human Life Foundation's Great Defender of Life, 2025.

These organizations' ideologically motivated dishonesty reveals the need for a life-affirming change in our nation's medical culture.

Denying Abortion's Harms

Prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, abortion advocates argued that pro-life laws incentivize abortion-determined women to undergo dangerous "back-alley" and self-managed abortions. But in the era of *Dobbs*, leading pro-abortion organizations are explicitly directing their followers and allies *not* to use rhetoric such as coat hanger imagery. Today, the Planned Parenthood Action Fund's website lists "coat hanger images" as an example of "language and symbols to avoid."¹

What changed?

One important explanation lies in the development of the abortion pill mifepristone. Approved by the FDA in 2000 as part of a two-drug protocol to induce an abortion, mifepristone was originally placed under strict regulations to protect women from its life-threatening potential side effects: retained tissue, hemorrhage, and sepsis, to name the most concerning ones. But between 2016 and 2021, the FDA completely eroded these essential safeguards. As a result, these drugs can now be ordered online without so much as an in-person evaluation to confirm how far along a woman is in her pregnancy and to ensure the pregnancy is in her uterus (and not an ectopic pregnancy, which occurs in 1 in 50 pregnancies) before she undergoes a painful and potentially dangerous abortion—often by herself.²

But the abortion industry is determined to push the narrative that this drug is completely safe. Because, according to the latest report by the Guttmacher Institute, drug-induced abortion constitutes nearly two-thirds of all abortions, and mail-order, do-it-yourself abortion represents 14 percent.³

In short, although abortion proponents' primary argument against pre-*Roe* pro-life laws was that they led to dangerous self-managed abortions, today's abortion proponents refrain from warning women about the risks of managing their own abortions, because the abortion industry increasingly relies on self-management through mifepristone.

Drug-induced abortion is not, in fact, perfectly safe. It has four times the risk of complications of surgical abortion,⁴ and without an ultrasound scan, medical professionals cannot adequately rule out risk factors for the drug's most serious potential complications—retained pregnancy tissue, hemorrhage, sepsis, and missed ectopic pregnancy. Recent analyses of insurance claims data in the U.S. show that nearly 1 in 9 women who take the abortion pills will experience a serious complication.⁵

But pro-abortion medical groups dismiss these risks. In 2023, a dozen ma-

major medical organizations, including ACOG, the American Medical Association (AMA), and the American Association of Family Physicians (AAFP) submitted an *amicus curiae* brief to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in which they stated that mifepristone is as safe as “common painkillers like ibuprofen and acetaminophen, which more than 30 million Americans take in any given day.”⁶ As one paper lays out, this oft-repeated activist talking point so lacks “specific, controlled, and head-to-head evidence” that it violates the legal guidelines set for pharmaceutical marketing about drug safety communications, meaning that “if such an assertion was attributable to the manufacturer, it would precipitate a reprimand by the FDA.”⁷

This isn’t the only egregiously false claim that ACOG has promoted. In one statement, it contends that “the greatest risk of harm related to self-managed abortion for patients is the risk of criminalization.”⁸ In fact, not a single pro-life law in the books prosecutes women for obtaining abortions.

Nevertheless, ACOG’s guidelines for clinicians on caring for patients who undergo self-managed abortions mentions no other risk of this practice but “criminalization.”⁹ The words “hemorrhage,” “infection,” and even “bleeding” are nowhere to be found in this document.

This silence speaks volumes about ACOG’s priorities. In doing so, ACOG joins the list of other medical associations that have thrown aside basic principles of patient care to follow the cultural winds (take, for example, the American Academy of Pediatrics’ harmful and unscientific position on gender intervention¹⁰). Because of their political commitments, leading medical authorities are ignoring sound science and medical ethics to deny the harms to women of induced abortion.

Erasing the Preborn

Of course, the party that’s most harmed by induced abortion is the preborn child whose life is taken by it. Abortion advocates deny this negative impact, too, by taking pains to avoid acknowledging the child’s humanity. This largely comes in the form of language policing. For example, ACOG’s *Guide to Language and Abortion* objects to the use of several pregnancy-related terms, claiming they are medically inaccurate.¹¹ But a closer look at the disfavored words themselves—and ACOG’s preferred replacements—suggests that their motive for these efforts to alter our lexicon is driven by politics rather than actual science.

Under its list of “terms to avoid,” the *Guide* includes “preborn child” and “unborn child,” arguing that “centering the language on a future state of a pregnancy is medically inaccurate” and instead suggesting “embryo” or “fetus.” However, in another document on caring for families who have experienced

a stillbirth, they give the following guidance on language to use: “Communication with bereaved parents should be clear and honest. The term ‘your baby or babies’ should be used in conversations; terms such as fetus, embryo or spontaneous abortion should be avoided.”¹² Why the inconsistency? Does scientific reality hinge on the wantedness of a child?

ACOG also advises against describing cardiac activity, which is detectable on ultrasound at six weeks’ gestation, as a “heartbeat,” arguing that the cardiac organ doesn’t develop its four chambers until later and therefore doesn’t count as a heart in early pregnancy. But organs aren’t defined by their fully developed form. If they were, we’d say humans don’t have brains until well into adulthood. They’re defined by their function—in this case, pumping blood through the organism’s body, which the embryonic heart performs starting around five weeks gestation.

This illogical formalism isn’t about good medical care. To the contrary, communicating with patients well requires using language that they can understand—not just regurgitating complex medical terms. The goal of this semantic gymnastics is clear: to replace colloquial but perfectly accurate language describing preborn babies with cold, clinical medical jargon to deliberately skate over the scientific fact of the child’s humanity.

The Society of Radiologists admits as much in its recently published *Lexicon for First-Trimester Ultrasound*, in which it advises against describing an embryo as “live” or “living.”¹³ Unlike ACOG, the Society doesn’t even pretend that its reasoning isn’t political, stating that it objects to this language on the grounds that it “may be appropriated by people outside of the field of medicine to support political rhetoric and prescriptive legislation.”

The dehumanization of children in the womb by abortion proponents is nothing new, but it is disappointing to see the medical professional organizations that physicians like me are supposed to trust join in on these dishonest games. Since medical school, I have been taught that obstetricians should be committed to caring for two patients. Erasing my second patient goes against the foundational principles of my vocation.

“Blame the Bans”

Another key pro-abortion tactic has proven successful in scaring the American public about pro-life laws: ban-blaming.

In early 2025, ACOG launched a video campaign featuring the fictional case of a patient suffering pregnancy complications.¹⁴ The video closes with the slogan “blame the bans”—which perfectly summarizes abortion advocates’ dishonest approach to changing public opinion about abortion laws.

Their approach is simple: Publicize stories of women in pro-life states suffering

traumatic experiences related to pregnancy, then blame those tragedies on abortion laws. Some of these stories may have occurred due to some physicians' confusion about when they can intervene to treat pregnancy complications—but instead of calling for better guidance to reassure physicians that they can, in fact, offer excellent emergency care under pro-life laws, abortion advocates stoke the confusion and then point fingers at the laws for causing it. This narrative continues even after state officials have explicitly clarified that physicians can treat pregnant women in a timely manner,¹⁵ and despite the fact that not a single physician in the country has been charged with violating abortion laws for providing emergency obstetric care.

Often, abortion advocates attribute negative outcomes to abortion laws without any concrete evidence of a connection between the two except that the cases occurred in pro-life states. They completely ignore other potential causes of maternal morbidity and mortality, including plain and simple medical neglect—which, let's not forget, occurs in every state. Weaknesses in our nation's maternal healthcare system have negatively impacted pregnant women across the country for decades, especially low-income mothers and those living in maternity care deserts. But under *Dobbs*, the only determining factor for maternal outcomes that abortion advocates see is abortion laws.

By its own admission, ACOG's goal in ban-blaming is not to call for better legal guidance for physicians, even though one report found that many legal departments of hospitals in pro-life states have a dire need for improvement in the support they offer their medical staff. Rather, they openly state that their motive is political. In one statement, ACOG asserts that “no edit, no amendment, no addendum” to pro-life laws can satisfy them. It wants nothing less than for these laws to be “repealed,” legalizing abortion at any stage of pregnancy and for any reason.¹⁶

In pursuing its agenda, ACOG is willing to sacrifice physicians' practices and women's health.

The Impact on Doctors and Patients

The rhetorical games that pro-abortion medical organizations are playing have a material impact on patient care. Three years after my phone was bombarded with text messages from colleagues wondering what the newly released *Dobbs* decision would mean for them, I am dismayed at the confusion that remains among some of my fellow physicians about how to practice medicine under pro-life laws.¹⁷

Some of the uncertainty stems from an unacceptable lack of guidance from hospital legal departments or state medical boards—though this is improving. After my own state of Indiana's pro-life law went into effect, my hospital

gave us straightforward instructions about how our new law would impact our practice: Aside from a few new paperwork requirements, we could care for patients in the exact same way we did before. Unfortunately, not all doctors have been offered this support. As late as December 2024, a report published by U.S. Senator Ron Wyden found that many physicians experience a “lack of communication” from their hospitals’ leadership, leading to “inaccurate interpretations” of pro-life laws.¹⁸ One Texas OB-GYN stated that she has seen “doctors telling patients they can’t treat an ectopic pregnancy, which is not true.”

This confusion and misinformation are also directly harming our patients through misdirection. Abortion proponents’ monomaniacal focus on pinning mothers’ negative health outcomes on pro-life laws causes them to ignore the complex and overlapping factors that contribute to our nation’s maternal mortality crisis. For example, abortion advocates have blamed rural maternity ward closures in states like Idaho on their abortion laws, but the decline in rural hospitals’ labor and delivery services has been an issue for at least a decade, impacting even states with extremely permissive abortion laws like California, which has seen 21 percent of its maternity units close since 2014.¹⁹

Similarly, ban-blaming ignores the important role that poverty and medical neglect play in determining pregnant mothers’ health outcomes. For example, in its article on Yeni Alvarez-Glick, who passed away in Texas during her third trimester from complications related to hypertension, *The New Yorker* reports that she was unable to afford the insulin she was prescribed and sometimes skipped doses of her blood pressure medication so that its side effects didn’t interfere with her job. It also notes that she was prematurely discharged from the ICU prior to her death.²⁰ Glossing over these factors in favor of blaming Texas’s heartbeat law paints a false picture of this tragic case and distracts from the issues that our nation must address to prevent future deaths like Yeni’s. Furthermore, as author Leah Libresco Sargeant states, “framing her case as the fault of an abortion ban presumes that abortion is the escape clause for bad medical care.”²¹

Across the country, another result of pro-abortion false narratives is the terror some women and their partners feel that they won’t be able to obtain treatment for pregnancy complications. This misguided fear can have deadly ramifications.

One *New York Times* report features the profile of a Texas couple that identified as “pro-life,” yet heartbreakingly opted to order abortion drugs online when the wife became pregnant. They told the *Times* that this was because she suffered from endometriosis, and “they worried that Texas’ abortion ban

made hospitals so afraid that if she miscarried or had pregnancy complications, doctors would have to wait to intervene until her condition became life-threatening.²² In fact, the Texas Supreme Court and the state's Medical Board have both explicitly stated that physicians can quickly treat pregnant women suffering potentially life-threatening complications.²³ False beliefs to the contrary can be corrected by ensuring that the physician workforce is well educated about their state laws.

Another victim of misinformation about pro-life laws is Candi Miller, the 41-year-old Georgia wife and mother who passed away from complications during an attempted self-managed abortion.²⁴ According to her family, Candi similarly feared that her state's abortion law would prevent her medical team from treating her should her several pre-existing health conditions pose a serious risk during her pregnancy. She also believed two abortion-harm-denying narratives: one, that do-it-yourself abortion is safe; and two, that she could "get jail time" for getting "caught trying to do anything to get rid of the baby," as her son put it. Organizations like ACOG have repeated both of these myths, which may have ultimately cost Candi her life, as she was too scared of prosecution to seek medical aid when she needed it.

As someone who has devoted her career to serving both pregnant women and preborn babies, I find it unacceptable that the medical organizations I should rely on to support my practice are sacrificing my patients to the interests of the abortion industry.

Transforming the Culture of Medicine

In an era where the nation's leading medical organizations prioritize a pro-abortion agenda over the health of our patients, one thing is clear: It's time for a new path forward in medicine.

Pro-life medical organizations are filling in the gaps where "mainstream" groups are abandoning patients for politics. Pregnancy help centers are on the frontlines of meeting women with unplanned pregnancies where they are. With approximately 2,750 centers across the country, pregnancy centers served nearly 1 million women in 2022, providing over 500,000 free ultrasounds so they could see the humanity of their preborn children.²⁵ Many also provide medical services such as well woman exams and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—all in a life-affirming, supportive, and compassionate environment. Contrast this to the "care" provided by Planned Parenthood clinics across the country, which are outnumbered 5 to 1 by pregnancy centers, and are singularly focused on providing one thing to pregnant women—abortion.

Faith-based medical associations like the Catholic Medical Association

(CMA) and the Christian Medical and Dental Associations (CMDA), among others, advocate for the lives of both patients as well as helping support their members. Additionally, however, there is a need for a second medical opinion on the issue of abortion to counter the false pro-abortion narrative put forth by the other major medical associations. The American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG), of which I proudly serve as CEO, has been that second medical opinion since 1973. We are promoting clarity over confusion through medical education—including educating physicians on state abortion laws. Our online course “Practicing Obstetrics in States with Abortion Regulations” aims to empower physicians to confidently serve their patients with the excellent and often lifesaving care they deserve.²⁶ Through our advocacy arm, AAPLOG Action, we are working with policymakers in pro-life states to ensure that education like this is available to all medical professionals. By putting a stop to the deliberate confusion that the abortion industry has sown in pro-life states, we hope to ensure that women get the care they need and that our nation can fully address systemic weaknesses in our healthcare system without distractions.

Through its educational content, AAPLOG is fighting back against the dishonest minimization of abortion drugs’ serious harms to women and the language games that serve to obscure the humanity of our preborn patients.

And through its member programs and services, AAPLOG is investing in our nearly 8,000 life-affirming medical professional members, including medical students and residents, who constitute the next generation of medicine.

For millennia, the medical profession has been grounded in the principles of the Hippocratic Oath. As this sacred statement of ethics has been neglected, practices that deliberately harm our patients have crept into medicine, eroding its very purpose—health, healing, and wholeness. In this post-*Dobbs* era, there has never been a more important moment for life-affirming medical organizations like AAPLOG. As pro-life voices for the medical profession, we are poised to restore sanity to a culture gone astray. And, as medical voices for the pro-life movement, we are also well-equipped to offer evidence-based education for advocates working to make life-affirming cultural change.

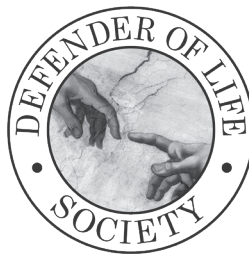
Now is the time for pro-life advocates to mobilize behind medical professionals. The future of our nation’s healthcare, as well as the well-being of pregnant women and their preborn children, depend on it.

NOTES

1. Planned Parenthood Action Fund. (n.d.). Protest tips: It's our fight, let's do it right | rightfully ours. Planned Parenthood Action. <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/rightfully-ours/bans-off-our-bodies/protest-tips-lets-do-it-right>
2. American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (n.d.). Just the Facts Sheet: Chemical Abortion. AAPLOG. <https://aaplog.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/20230728-Chem-Ab-One-Pager.pdf>
3. Maddow-Zimet, I., & Forouzan, K. (2025, June 24). Stability in the number of abortions from 2023 to 2024 in US states without total bans masks major shifts in access. Guttmacher Institute. <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/stability-number-abortions-2023-2024-us-states-without-total-bans-masks-major-shifts-access>
4. Niinimäki M., Pouta A., Bloigu A., Gissler M., Hemminki E., Suhonen S., Heikinheimo O. Immediate complications after medical compared with surgical termination of pregnancy. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2009 Oct;114(4):795-804. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0b013e3181b5ccf9. PMID: 19888037.
5. New Research Reveals Undisclosed Dangers of Chemical Abortion. Foundation for the Restoration of America. (2025, May 2). <https://www.froa.com/chemical-abortion-research/>
6. *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. US Food and Drug Administration*, Court Listener (US District Court for the Northern District of Texas February 10, 2023). Retrieved from <https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.txnd.370067/gov.uscourts.txnd.370067.91.1.pdf>
7. Louttit C. The Origins and Proliferation of Unfounded Comparisons Regarding the Safety of Mifepristone. *BioTech.* 2025; 14(2):39. <https://doi.org/10.3390/biotech14020039>
8. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (n.d.). ACOG releases new recommendations for clinicians about self-managed abortion. ACOG. <https://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2024/11/acog-releases-new-recommendations-for-clinicians-about-self-managed-abortion>
9. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (n.d.). ACOG releases new recommendations for clinicians about self-managed abortion. ACOG. <https://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2024/11/acog-releases-new-recommendations-for-clinicians-about-self-managed-abortion>
10. Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Adolescence, Section on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health and Wellness (Michael Yogman, Rebecca Baum, Thresia B. Gambon, Arthur Lavin, Gerri Mattson, Lawrence Sagin Wissow, Cora Breuner, Elizabeth M. Alderman, Laura K. Grubb, Makia E. Powers, Krishna Upadhyia, Stephenie B. Wallace, Lynn Hunt, Anne Teresa Gearhart, Christopher Harris, Kathryn Melland Lowe, Chadwick Taylor Rodgers, Ilana Michelle Sherer, Jason Rafferty); Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics* October 2018; 142 (4): e20182162. 10.1542/peds.2018-2162
11. ACOG Guide to language and Abortion. ACOG. (n.d.-a). <https://www.acog.org/contact/media-center/abortion-language-guide>
12. Management of stillbirth. ACOG. (n.d.-d). <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/obstetric-care-consensus/articles/2020/03/management-of-stillbirth>
13. A Lexicon for First-Trimester US: Society of Radiologists in Ultrasound Consensus Conference Recommendations, Shuchi K. Rodgers, Mindy M. Horrow, Peter M. Doubilet, Mary C. Frates, Anne Kennedy, Rochelle Andreotti, Kristyn Brandi, Laura Detti, Sarah K. Horvath, Aya Kamaya, Atsuko Koyama, Penelope Chun Lema, Katherine E. Maturen, Tara Morgan, Sarah G. Običan, Kristen Olinger, Roya Sohaey, Suneeta Senapati, and Lori M. Strachowski, *Radiology* 2024 312:2.
14. Abortion bans prevent clinicians from providing care. ACOG. (n.d.-a). <https://www.acog.org/news/news-articles/2025/1/abortion-bans-prevent-clinicians-from-providing-care>
15. TMB provides clarification on rules regarding exceptions to . . . Texas Medical Board. (n.d.). <https://www.tmb.state.tx.us/dl/57121A93-FA13-5E39-F2B2-DFC51BCA2EFD>, YouTube. (n.d.). Medical Education & Guidance. South Dakota Department of Health. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrYxPkSzTTw>; AAPLOG, X. Sept. 27, 2024. <https://x.com/aaplog/status/1839780781255692742>
16. "Abortion bans are to blame, not doctors." ACOG. (n.d.-a). <https://www.acog.org/news/news-releases/2024/10/acog-abortion-bans-are-to-blame-not-doctors>
17. Hauschildt, K. E., Kumar, A. J., Viglianti, E. M., Vranas, K. C., Bernstein, T., Moroz, L.,

- Iwashyna, T. J., & Critical Care-Obstetrics United for Research and Advocacy for Gender Equity (COURAGE) Group (2025). US Physicians' Perceived Impacts of Abortion Bans in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine. *Chest*, S0012-3692(25)00300-9. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chest.2025.03.008>
18. Practicing Amid "A Minefield": Emergency Reproductive Healthcare Under *Dobbs*. A Senate Finance Committee Staff Report. <https://legacy.www.documentcloud.org/documents/25463495-senate-committee-report-on-emergency-reproductive-health-care-post-dobbs>
19. Southwick, R. (2025, April 17). Many California hospitals have closed maternity units, and more are at risk. *OncLive*. <https://www.chiefhealthcareexecutive.com/view/many-california-hospitals-have-closed-maternity-units-and-more-are-at-risk>
20. Taladrid, S. (2024, January 8). Did an abortion ban cost a young Texas woman her life?. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/01/15/abortion-high-risk-pregnancy-yeni-glick>
21. Libresco Sargeant, L. (2025, January 27). Pro-life laws didn't kill these women. *Commonplace*. <https://commonplace.org/2025/01/27/pro-life-laws-didnt-kill-these-women/>
22. A day with one abortion pill prescriber - *The New York Times*. (n.d.). <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/09/health/a-day-with-one-abortion-pill-prescriber.html>
23. TMB provides clarification on rules regarding exceptions to Texas Medical Board. (n.d.). <https://www.tmb.state.tx.us/dl/57121A93-FA13-5E39-F2B2-DFC51BCA2EFD>, *Texas v Zurawski* (Texas Supreme Court February 21, 2024). Retrieved from <https://aaplog.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024.02.21-TX-v.-Zurawski-AHM-and-CLI.pdf>.
24. Surana, K. (2024, September 18). Candi Miller died afraid to seek care amid Georgia's abortion ban. *ProPublica*. https://www.propublica.org.translate.google/article/candi-miller-abortion-ban-death-georgia?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=es&_x_tr_hl=es&_x_tr_pto=tc
25. Pregnancy center reports. *Lozier Institute*. (2025, January 9). <https://lozierinstitute.org/pcr/>
26. Medical education. *AAPLOG Medical Education*. (n.d.). <https://meded.aaplog.org/>

You can defend life and love well into the future



**Make the Human Life Foundation part of your legacy—
Join the Defender of Life Society today.**

For more information, call (212) 685-5210 today. Or e-mail
defenderoflife@humanlifereview.com

For “More Babies,” Fund RRM Rather Than IVF

Grace Emily Stark

On February 18, 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order looking to expand access to in vitro fertilization (IVF). In the order, the president first acknowledges the infertility crisis faced by many couples in the United States and then offers the following statement as the guiding ethos behind the executive order: “My Administration recognizes the importance of family formation, and as a Nation, our public policy must make it easier for loving and longing mothers and fathers to have children.”

A noble goal, to be sure, even if our nation weren’t currently facing an impending demographic winter (already a reality in Europe and Asia). But what the president may not realize is that IVF is not the only avenue for helping couples overcome infertility and achieve the families of their dreams—and it might not even be the most effective. While IVF can, indeed, help couples *overcome* infertility, it does not actually *treat* infertility. Only restorative reproductive medicine (RRM) can do that.

While there are many moral and ethical considerations to IVF, especially concerning the destruction and/or storage of embryos—to say nothing of the significant ethical quandaries posed by the use of donated gametes¹ and surrogacy²—for the scope of this article, I will compare IVF and RRM based on their medical and scientific merits in assisting couples to grow their families.

We Must Stop Calling IVF Infertility “Treatment”

In the same way that hormonal contraception does not treat³ the underlying causes of menstrual cycle issues (but rather shuts down the menstrual cycle entirely), IVF does not so much *treat* infertility, as *circumvent* it.

For many couples, infertility is often not a disease in itself, but a *symptom* of an underlying pathology. For example, women with endometriosis often struggle to get and stay pregnant, due to the lesions, inflammation, and hormonal imbalances that are hallmarks of this very prevalent disease. Some women do not even discover that they have endometriosis until they struggle to become pregnant, despite the common symptoms of heavy, painful periods

Grace Emily Stark, M.A., is the Editor of *Natural Womanhood*. She holds a M.A. in Bioethics & Health Policy from Loyola University Chicago and a B.S. in Healthcare Management & Policy from Georgetown University, and is an alumna of the Paul Ramsey Institute Fellowship at the Center for Bioethics and Culture.

they have likely been struggling with for most of their lives.

While women diagnosed with endometriosis are often encouraged to use IVF to conceive (and although IVF may sometimes successfully lead to conception), the procedure does nothing to correct the underlying disease itself. With IVF, conception happens in a lab, in an attempt to *bypass the adverse health conditions* in the woman's body that make conception difficult to achieve. In contrast, RRM seeks to *correct the adverse health conditions* causing the infertility—such as endometriosis—via surgical interventions, hormone balancing, and other aspects of a holistic approach,⁴ so that both the woman's general health *and* her fertility are improved. In other words, RRM treats the woman's health conditions while concurrently allowing conception to occur “the old fashioned way.”

As someone who has experienced infertility and has overcome it with the help of RRM, I have dedicated my career to expanding public education about fertility health. That is why I believe an administration professing a desire to “Make America Healthy Again” (MAHA) should turn to RRM as the obvious answer to the question: “How do we help more people have babies?” As Patrick T. Brown pointed out in his March *Commonplace* article,⁵ “Trump's IVF Order Betrays MAHA”:

MAHA may mean many things. But it has the most potential if it is understood as a truly radical movement, in the sense of returning to the root of our woes. Rather than opting for quick-fix band-aids or treating different parts of the body in isolation, an integrated, ground-up approach to well-being could be a welcome trend.

But “treating different parts of the body in isolation” is precisely what IVF does, since it looks primarily to ovaries for the eggs they can provide and to testes for their sperm, rather than to the whole persons from which these gametes come.

More than Ends and Means

To some, this might sound like mere semantics. What does it matter how one achieves a pregnancy, some might think, *so long as it happens*? And to a desperate couple in the throes of infertility, it can seem like it *does not matter, as long as we get a baby*. Again, as someone who has been there before,⁶ I can understand this feeling well.

And it must be acknowledged that for some individuals with biological structural abnormalities (for example, a rare complication of being a male carrier of the cystic fibrosis gene is that one is born without the part of the male reproductive system called *vas deferens*—the result being that one “shoots blanks,” as the saying goes), or for those who have had surgeries

where reproductive parts have been damaged or removed (whether for therapeutic or sterilization purposes), RRM currently is unable to help. For such individuals, if the goal is to achieve a biological child, IVF may be the only means currently available.

Aside from these rarer, more difficult cases, RRM is the better choice. That is because RRM does not simply offer the possibility of a live baby, even for couples for whom IVF has previously failed,⁷ but it also often improves the health of the couples overall.

Although our culture has ingrained in us that our fertility is a nuisance to be suppressed with pills, injections, and devices (until we decide we would like our fertility to be turned on to produce a wanted baby), the fact is: *Fertility is a sign of a healthy woman's body that is functioning as it ought.* Its absence, in an adolescent or adult woman, is therefore a sign of larger problems. We owe it to the men and women struggling with infertility to take seriously these warning signs of other issues that are impacting their overall health and well-being. It should concern us that IVF ignores these issues, leaving couples more strained—financially, emotionally,⁸ and physically—than they were at the start.

IVF Is Not Without Risks to Mothers and Babies

As President Trump's executive order points out, IVF is extraordinarily expensive. Yet, as expensive as it is, IVF promises neither successful birth nor a risk-free experience for moms or babies. While birth rates resulting from IVF have improved over the years, they can still vary greatly with a woman's age and across clinics, with at most a 50 percent chance per cycle of live birth *if* a woman is under 35 years old. For many women under 35, that can mean a minimum of two to three cycles before one achieves a live birth. Success rates drop considerably after age 35, and since the average American woman seeking IVF is 36.3 years old, according to the CDC's 2024 National ART Summary,⁹ the national average percentage of live births per IVF cycle hovers around 37.5 percent.

Further, the unique risks inherent in the IVF process often go undiscussed in the media as well as between doctors and patients. While sperm retrieval is relatively straightforward (assuming a man has all his reproductive parts intact), egg retrieval is significantly riskier and more invasive. According to the Center for Bioethics and Culture's 2022 *Comprehensive Report on the Risks of Assisted Reproductive Technology*:

[Egg retrieval] risks include, but are not limited to: Ovarian Hyper Stimulation syndrome (OHSS) due to superovulation, loss of fertility, ovarian torsion, stroke, kidney disease, premature menopause, ovarian cysts, and in some rare cases, death. OHSS is

a life-threatening condition that can also cause stroke, ovarian torsion, organ failure, and psychological distress.

IVF pregnancies also present significantly more risk to mothers than spontaneous conception, for reasons that are not yet well-understood. As the fertility-health site *Natural Womanhood*¹⁰ states:

Perhaps due to the IVF procedures themselves, or to the unaddressed underlying causes of infertility, or to a combination of the two, IVF increases risk of pregnancy complications ranging from preeclampsia to ectopic pregnancy and multiple gestations to gestational diabetes. A large Swedish study found another risk in women who conceived via IVF: increased incidence of hypertension (high blood pressure).

What's more, children conceived via IVF have long been known to experience increased risk of low birthweight and preterm birth (and the complications associated with those conditions), as well as increased risk of birth defects and childhood cancer,¹¹ compared to those conceived without IVF. And according to a 2023 report¹² on the long-term risks of IVF-conceived children: "Studies on cardiometabolic health in children born after ART are conflicting, and there may be an increased risk of high blood pressure, and early markers of later onset compromised cardiometabolic health may be present."

RRM Also Carries Risk, but the Nature of the Risks Varies Significantly from IVF

I would be remiss to suggest RRM is entirely without risks. Certainly, RRM surgical interventions like endometrial excision¹³ and ovarian wedge resections¹⁴ do carry their own respective risks. However, unlike IVF procedures, RRM procedures *are primarily therapeutic*: Along with other interventions, these procedures have the potential to heal or to considerably lessen symptoms of underlying diseases like endometriosis and PCOS, while improving fertility in the process. Meanwhile, the successful birth rates for RRM are at least comparable to, and possibly better than, those of IVF. According to a 2022 study published in *Human Reproduction Open*:¹⁵

Several retrospective single-clinic studies from Canada, Ireland, and the USA, with subfertile couples receiving restorative reproductive medicine, mostly natural procreative technology, have reported adjusted cumulative live birth rates ranging from 29% to 66%, for treatment for up to 2 years, with a mean women's age of about 35 years.

Children born to couples treated with RRM also have very good neonatal outcomes, with apparently little to no increased risk¹⁶ for preterm birth or low birthweight, despite (in one study) having mothers with "significant negative predictive characteristics for healthy live birth including: advanced reproductive age (average 37.2 years), an average of 5.8 years of infertility

with 2.1 (range 1–9) previous IVF attempts, with only 5% having previously had a live birth from IVF.”

RRM studies like the above are small but promising, and couples report high satisfaction with the RRM process (especially those who’ve had prior experience with IVF).¹⁷ And, on the whole, most RRM interventions are likely to be significantly less expensive¹⁸ than IVF and other assisted reproductive technology procedures. What’s more, some couples have even overcome subfertility without RRM interventions, simply by learning how to chart their cycles¹⁹ and time intercourse according to the most fertile period.

More research is needed to further explore the potential of the burgeoning field of restorative reproductive medicine, which gives due attention to the menstrual cycle as the fifth vital sign of women’s health, helping improve the health of couples *and* babies in the process.

To Make America Fertile Again, Look to RRM

This need for greater RRM research brings us back to President Trump’s executive order. Rather than throwing government money at the highly unregulated, multi-billion-dollar IVF industry, the administration would do better to take a RRM approach to infertility, not just to meet the goal of manufacturing more babies, but to address the underlying health issues behind infertility. Restorative reproductive medicine has the potential to do that, but more investment is needed. For example, more education and training of additional healthcare professionals²⁰ is vital, as is the creation of ICD diagnostic codes and CPT codes so RRM professionals can receive appropriate reimbursement for procedures like endometriosis excision surgery. Such reimbursement would both incentivize more professionals to be trained in and offer this kind of medicine, and lower costs of care for patients. Embracing the RESTORE Act²¹ would be an excellent step in this direction.

Proposing tax breaks for new parents on the campaign trail last August, President Trump said,²² “We want more babies, to put it very nicely.” His recent executive order expanding IVF access was delivered in the same spirit.

More babies is a grand idea—for many reasons²³—but where IVF seeks to create more babies in labs, RRM aims to help more couples experience baby-making the most healthy and natural way possible. I’m willing to bet that, given the opportunity, the latter is how most couples would prefer to build their families.

NOTES

1. Them Before Us, “My Daddy’s Name Is Donor—Study,” (Feb. 7, 2023). <https://thembeforeus.com/my-daddys-name-is-donor-study/>
2. Grace Emily Stark, “Renting Wombs, Rending Hearts: The Dark Realities of Surrogacy” - *Verily* (Jan. 26, 2021). <https://verilymag.com/2021/01/surrogacy-altruistic-commercial-exploitation-women-children-2021>
3. Grace Emily Stark, “Birth Control’s Failed Promises,” *Human Life Review* (Spring 2022). <https://humanlifereview.com/birth-controls-failed-promises>
4. Melissa Buchan, “How to Get an Endometriosis Diagnosis and Find Truly Restorative Treatment,” *Natural Womanhood* (June 27, 2020). <https://naturalwomanhood.org/endometriosis-diagnosis-and-treatment-not-birth-control-2021/>
5. Patrick T. Brown, “Trump’s IVF Order Betrays MAHA,” *Commonplace* (March 4, 2025). <https://commonplace.org/2025/03/04/trumps-ivf-order-betrays-maha/>
6. Grace Emily Stark, “Remembering the Loss in Pregnancy Loss,” *Verily* (Oct 1, 2020). <https://verilymag.com/2020/10/grieving-miscarriage-abortion-pregnancy-loss-20>
7. Phil C. Boyle, Theun de Groot, Karolina M. Andralocj, “Healthy Singleton Pregnancies From Restorative Reproductive Medicine (RRM) After Failed IVF,” *Frontiers in Medicine* (Volume 5, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2018.00210>
8. The Center for Bioethics and Culture Network (CBC), “Venus Rising with Stacy: What I Learned About the Predatory IVF Industry” (Apr. 11, 2023). <https://cbc-network.org/2023/04/venus-rising-with-stacy-what-i-learned-about-the-predatory-ivf-industry/>
9. CDC Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), *National ART Summary* (Dec. 10, 2024). <https://www.cdc.gov/art/php/national-summary/index.html>
10. Melayna Alicea, “Assisted reproductive technology (ART), heart disease, and stroke: What’s the connection?: What 2 research studies tell us,” *National Womanhood* (Oct. 31, 2024). <https://nationalwomanhood.org/art-heart-disease-stroke/>
11. Barbara Luke, Morton B. Brown, Hazel B. Nichols, et al., “Assessment of Birth Defects and Cancer Risk in Children Conceived via In Vitro Fertilization in the US” (Oct. 29, 2020). <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2772342>
12. Anja Pinborg, Ulla-Britt Wennerholm, Christina Bergh, “Long-term outcomes for children conceived by assisted reproductive technology,” *Fertility and Sterility* (Vol. 120, Issue 3, Part 1, Sept. 2023), pp. 449-456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2023.04.022>
13. Taryn DeLong, “Considering endometriosis surgery? Here’s how to find a good endo surgeon,” *Natural Womanhood* (Sept. 17, 2021). <https://naturalwomanhood.org/considering-endometriosis-surgery-heres-how-to-find-a-good-endo-surgeon/>
14. Grace Emily Stark, “Understanding the Surgical Techniques Used to Address PCOS,” *Natural Womanhood* (Nov. 7, 2019). <https://naturalwomanhood.org/understanding-the-surgical-techniques-used-to-address-pcos/>
15. Joseph B. Stanford, Tracey Parnell, Kristi Kantor, Matthew R. Reeder, Shahpar Najmabadi, Karen Johnson, Iris Musso, Hanna Hartman, Elizabeth Tham, Ira Winter, et al., “International Natural Procreative Technology Evaluation and Surveillance of Treatment for Subfertility (iNEST): enrollment and methods,” *Human Reproduction Open* (Vol. 2022, Issue 3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/hropen/hoac033>
16. Phil C. Boyle, Theun de Groot, Karolina M. Andralocj, Tracey A. Parnell, “Healthy Singleton Pregnancies From Restorative Reproductive Medicine (RRM) After Failed IVF,” *Pub Med Central, National Library of Medicine* (July 31, 2018). doi: 10.3389/fmed.2018.00210
17. Leonora Butau, “When IVF fails, what’s next?,” *Natural Womanhood* (July 8, 2022). <https://naturalwomanhood.org/ivf-fails-to-treat-underlying-reasons-for-infertility/>
18. Grace Emily Stark, “An Infertility Treatment That May Work Without Breaking the Bank: HINT: It’s not IVF,” *Verily* (March 28, 2019). <https://verilymag.com/2019/03/ttc-infertility-treatment-that-is-cheaper-than-ivf-napro-technology-2019>
19. P. Frank-Herrmann, C. Jacobs, E. Jenetzky, C. Gnoth, C. Pyper, S. Baur, G. Freundl, M. Goekenjan, T. Strowitzki, “Natural conception rates in subfertile couples following fertility awareness training,” *Pub Med, National Library of Medicine, Arch. Gynecol. Obstet.* (Feb. 9, 2017). doi: 10.1007/s00404-017-4294-z
20. Facts About Fertility. <https://factsaboutfertility.org>
21. Natalie Dodson, Emma Waters, “To Address Infertility, It’s Time to Give Real Reproductive

Health Options,” Ethics and Public Policy Center (June 13, 2024). <https://eppc.org/publication/to-address-infertility-its-time-to-give-real-reproductive-options/>

22. Joey D’Urso, “How Trump’s presidency could change where babies are born: It’s not just Elon Musk who is doing his bit to boost the birth rate,” *The Times* (March 3, 2025). <https://thetimes.com/us/american-politics/article/trump-birthrate-where-children-born-maps-charts/5mk2m0x2j>

23. Grace Emily Stark, “Babies Make Families,” *The American Conservative* (Apr. 16, 2018). <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/babies-make-families/>

There Are Boys; There Are Girls

William Murchison

To begin: Good for the United States Supreme Court! Very good for the United States Supreme Court! In fact, glory be, and the bar's open, folks.

I find it impossible, though you never know in our present chaotic age, to see how the court could have negated Tennessee's right as a sovereign state—however debilitated the sovereignty idea these days—to forbid unproven and conceivably perilous medical treatments for minors: our children, over whom we are charged to watch with all diligence.

The court's 6-3 decision in *United States v. Skrmetti*, handed down June 18, is by modern standards a remarkable step in the nation's provisional, slow, and sometimes grudging movement toward plain old everyday common sense in the face of brazen, over-confident ideology.

Consider. Tennessee's legislature in 2023 looked at the cultural trend—ratified by a host of self-deputized experts, including many doctors—to gratify doubts about personal sexual identity through the use of puberty blockers and hormones. That is, if a girl increasingly saw herself as a boy, her friendly neighborhood physician would help her “transition” to the male state. Males who saw themselves as largely or maybe even entirely female in orientation could un-man themselves, so to speak. Your body, your choice! Who'da thunk it—I mean even 20 years ago, when American culture still wobbled mentally over a woman's asserted right to abort her unborn baby?

Tennessee, for reasons that clashed with the new ideology but resonated with experience, judgment, and the imparted wisdom of the human race, said, er, no . . . we're not having any of that around here. An adult—that was different. Adults make their own choices. But children: sorting out new knowledge, new experiences, new personal understandings day by day. Not for them, the propaganda about “gender choice.”

What society, careful of its children's well-being, could encourage, far less allow, irreversible judgments that deviated from the state in which a particular child entered the world?

Our society hasn't done that. Not yet. And one feels better about the future, given the *Skrmetti* decision; still, one has to reckon with the clamor remaining

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.

at certain levels of life to let people decide for themselves who and what they are, irrespective of who and what they may be in the context of a civilization grounded in—forgive the antiquated word—Reality; that which IS, as distinguished from that which we might see ourselves called to remake, in a different pattern.

The transgender activists are harrumphing about someday winning what they see as their right to recognition as a put-upon constituency meriting government assistance and public affirmation. The *New York Times* quoted one prominent activist saying, prior to *Skrametti*, “One thing I’m certain of is that this organization stays on an issue like water on stone. We don’t win this in a couple of weeks, I’m sure my organization is going to be on it for the next 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years.”

On what issue, exactly? The right of personal sex choice for all and one? The only criteria being anxiety, fear, or pulsating emotions? And afterwards, what new choices lie ahead, awaiting affirmation?

It’s a crazy age, but the high court, by flagging the Tennessee law through cultural traps and blockades, has brought us a little nearer the recovery state for which many Americans long. Adults may if they like continue to change their sexes medically. Christine, née George William, Jorgensen set the worldwide example for that in the 1950s, and along since have come others, the most notable, maybe, being the Olympic gold medalist Bruce, presently Caitlyn, Jenner.

It is, as the saying goes, a free country: howsoever expansive the definitions of freedom with which we work in the 21st century. Transgender enthusiasm is not going away any time soon: maybe never. But for Tennessee children, and children in the 26 other states that presently bar sex transition for minors (none of them on the West Coast if you were really wondering)—there are no puberty blockers, cross-sex surgery, nor other medical urgencies.

At the age of responsibility they may choose for themselves, as is surely a right the Supreme Court would affirm. Until that day, officious “rights” campaigners and with-it physicians, always ready to believe something new, and abetted by worried but naïve parents, cannot allow minors to “change” on the basis of possibly changeable fears and emotions.

That seems good enough for Justices Amy Barrett and Clarence Thomas, who wrote in concurrence: “The prospect of courts second-guessing legislative choices in this area should set off alarm bells.”

We should all be alarmed if it doesn’t. Volubly so. Judicial subservience to the changing fashions of our time—intellectual, cultural, religious, you name it—not only would further divide Americans—*vide* the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections—but also fuzz up the kind of robust discussions we need

more than ever about questions of life and death.

In today's conversation—especially that which passes for “conversation” on social media or in university classroom byplay—you're either a MAGA maggot or an anti-semitic who probably shouldn't be in the country anyway. (Why, I ask in passing, don't people use a good, depreciatory word like “Yahoo” anymore? Jonathan Swift gave us that serviceable word in *Gulliver's Travels* for slouching, smelly types we all deplore.)

Mr. Justice Thomas, in a separate concurrence, dilated on our growing tendency to accept the judgment of those designated—by the intellectual establishment—“experts,” their voices amplified by a credulous, encouraging media.

The “experts” in pediatric medicine have lined up largely with the exponents of gender transition for minors, declaring, among other things, that a change of one's gender can lessen the chances of suicide.

Wrote Thomas: “[T]here are particularly good reasons to question the expert class here, as recent revelations suggest that leading voices in this area have relied on questionable evidence and have allowed ideology to influence their medical guidance.”

“Ideology” is the right word all right—the declaration (characteristic of our times) that thus and so, whatever someone may have once said, is Truth itself. On what basis? Well, on the basis of I-say-so. I know! I'm right! Follow me! One thinks of famous figures throughout human history, not all of them with toothbrush mustaches and a love of straight-armed salutes, who build their careers on such declarations.

Relief should be our first take on *Skrmetti*. But after that, reflection.

It is well that 27 states have undertaken to protect the not fully mature, the still developing, from decisions that could mar, or destroy, their future lives. More states should (and probably will now) follow Tennessee's lead.

But the essential questions aren't decided: Who are we? What are we? And what do we do about it? These were not the questions before the U.S. Supreme Court. Nor could they have been. Courts are instruments of the self-government to which a free people—us—is entitled.

What the court said, in essence, is that the Constitution upholds a state's right—so long as that right fails to overshadow another, federally protected one—to legislate for its people's perceived benefit: the benefit, in this case, of Tennessee's people; and by extension those living elsewhere under similar laws.

Yes, yes. That's Political Science.

But the “trans” matter at bottom isn't about Political Science or its adjunct preoccupation, politics and polls. It is about—well, Reality itself: what is, as opposed to what isn't, and the way we are caught up in it through our incidents of birth.

Something large happened way “out there”—far longer ago than once-upon-a-time. And man came onto the face of the earth. And woman. The Old Testament tells the story in a fashion that is not exactly second-nature to grasp in its fulness and beauty, but which never surrenders our attention. We are still working through it all, putting in place pieces in a gigantic puzzle unlikely to be solved—at least by us.

So you could say if you wanted to that we are guessing, acting with only partial knowledge—whatever “full” knowledge might mean, given the tendency of new “facts” constantly to present themselves to human gaze.

We are not guessing, nevertheless, when we say, “That’s a boy.” And, “That’s a girl.” Our eyes tell us. The brain kicks in.

So it has ever been. That is Reality.

I take into account, in saying this, medical indications of sexual ambiguity in particular children. The thing is, ambiguity explains nothing larger than the ambiguity itself. It cannot speak to concentrated experience and observation over millennia of existence. There are boys; there are girls. To riff on the political scientist Willmoore Kendall, this is a thing we know “in our hips.” If we do not know this basic fact of human existence, we know nothing whatever, and the Lord help us.

The oddity of recent years—that is putting it mildly—is the widespread and very, very ideological argument that we can invent our own Reality, as in the plea for a different sex than the one with which we entered the world. It is the argument inspiring those who demand public ratification of the value and worth of puberty blockers and the other appurtenances of sex change. They know!—a large assertion we can swallow or not, just as we like.

Feminism, a creed all its own, which has brought particular benefits, marred by particular potholes and muddy stretches, is chiefly responsible for elevating transgenderism to national cause status. Joe Biden called transgender equality “the civil rights issue of our time.” Shall we pass on by, averting our gaze?

Feminism is chiefly responsible for the rise of “gender” as mandatory substitute for “sex.” I found this out when I corrected a panelist high in church circles about using “gender”—a grammatical term—when she clearly meant “sex.” No, no, I was informed, gender is the new understanding, among . . . I can’t remember exactly her words; she meant, Those in Process of Personal Development, seeking to define themselves over against the artificial constructs of yesteryear.

No, lady!, I ought to have said. Or, perhaps, no, ma’am. You’re a mile from home plate. And, furthermore, paving the field for Trouble.

Trouble we got all right—the “choose-your-pronoun” nonsense (I don’t need to rehearse that, do I?), the question of how to regulate restroom choice, the sad

spectacle of ex-boy swimmers competing against undoubted girl swimmers.

But on it went, until it got to be too much. The *New York Times*, in an objective—I'm serious, folks—magazine piece July 6 by Nicholas Confessore, quotes a Maryland physician and trans rights activist as saying (just before the *Skrmetti* decision), "People know the movement is stuck. They know we've gone too far. They know we've lost the thread."

The thread—it is too alluring an image to drop. A thread binds, it connects. Lost, it loses all utility, as maybe in the trans rights brouhaha. In declaring children and teenagers reliable enough to assess their own sexuality with parents and white-coated doctors standing ready to approve their choice, the trans movement has embraced a kind of personal autonomy unknown to, unthought of by, virtually any who ever have inhabited this planet.

A thread, at the same time, has other, more fruitful applications. As with Ariadne, the Greek beauty loved by Theseus, a thread followed properly can lead upward to the light, out of the dark lair of Minotaurs and similarly disagreeable beasts, to fresh air, true understanding—and reaffirmation.

Such a thread may lie somewhere in our political capitals, on the ground, on a monument, in a museum, who knows, ready to be laid strikingly along a path of cultural recovery from the delusions that keep us in carefully supervised captivity.

The first delusion: That I am enough. Me! I suffice. I know what I need, which is something no one else can know.

The second delusion: That the rest of society, including government, embraces, or should, my choices, my aims, my ideals.

The third delusion: That what was said and believed in the past is flushable down the drain, inasmuch as I wasn't there. I didn't contribute to saying and thinking it.

The fourth delusion: That opponents of my views have nothing useful to say, thus don't deserve time or space to say it.

The idea that the state of Tennessee offends instead of enables, and in the end protects, its youngest citizens has no root in understandings older than America itself: the understandings that undergird our community.

Skrmetti provides an occasion—whether we grasp it or not, like Ariadne's thread is beyond knowing—namely, to stop. To look around. To think. To rub the eyes. Where are we anyway?! How did this sort of thing get started? Have we as a culture after all been chasing a chimera of "equality" and "justice" based on coercion, contrary to realities we used to embrace with joy and satisfaction.

I leave the matter where I started. Good for the high court; and, waiter, waiter, make mine a double!

From the Archives:

Together for Life

Richard John Neuhaus

I should imagine that everybody here, without exception, has been to many, many such meetings; at least meetings that roughly fall under the umbrella of pro-life concern. And one of the most important things, I think, for all of us to remind ourselves of—and to be reminded of again and again—is that we’re going to be at a lot more meetings, God willing. That there is no permanence, there is no end point to the great cause of life that brings us together. We are signed on for the duration and the duration is the entirety of the human drama, for the conflict between what John Paul II calls the culture of life and the culture of death is a permanent conflict. It is a conflict built into a wretchedly fallen and terribly ambiguous human condition.

And so those who have been recruited, who understand themselves by virtue of their very faith in God, their very having-been-chosen-by-God, the God of life—those who understand that, know that they are in this for the duration, and that everything that has been the pro-life movement of the last thirty-plus years has been the prelude, has been the laying of the foundation for the pro-life movement of the twenty-first century and of the twenty-second century, and of all the centuries, however many more there are to come. That understanding is absolutely essential to the kind of commitment, the kind of devotion, the kind of self-surrender that has made the pro-life movement one of the most luminous illustrations of the human capacity for altruistic, genuinely other-regarding activities, indeed, not only in the American experiment, but in world history. Never before, I think it fair to say—ponder this—have so many people given so much over so long a period of time for a cause from which they have absolutely nothing to gain personally; and indeed in which they have, in many cases, lost—at least by any ordinary calculation of benefits—lost time, often friendships, or gained a great deal of opprobrium and misunderstanding on the part of others and, in many cases, have been jailed and arrested, and have paid deep fiscal penalties.

It is an inspiring thing to have been part of this first thirty years of this phase of what is called the pro-life movement. And we dare not be weary. We

Richard John Neuhaus was a priest in the archdiocese of New York, the founding Editor of the journal *First Things*, and the inaugural president of the Institute for Religion and Public Life. This address was given at a conference at Fordham University April 24, 2001, titled “Exploring How Jews and Christians Can Work Together to Sanctify Human Life.”

dare never give in to what sometimes seem to be the overwhelming indications that the cause is futile. We dare never give in to despair. We have not the right to despair. And finally, we have not the reason to despair.

It is a grand thing, it is among the grandest things in life, to know that your life has been claimed by a cause ever so much greater than yourself, ever so much greater than ourselves. In our American public life today, there's much talk about a culture war—sometimes in the plural, culture wars. It's a phrase that I've used, it's a phrase we've used in *First Things* from time to time, and people sometimes are critical of that. And they say, Oh, isn't that an alarmist kind of language, isn't that an inflammatory kind of language to use, to talk about wars?

Well, maybe. It's a contestation, if you prefer the word contestation. It's a conflict, certainly very, very deep. But it does have a warlike character to it. And if it *is* war, it's good to remember who it was that declared this war—who is waging a defensive war, and who an aggressive war. It was not our side that declared war. We were not the ones who decided on January 22, 1973 that all of a sudden everything that had been entrenched in the conscience and the habits and the mores *and the laws* of the people of this nation with respect to the dignity of human life and the rights bestowed upon that life—that all of that was now to be discarded. That in one, raw act of judicial power, which of course the *Roe v. Wade* decision was, every protection of the unborn, in all fifty states, would be completely wiped off the books.

Astonishing thing. It is important for us to remember that most of those who were on the side of what was then called liberalized abortion law, now called pro-choice, were as astonished as everyone else by *Roe v. Wade*. Nobody expected that the Court would simply abolish abortion law, would simply eliminate even the most minimal protections of unborn life.

That, of course, is not the only occasion upon which a war was declared that creates what today is called the culture war. There are many, many other points in the culture. Sometimes we simply refer perhaps too vaguely and too generally to the Sixties, but certainly under sundry revolutionary titles, all claiming to be great movements of liberation, was explicitly lodged and advanced and argued for in the name of warfare, a counterculture intended to overthrow, presumably, the oppressive, stifling, life-denying character indeed of Western Civilization itself and all its works and all its ways. It was to be an exorcism, if you will, of what was perceived to be a maliciously oppressive cultural order of which we are a part, with respect to sexuality always weaving in and out and coming back to the question of sexuality, marriage and divorce and education policy and a host of things.

And so war was declared and war followed. And it will continue to look

very much like a war. It is our responsibility not only for strategic or tactical reasons, but very importantly for moral reasons, to make sure that it doesn't become warfare in the sense of violence and bloodshed. It is our responsibility to advance our arguments in this great contestation with civility and with persuasiveness, knowing that sound reason and the deepest convictions engendered by Judeo/Christian moral tradition both strongly support the cause of life which will ultimately prevail.

Professor Bernard Dobranski, Dean of Ave Maria Law School, noted the motto of Ave Maria, *Fides et Ratio*, faith and reason. And these two are seldom so powerfully conjoined as in the pro-life cause. We are constantly in the process of saying to those who claim that we would impose our values, and even worse impose our religion upon others: No, our response is: Let us reason, let us come reason together about what is the foundation of human life.

Let us come reason together about what are—as everybody should understand—moral questions about how we order our life together. The Dean said that all of law is moral, all of politics is moral, ultimately.

What is politics? I think the best shorthand definition of politics that anybody's ever proposed is Aristotle's. And Aristotle said politics is free persons deliberating the question how ought we to order our life together. *Free persons deliberating the question how ought we to order our life together.* And the “ought” of that definition is clearly a moral term.

Every political question of consequence is a moral question. What is fair? What is just? What serves the common good? Fairness, justice, good: these are all moral terms. We are the ones who are prepared to enter into the dialogue, if you will: the ongoing conversation, within the bounds of civility, as to how we ought to order our life together, including the question who belongs to the *we*—the most elementary of all political questions. Who belongs to the *we*? Who is entitled to our respect? Who is entitled to protection?

This conversation, this argument, in unwarlike ways, in civil ways, in persuasive ways, will prevail incrementally, piece by piece, sometimes moving, it seems, more backward than forward. But we're accustomed to that; we should be. We know that we've signed on for the duration, we know that the conflict between the culture of life and the culture of death is nothing less than the story of humankind. Humankind trying to find a better way, a more just way, a more humane way of ordering our life together, and of protecting all those who belong to the *we*.

Our goal . . . I think in the last few years it's been a very encouraging thing that across the spectrum of those concerned in various ways with the cause of life, there is an agreement on how we formulate our goal. What is it, that

goal? The goal is every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life.

I'm glad to say that, during the 2000 presidential campaign and since, President Bush has consistently reiterated that as the goal. When asked, "What do you mean when you say you're pro-life?"—I mean that we must work as a society for a time in which every unborn child is protected in law and welcomed in life.

Now we all know that we will never get to that time. There will always be abortions just as there will always be other forms of homicide, and there will always be robberies, and there will always be child abuse. We know that because we are unblinkingly realistic about the nature of the human condition and of our lives within it. But we also know what is that realistic goal that step by step, with wisdom, with courage, with unfailing commitment, we are working toward.

It is a great question of what it is that keeps you going. Each of us, I think—Jews and Christians, those of us who by the grace of God have been called to the community of the God of Israel, whether as Christians or Jews it is for us to know that finally this is His cause before it's our cause. That He is the Maker of heaven and earth and the Author of life. And that every human life is inestimable, invaluable (that is to say no price can be put upon it), a meeting between the finite and the infinite. That every human life is destined from eternity and called to eternity, with God, from God.

And if one believes that, it is not whistling in the dark, or simply trying to keep up spirits or wearing a bright yellow smiley button to say that the cause of life will prevail. John Paul II, as you know, frequently speaks about the beginning of the third millennium as a springtime—a springtime of Christian unity, a springtime of Jewish/Christian understanding; a springtime of world evangelization, a springtime of the renewal of human culture.

And people sometimes ask, well, how can someone like Karol Wojtyla who became John Paul II say that, someone who has lived through the twentieth century, the bloodiest and most horrendous of all centuries in human history—lived through everything that would seem to contradict such a disposition, such an anticipation of a springtime? I mean he lived through Nazism, he lived through communism, he saw the slaughter and the horror. And people ask, how can he be so optimistic about the human project, about the future? And the answer, of course, is that he's not optimistic at all. Nor does he call us to be optimistic. Optimism is not a virtue—it's simply a matter of seeing what you want to see, and not seeing what you don't want to see.

Hope is a very, very different thing. Hope is looking into the heart of darkness and seeing at the heart of darkness that there is reason for hope. Because for Christians looking at the Cross, as we've just done during the Easter

period, at the heart of darkness and Christian understanding is God Himself in Jesus Christ. And the last word belongs not to darkness, but to love, to the resurrected life, to the vindication of hope.

So we know what the goal is: every unborn child, every old person considered expendable, all the radically disabled physically, mentally, everyone protected in law, welcomed in life. We work for that, relentlessly, the culture of life versus the culture of death. It is one of the greatest encouragements of recent years, for which the organizers of this conference can accept the due thanks of all of us, that there has been a growing convergence between significant sectors of the Jewish community and of the dominantly Christian pro-life cause of the last thirty, forty years; important for many, many different reasons. Not so much because it adds numbers or adds clout, but because it bears more powerful, more credible witness to what we mean when we speak together about the God of life, and renew, by such speech and by such witness and by such work, what society once meant by human beings created and endowed with inalienable rights.

It is among the contributions of this great cause to renew the constituting convictions of the American democratic experiment, which are very, very much under assault on many different fronts.

I remember years ago where my own personal involvement in the pro-life cause really began, long before *Roe v. Wade*, when it was then called the movement for the liberalization of abortion law here in New York and California and Hawaii. In the Williamsburg/Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, in St. John the Evangelist Church of which I was pastor, I read an article in *Harper's* magazine by Ashley Montagu, an anthropologist at Princeton (where does Princeton get these kinds of leaders?). And this article was about what makes a life worth living. And he ran through, as you might imagine, a number of criteria of what constituted a life worth living. Obviously physical health, being in a solid, secure family situation, having economic security and prospects of an educational and career future. I think there were ten or eleven criteria, measures of a life worth living. And I recall it was an Advent Sunday in 1964—I realize I don't look that old—and I was standing at the altar at St. John the Evangelist looking out at the three or four hundred people there attending the liturgy. And I realized, looking over all these black faces of people—almost all very poor—that in Ashley Montagu's judgment not one of them had a life worth living. Not one. Not one could meet more than two or three of the criteria, in his view, necessary to a life worth living.

And this—I have to say it—hit me . . . Kaboom! A great evil is afoot here—What is this man saying? And people who say these things and think

this way—what are they saying? They’re saying, of course, what anybody should recall if they’re at all literate about the history of which we are a part; they’re saying that there are very, very large numbers of people living lives that are not worthy of life. And anybody who has any literacy with regard to the times in which we live will recognize that phrase, and where it was used before. *Lebensunwertes Leben*. Life that is not worthy of life. Which, of course, was the centerpiece of the genocidal, unspeakable practice of the Nazi regime: That we presume to decide which lives, indeed, are worthy of life and have any claim upon our attention. In short, we decide who belongs to the we. And we exclude those with whom we do not want to deliberate how we ought to order our lives together.

It’s an astonishing thing: I know that it’s very controversial and precisely because it is controversial it is necessary to touch on the ways in which there are parallels and non-parallels between that unspeakable horror of the Holocaust and today’s culture of death. When my dear, dear friend John Cardinal O’Connor first came to New York, he spoke very straightforwardly about the parallels of the Holocaust. And it caused a great deal of controversy, and many in the Jewish community (but not only in the Jewish community) said, well, you have to be very careful in making that analogy. And they were right. And Cardinal O’Connor took that very much to heart and was from there on very, very careful indeed.

But at one point, all of us—Christians and Jews and whoever understands what’s at stake here—have to understand that there is this crucial commonality. There is this lethal point of logic shared by these two dreadful phenomena: that we put ourselves in the position of deciding that certain peoples, by virtue of their race, their religion, their culture, their size, their disability, their language, name it—are *lebensunwertes Leben*. And that is the lethal logic that motors the madness of killing, whether it be partial-birth abortion, whether it be euthanasia, whether it be the willingness to destroy life in order to create the perfect baby, or to clone those who are considered the superior types of our species. Whatever mechanism and whatever cause and technological manipulation is being advanced in the tide of the culture of death has always at its center the lethal logic of *lebensunwertes Leben*. We’re up against something very ominous, where evil is indeed afoot. The things that I’ve mentioned—partial-birth abortion has already been mentioned, other developments, eugenics, cloning, genetic engineering—and it is an ominous thing that in the last three years it has become respectable again to use the word eugenics.

Eugenics basically means good births, of course, but much more than that, it means the programmatic effort to redesign the humanum, create a superior,

better kind of human being and, of course the flip side of that is to reduce or eliminate inferior types of human beings. Eugenics was an elite cause, and a liberal cause and a progressive cause beginning in the late nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. And then, of course, with the Second World War and with Hitler and the Holocaust, the idea of eugenics was totally discredited. The word was *verboden*, taboo. Nobody used the word “eugenics.”

But now in the last two or three years, keep your eyes open, look at the books that are being published, read the leading opinion journals, it’s becoming respectable again to talk about eugenics. And the people who talk about it say, well, of course there was that unfortunate episode, that unpleasantness back there around the middle of the century in Germany. But that really was an *aberration* and now we have to get back on track with the great cause of designing a better humanity. Dealing with human beings essentially as things, as products which are to please our consumer tastes. And if they don’t, like any other consumer product, they simply can be rejected or eliminated or tossed out. That’s a very, very ominous thing.

But I did not come here to discourage or to depress. It’s very important, crucially important for us to remember, in this great contest between the culture of life and the culture of death and the form that it takes in what’s called the culture wars of our society, how much we have to be thankful for. If you recall, back in the late sixties and then in 1973, when the *Roe v. Wade* decision came down, the *New York Times* said—and all of the rest of the media echoed the proposition—that the abortion question had at last been settled. That was the word that was used; the Supreme Court had settled the abortion question. And here we are, almost thirty years later, and it’s the most unsettled question in American life.

And that in itself is reason for hope. It’s reason for hope that all the brightest and the best and their institutions in our society, almost without exception, in 1973 said that this question is over. Don’t talk about it any more; don’t argue about it any more. It is settled. All of the major universities and the voices from the Academy, the philanthropic world, the prestige media go across the board, the powerful—those who control the commanding heights of culture were unanimous that this question was settled.

There was only one major institution in American life that dissented, and that was the Catholic Church, the bishops of the Catholic Church. Not as powerfully, not as articulately, not with the determination or the skill that they ought to have had. But they said, No way, wait a minute. This can’t be right. This is a very, very dangerous thing.

We are counting up reasons for hope, reasons to encourage us. Now look

where we are. Today we have the Evangelical Protestants, of all varieties, solidly committed to the pro-life cause. At the time of *Roe v. Wade* and still five years after *Roe v. Wade*, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest single Protestant association in the country, with more than fifteen million members, was passing resolutions in favor of legalized abortion. It was the great work of Francis Schaeffer and a handful of others that turned around the whole of that almost one-third of the American public that is Evangelical Protestantism.

And the Jewish: how very, very important this is. For a long time now some of us have been involved in the Christian/Jewish dialogue. (Again, I'm much older than I look.) And going back, I remember at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri Rabbi Saul Bernard, who, thank God, is still with us. He was then the Interreligious Director of the Anti-Defamation League and would go around almost like an itinerant evangelist to Protestant seminary and Catholic, with this message about a strange phenomenon called the Christian/Jewish dialogue. And he first embroiled me in that. And I've never been able to get out of it, nor wanted to get out of it ever since.

Along the way it was by the grace of God my great good fortune to become a friend of someone for whom I thank God every day, Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was perhaps the most influential and admired Jewish theologian of this century, at least in America. Heschel did not live long enough, or it did not come together in quite the right way, for his ever to be entirely as clear as I thought he ought to have been on the question of abortion and the related questions of *lebensunwertes Leben*. But Heschel did understand what was involved. Heschel said that just to *be* is a blessing; just to live is holy. And he spoke and wrote magnificently about the pathos of God suffering with His wounded creation. Heschel had another line which is never to be forgotten, I hope. With regard to Jewish/Christian dialogue he said interfaith dialogue begins with faith.

And what is happening here in this meeting, and what is happening more generally in our society as all of us give ourselves to this, and we pray our efforts succeed, is a meeting in faith. Obviously there are deep differences between Jews and Christians, and the deepest of differences, as St. Paul wrote in Romans, chapters nine through eleven, probably await the end time, the *eschaton* of the final coming of the kingdom of God and the Messianic age, ever to be sorted out and resolved.

But along the way we are together pilgrims in faith, and pilgrims of faith, seeking to do the will of the God of Israel Who is the Author of Life. And that has to be much more than strategic and tactical considerations, as important as they are; that has to be the center of what brings us together in this

meeting and what, from this meeting, will, by the grace of God, build and build into an ever greater cooperation. So much has already been happening that is hopeful. The issue is not settled; it's the most unsettled in our life today. A few years ago the *Boston Globe*—which has a fiercely pro-abortion, anti-life editorial posture—wrote in an editorial after one of the numerous studies that have come out that some of us have been looking at for lo, these forty years, about the public attitudes on abortion—and the *Boston Globe* ruefully, regretfully said, we must face the fact (meaning those who support *Roe v. Wade* must face the fact) that seventy-five percent of the American people believe that abortion should not be legal for the reasons for which ninety-five percent of abortions are obtained. That's right.

It's a remarkable thing. And encouraging—the prestige media and the universities and the philanthropies and related institutions and persons who are perceived as controlling the commanding heights of culture do not have near the control that they think they do. Not near, thank God. The fact is that despite an almost unanimous and relentless campaign to have abortion accepted not simply as a purely private matter, and one that has to be entirely outside the scope of public purview or concern or control, but accepted as a positive good—they know that they have lost the argument publicly.

They hold on relentlessly with their fingertips, to whatever little edge they can get, partial-birth abortion—to even demand that infanticide (which surely this is) must be permitted. And why? Not because they are in love with infanticide; just out of simple human feeling, we must allow to our brothers and sisters on the other side that many of them find this as repugnant as do most feeling, thinking human beings. But they hold on to this because they dare not give an inch; because they believe that if even an inch is lost, their whole house of cards will come tumbling down.

And there is an element of truth to that. I think there is a strong element of truth to that. They know they have lost the argument.

We cannot be euphoric. We must always be terribly sober in estimating what the future holds. But I do believe that with this administration in Washington, we are at long last seeing a political expression of what for a long time has been a much deeper, moral, cultural turning in American life.

I always remind myself, and tell others, of Psalm 146. Psalm 146, as you know, says, Do not put your trust in princes, even when they're your princes and you're a bit more hopeful about them than you are about others. But I *am* hopeful that this administration has, in a way that is deeper than the political calculation, understood at least in part what is at stake. You remember we shouldn't be naive about this. And we know there are going to be disappointments. We know there are going to be tears. We know that. All of us are

grownups. I recall President Reagan, when he would talk about negotiating arms control with the Soviet Union, would say, “trust but verify.”

And so also with respect to this administration, or anybody else in the political arena who seems to be an ally, it should not only be “trust but verify,” but also “trust and maintain the pressure,” and *that* all of us must do in the political arena. We must do it together.

It is an encouraging thing again, the heroes in the Jewish community, and among them my dear friend Rabbi Marc Gellman, who you’ll be hearing from later, who is sometimes described as being the only Reform pro-life rabbi in the country. And there is Nat Hentoff, who has just with breathtaking consistency and relentlessness acted upon the principles that made him such a hero of the left, and in some issues still a hero of the left, but who understood that he could not live with himself, he could not be Nat Hentoff except at the price of breaking ranks over this most elementary question of the status of the least among us.

Heschel used to say a society is measured morally not by how it treats people along the strength-lines in the society, but how it treats people along the fault-lines of the society. Nat Hentoff has understood that, and Chris Gersten and so many others.

It is more difficult for our Jewish brothers and sisters than it is for us, especially for us Catholics and for Evangelical Protestants today. It is much, much more difficult; because so many countervailing, counter-cutting forces and memories are in play, sometimes painfully. But for most American Jews, outside of the most observant, Orthodox community, the great belief, the right belief has been that the more secular the society is, the safer it will be for the Jews. A Reform rabbi friend of mine some years ago said, when I hear the phrase Christian America, I see barbed wire. That’s hyperbole, of course, but one has to understand what he intends to say.

At least in the twentieth century, especially following the Second World War, in the dominant Jewish communities, the dominant intellectual, cultural, organizational forces were committed to what I have described as the naked public square; public life excluding as much as possible religion and faith-based morality. The great Leo Pfeffer himself, a believing and observant Jew, won court case after court case basically arguing that democracy required the radical secularization of public life, the removal of any transcendent reference to the public belief.

What we see in our Jewish brothers and sisters represented here, and in many, many other places around the country, and I speak now to you who are Christians and Catholic first—what we see here are some courageous people, some thoughtful people who have come to recognize in various ways that

the naked public square, a public life that is devoid of the transcendent, of religion and religiously-based morality, is a very dangerous place. It is a very dangerous place because where there is no transcendent inhibition against evil, there is no transcendent inhibition against the evil also of, for example, anti-Semitism. And where there is no transcendent aspiration to good that is given public expression in politics and in law, there is no transcendent inhibition of evil.

We are given the task of reviving, at many, many different levels working together, the high promise and the vitality of the American democratic experiment. We are the ones who are urging the renewal in all of this, who are urging that we come together and deliberate how we ought to order our life together, beginning with who belongs to the *we*. We are the ones who are prepared, if you will, to compromise with respect to this measure or this law or that law, fully knowing that what is uncompromisable is the goal of every unborn child protected in law and welcomed in life. That can never, never be compromised. But on the way to that goal, political and legal compromise is not morally compromising; indeed it is morally imperative. We are the ones who want to reason together. We are the ones who have that confidence in the mutually-reinforcing power of *fides et ratio*. Of faith and reason.

Well, I have gone on too long. Jews and Christians are the future not only of the pro-life movement in this country, but of reviving an understanding that the God of Israel, whom we all worship, is indeed at work and alive, providentially directing not only life in this century but of His entire creation.

Last year there was a mark of new maturity, very encouraging, positive and of historic importance in the Jewish/Christian dialogue with the issuing of a statement called *Dabru Emet (Speak the Truth)*, on Jewish understandings of Christians and Christianity, published in the November issue of *First Things* and signed by over a hundred and seventy—now I understand well over two hundred—Jewish scholars. And among the things that this underscores is that we have an ultimate obligation for a moment that has never before happened in the history between Jews and Christians, and that in fact can only happen here in the United States.

Because it is only here that are there enough Jews, and enough Christians, mutually confident, mutually secure in their relationship to one another, to enter honestly into continuing conversation, and to continue an exploration of what the God of Israel intends for us and for the nation and the world of which we're a part. This is a new thing, this dialogue. What this meeting is about is one critically important facet of this new thing that God is doing, and that is moving the conversation from the theological and philosophical

and historical and the sorting out of all the grievances and anxieties of a long, tortured history, to the question What shall we do now? What is it that we are obliged to do now?

And what we are obliged to do now is to bear witness together; and more than bearing witness, to effectively collaborate together in advancing the arguments along with many others, until finally they find effective political and legal expression, and, most important, find expression in the everyday habits and mores of the American people. To secure the conviction that there is no such thing as *lebensunwertes Leben*. To persuade our fellow citizens that every life is a juncture between the finite and infinite purpose, destined from eternity and called to eternity.

Whether we will prevail or how we will prevail, this cause will prevail, this truth will prevail, because it is the truth of the God of life.

“I Am What I Say I Am” and Other Fictions

Ellen Wilson Fielding

. . . . *Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:*

. . . myself *it speaks and spells,*

Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, “*As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame*”

One of my children loves to watch those gorgeously filmed nature series that air on channels like Nat Geo and Animal Planet. Despite the exotic beauty into which they instantly immerse the viewer, my viewing pleasure is diluted somewhat by the suspicion that they are essentially stunningly shot animal snuff films (to adapt a memorable phrase from the television series *Friends* about *Old Yeller*). The baby elephant is almost sure to die of thirst as the trek between water holes gets longer and longer (climate change). The polar bear looks around for the thick snows of Arctic Canada in which his kind are designed to thrive and instead discovers more and more early thaws (climate change). Mountains of discarded plastic in oceanic garbage dumps threaten sea life deep in the dark ocean depths (pollution).

Still, I find myself captivated by the wild strangeness of these inhabitants of jungles, oceans, deserts, and arctic regions, so deeply alien to anything I have experienced. Despite the sometimes-anthropomorphizing narration, the brutality (they are, after all “brutes”) of these animal lives is on full display. This is the way each species, in its own way, is: “Crying What I do is me: for that I came.”

Across the board, these documentaries show a striking willingness to acknowledge and dwell on the *nature* of each profiled species—its physical attributes, hunting and mating rituals, adaptations to environmental challenges, pursuit of solitary or communal life. The viewer learns how each constructs a home, communicates with its kind, attracts a mate, fights off natural predators or feeds on largely defenseless prey, engages in seasonal migration or hibernation. Members of the animal world lead lives largely—almost entirely—scripted by their natures, and those researching and producing these documentaries seem fine with that. If one of the penguin young falls prey to a natural enemy like the orca or the sea lion, well, that’s natural. What else

Ellen Wilson Fielding, a longtime senior editor of the *Human Life Review*, is the author of *An Even Dozen* (Human Life Press). The mother of four children, she lives in Maryland.

can the orca do? It is made that way.

When it comes to human beings encroaching on animal habitats, however, the reaction is different, and I am not sure the scriptwriters understand how much they are conceding to human exceptionalism by this difference. Setting aside for the moment our superior intellectual abilities, human beings are perhaps even more distinguished by free will and by the self-awareness through which we exercise it: that is, our ability to consider and identify the often competing demands of our thoughts, desires, motivations, and limitations. The biblical explanation is that, alone among all the creatures sharing the earth with us, we are made “in the image and likeness of God.”

Our species has a nature, as every species does, but (perhaps confusingly for strict materialists) our free will makes it possible for us to go against the design of that human nature. Unlike the penguins and jaguars and polar bears, orcas and seagulls and giant mambas—unlike all other species—we humans can choose not to abide by the in-built imperatives of our nature, though not without negative results.

Shouldn't it provoke thought that we differ so profoundly from all our animal neighbors in what we today like to refer to as our “agency”? How do we come to be capable of causing so much upheaval on the planet that all of us inhabit, but that only one species among us can even conceptualize as a planet or consider leaving behind for another planetary home?

The first chapter of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *The Long Winter* takes place the summer before that record-breaking winter, when Laura's father notices the muskrats have been building homes with unusually thick mud walls. He concludes that severe weather will be coming. Laura is mystified:

“Pa, how can the muskrats know?” she asked.

“I don't know how they know,” Pa said. “But they do. God tells them, somehow, I suppose.”

“Then why doesn't God tell us?” Laura wanted to know.

“Because,” said Pa, “we're not animals. We're humans and, like it says in the Declaration of Independence, God created us free. That means we got to take care of ourselves.”

Laura said faintly, “I thought God takes care of us.”

“He does,” Pa said, “so far as we do what's right. And He gives us a conscience and brains to know what's right. But He leaves it to us to do as we please. That's the difference between us and everything else in creation.”

“Can't muskrats do what they please?” Laura asked, amazed.

“No,” said Pa. “I don’t know why they can’t but you can see they can’t. Look at that muskrat house. Muskrats have to build that kind of house. They always have, and they always will. It’s plain they can’t build any other kind. But folks build all kinds of houses. A man can build any kind of house he can think of. So if his house don’t keep out the weather, that’s *his* look-out; he’s free and independent.”

Whether Pa is correct in believing that the muskrats somehow sense the severity of the coming winter and adjust the thickness of their walls accordingly I do not know. But his emphasis on the animals’ lack of freedom to depart from the instinctual demands of their own nature—to build an entirely different dwelling, or to switch diets on a whim, or to become the predator of an animal that normally preys upon it—is as significant as he says it is. Deer, for instance, never “decide” to turn predator, abandon their vegetarian diet for a carnivorous one, and set off to prey upon wolf packs. Lions do not convert to grass-eating pacifism. Mountain goats do not move to the Sahara, nor camels migrate to the Arctic. Not only does each species require certain circumstances to thrive, but they “know” that: They do not attempt to rebel against their ingrained instincts.

With us it is different. We can choose, as Laura’s father points out, to build any kind of house we want. (He is thinking, we learn shortly after, of the very rudimentary homestead shanty that they currently live in and resolving to move the family to more secure shelter.) Every day we interact with fellow members of our species who have adopted vegan or vegetarian or carnivore diets. Others, again by choice, subsist almost entirely on junk food. Some of these choices are healthier than others; some are positively unhealthy. But all inhabit the spectrum of human choice, because we are not constrained by our instincts or even by common sense. We can do what we like—and in some instances, what we like may be the death of us.

For better or worse, human beings are different from the lower animals—and we were designed to be different, which means we are meant to be different. In *The Discarded Image*, C. S. Lewis contrasts “the beast’s perpetual slavery to nutrition, self-protection and procreation” with “the responsibilities, shames, scruples, and melancholy of Man.” As the reference to “shames, scruples, and melancholy” indicates, we are distinguished even in being capable of wrongdoing—and, correspondingly, of astounding acts of virtue and empathetic identification with the suffering of others.

Scholars tell us that the Greek word *hamartia*, used for the hero’s tragic flaw in ancient tragedies and for sin in the New Testament, more generally referred to “missing the mark,” like an archer failing to hit the bullseye. If we view our moral shortcomings as failures to hit the target of what human beings are intended to be, then that means we are in fact *meant* to live our lives

in a certain way. There is a standard by which we are measured, and we have plenty of experience in measuring ourselves and others by that standard. All human beings inherit a common human nature, and we understand that living in accord with that nature requires certain kinds of behaviors. Sometimes we perform successfully and sometimes—quite a lot of times—we do not. At those times we miss the mark of living a fully human life. But our freedom to choose among good, bad, and indifferent choices is not really a license to choose with impunity. Using our nature for our own aberrant purposes produces messy results, for ourselves and others.

In all sorts of areas of temptation, this is blatantly apparent, most objectively in the areas that have been codified by law in all cultures for which we have historical records. Take theft, for instance, which encompasses bank robberies and mugging old ladies on the street, but also stealing a candy bar from a corner store or a ten dollar bill from a family member's wallet, claiming benefits we are not entitled to, or shaving a little of Uncle Sam's share from a tax return. We can plausibly make the argument that all such thefts have antisocial implications—defrauding individuals or groups of money they need, exploiting the poor, eroding the social trust that we require for healthy societies, fomenting suspicion, disharmony, disunity. But though this is true, even apart from such implications, we know theft is wrong. We know it is wrong even when we participate in it in minor ways, such as by stealing time from an employer. It goes against the human grain, as the fox's theft of the chicken from the henhouse never goes against that animal's grain. Although we are the species that can choose to act against our nature, that doesn't permit us to fully shake off that nature, which stubbornly persists in making itself felt.

The same is true of intentional physical harm to the innocent. From cold-blooded murder to hot-blooded acts of violence, such actions strike most non-psychopathic people in almost all times and places as wrong. The worst of them have been forbidden by law since laws were devised.

There have been historical and regional exceptions, however, often justified by restrictive definitions of who is fully human. For example, Tom Holland's *Dominion* describes the leeway an ancient Roman master had in treating his slave as brutally as he chose. Likely the master would concede that the slave was human, but his reduced status made him human in a reduced sense to the pagan Romans. A similar devaluation was applied to deformed, sickly, or even just inconveniently timed newborns, all of whom the Roman paterfamilias could choose to have exposed rather than welcoming into the family's protective embrace. In such pre-Judeo-Christian societies (including all tribal societies where those outside the tribe could be enslaved or

mistreated or killed), human beings were judged worthy of life or of humane treatment according to a hierarchy of value.

The gradual adoption of Christianity in the West and elsewhere did not eliminate the often-convenient categorization of human beings into ranked classes that could be treated to varying degrees of violence or exploitation. However, it did work to mitigate certain practices, and at the very least to cause many who were guilty of them to develop a bad conscience and the awareness of moral opprobrium. Over the centuries, the initial understanding that murder and mistreatment of the innocent were wrong was expanded, with the categories of human status and innocence—and the degrees of protection afforded them—likewise extended. On differing timelines, there were movements to mitigate the inhumane treatment of prisoners, the insane and the handicapped, and to free the enslaved. Christianity, with its belief in a Creator God who also loved all human beings enough to become incarnate and suffer torture and death on their behalf, revolutionized the understanding of human rights beyond tribalism and social status. In a perverse way, we can see the effect of Christianity by observing the rise of various tribalisms and the endangerment of human rights as religious influence has receded in the West. Still, Christianity laid its extended understanding of human rights on the foundation of human nature—“grace building on nature,” as St. Thomas Aquinas put it (“grace does not destroy nature, but fulfills its potential. . .,” *Summa Theologiae*).

From the first generations of Christianity, pagans remarked on Christians’ abhorrence of abortion and euthanasia, their care for orphans, and their willingness to risk their lives to care for plague victims. This was how Christians had been enjoined to treat fellow members of the human species. However, that did not make it easy for them to do so. Like more universally held moral imperatives such as laws against stealing, Christians could not obey them instinctively, as an animal “obeys” the impulses of its nature. Although certain actions under certain circumstances seem right and wrong to us, they are not actions we are driven by nature to do, like breathing. They are things we could choose not to do. We might do that wrong thing even though we know we should not, or we might try to convince ourselves that the peculiar circumstances made it an acceptable choice, or that our free will was impaired in some way, by force or overwhelming influence or survival instincts.

And sometimes there *are* mitigating factors; sometimes we are under great pressure, given false counsel by someone we trust, not fully in possession of our reason due to alcohol or drugs, and on and on. These factors do not make the wrong thing right (they do not, for instance, make the choice to abort a

child right because money is tight or loved ones are exerting pressure), but they can reduce the level of our guilt.

But whether we are acting in accordance with our human nature or against it, whether we are deliberating, debating, extrapolating, and weighing arguments or obstinately ignoring all that to scratch an itch, we are always engaged in something quite alien to what the school of fish, the pack of wolves, the mountain goats leaping from crag to crag, or the black widow spider are doing when they act.

Everyone knows this on some level, even the producers of nature documentaries, or they would not be hectoring us to clean up the environment, stop eradicating rainforests and using chemicals that poison food and water sources. After all, it would be pointless to ask a hippopotamus to relocate because another species needs to use its watering hole—not because we don’t speak hippopotamus, but because they are not persuadable in that way. They may move because they see us as a threat or because some other instinct moves them to do so, but they won’t debate the pros and cons or be persuaded that moving is the right thing to do.

However, there is another and opposite way to reason wrongly about the difference between human beings and other species: We can begin to doubt whether there is even such a thing as human nature, concluding that our freedom to choose derives from the absence of any natural human template we are directed to conform to. In the area of human sexuality, for example, we can accept serial monogamy, polygamy, open marriage, a lifelong series of hookups, an addiction to porn, or a romantic relationship with ChatGPT as equally normative. We can view past norms as mere utilitarian moral codes adopted for the flourishing of the species in particular times and places that have nothing to say to us now. Where once human flourishing required stable families to bear and successfully bring to adulthood the many children needed to fill society’s ranks at a time when so many died young, today we need many fewer—and some of us have been persuaded to believe that Earth would be better off if we did not reproduce at all.

If children are no longer a clear economic boon to society—and also drain money, time, and energy from their parents—then the mutual love and support aspect of the traditional marriage of man and woman until death carries the whole burden of justification for the institution. That means that whenever at least one member of the couple concludes that life would be improved with no partner or a different partner, only the fragility of a perhaps imperfectly intended promise to love and cherish until death can prevent the union from snapping in two.

And if society concludes that only “reasonable” numbers of children are necessary and that large swaths of the population would likely be better off forgoing them, then the definition of marriage and the social understanding of that institution need not include anything about generating children. (Which potentially, at least, opens up that definition to just about any person or persons in any combination for any purpose.) And if children are not all that important and if lots of people would rather not have any, or would rather not have them anytime soon, but would still like to engage in sex, then legalized abortion will be needed to accommodate those desires.

All of these are human choices in the sense that humans are capable of making them, but that does not make them choices that contribute to a fully human life, any more than our choices to betray promises, neglect or maltreat the weak, or exploit those under our authority do. Certainly we are thereby exercising our free will, but so was John Wilkes Booth when he shot Lincoln in the head at Ford’s Theater. So was Judas Iscariot when he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. And so was Hitler when he set in motion the plan to exterminate the Jews. Though all of us exercise the human capacity to make free choices, surely that does not make all choices right. Surely when we make certain choices we are diverging from the design and purposes of our human nature. If so, isn’t it crucially important to distinguish between right and wrong uses of free will, and to encourage the former and discourage the latter?

Instead of which, in recent decades, we have chosen to extend our indiscriminate approval of choice beyond the standard moral questions to the great ontological question: What is a human being? But we introduce to this ancient question a modern twist: While philosophers like Aristotle describe us as rational animals, and while the book of Genesis reveals us to be creatures made in the image and likeness of God, the claim of today’s transgender proponents is that human beings are whatever they define themselves to be.

But if each of us has the power to define himself or herself (and the power to use any desired pronouns to do so), then each person becomes something like a species of one. That is, if we are not created with free will and consciousness, but inhabit a seemingly parentless universe that just randomly happened to come to be, a universe in which we inexplicably can choose radically different courses of action, then we are not constrained by gender-assigned-at-birth biological characteristics, and perhaps not any other kinds of characteristics either. We can each create our “self” as whatever we please.

This makes much less sense than even the flattened naturalistic view of the human species as no more than a smart animal with exalted pretensions. And yet variants of it are entertained by extremely intelligent people, including

some of the tech wizards that populate Silicon Valley. For years some of these have been proposing various mind-machine melds or predicting that we can achieve what they bizarrely conceive to be a kind of immortality by uploading the contents of the human mind onto a computer. Certainly the tech wizards betray their boyhood science fiction interests in the sci-fi tropes they keep plotting to bring to, well, life. Escaping from a doomed planet Earth to colonize the moon or Mars or a series of ever more distant planets is another classic example.

What strikes me most about every version of the tech wizards' plans to relaunch, relocate, or revivify humanity is how fundamentally unserious such plans are. Not that their formulators lack seriousness. But their seriousness has the flavor of the five-year-old explaining to Mommy how he plans to solve world hunger or end war. Mommy smiles a bit sadly, understanding that someday he will know better. But apparently a financially successful subset of that five-year-old cohort never did learn better, and now they in their own way (and the academy and the globalists and the media in theirs) are all set on transferring similar kinds of stick figure dreams into something they would call reality.

If we could imagine the multitudinous species of the world being granted the gifts of self-awareness and human speech for five minutes, they might chorus to us something like this:

We cannot make or unmake our natures. Even you humans, the cunning apex of the Creator's creation, cannot alter the nature of what you are, and attempting to do so invites disaster. There is much you can do that we, instinct-bound, can only gape at. But for you, excellence must be chosen. And to choose the path to excellence, you must first know what you are, who you are, and what you are made for. Any hammer that deludes itself into believing it is a saw will not succeed in behaving like either. Any man who thinks he is a woman, or any woman who thinks she is a man, will likewise be frustrated. And anyone who signs up to colonize Mars should think long and hard about what characteristics a human society on Mars needs to accord with human nature. Moving to Mars does not turn you into a Martian.

Instead, humanly speaking, the most rewarding project that life can offer any of us—young or old—is to become ever more fully what we are, so that each of us (in Gerard Manley Hopkins' words) "acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is."

The Culture of Objectification:

How Pornified Thinking Erases Preborn Life

Mary Rose Somarriba

The Netflix series *Adolescence*, which debuted earlier this year, brought greater public attention to a timely and important topic—the effect of online sexualized content on young boys and, concurrently, on young girls.

The series follows the story of a 13-year-old boy named Jamie, who is convicted of killing a classmate, Katie. Jamie’s parents discover their son has been radicalized by unsupervised exposure to online content leading him to identify with the “incel” community—the term stands for “involuntary celibate,” and members of the community harbor extreme resentment over their status and their conviction that they deserve female sexual attention and activity.¹

The false belief that one deserves and is unfairly being deprived of female sexual attention can be instilled even in school-aged boys exposed to some of the incel community’s lowest-hanging-fruit theories, such as that 90 percent of the girls are attracted to 10 percent of the boys. A middle-school boy who doesn’t see himself among that fortunate 10 percent could easily become devastated by the false belief that he’s fated never to have a girl like him.

From there resentment can grow—fertile ground for toxic narratives that cultish influencers are happy to supply in their videos and podcasts. One such promoter of harmful ideologies is Andrew Tate, described by the Anti-Defamation League as “a social media influencer and a self-described misogynist, . . . [who] uses his platform to cannily deliver his disturbing views on rape, relationships and power.”²

The lies of incel influencers are poison for young men’s relational development and sex education. Compounding this is easy access to pornography that often poisons young men’s brains as early as age 12 or even younger. According to a 2023 report by Common Sense Media: “73% of teen respondents aged 13 to 17 have watched pornography online—and more than half (54%) reported first seeing pornography by the time they reached the age of 13 . . . online pornography is shaping their views about sex and sexual relationships, as nearly half (45%) of teen respondents said that they felt online pornography gives ‘helpful’ information about sex.”³

Mary Rose Somarriba is editor-in-chief of *Verily Magazine* and a contributor to the *Human Life Review*. In 2012, she completed a Robert Novak Journalism Fellowship on the connections between pornography and trafficking.

Unfortunately, one is hard-pressed to think of a worse educational tool about sex than pornography.

Lest we need reminding, pornography relies on the objectification of people, treating them as mere sources of our pleasure, and leaving no room for true human intimacy. What's more, pornography depicts aggression and painful experiences as pleasurable. The women in porn gaze toward the cameras with intense longing, seeming to look at the viewer as someone extremely desirable, even though the viewer has done nothing to "earn" her liking. According to *Culture Reframed*,⁴ "What porn and incel culture definitely do have in common is that both degrade women and portray them as objects who deserve and enjoy sexual abuse." Repeated exposure to porn rewires viewers' brains⁵ to become accustomed to achieving sexual gratification with no effort, no personal interaction, and no consequences.

That includes no pregnancies.

Remarkably, today's public sex-education campaigns align with a pornified view of sex. Pleasure is promoted as the primary goal, committed relationships are irrelevant, and pregnancy is framed as an avoidable risk through "safe sex." Many of us gawk at the fringe ideology of people like Andrew Tate, but few gawk at Planned Parenthood's advice to young people on its website, where it explains, "Having a healthy sex life is about taking care of yourself, whether you have a partner or not."⁶ Of course, partnerless sex would be one-sided sexual pleasure, aka masturbation. What both porn and Planned Parenthood's understanding of sex have in common is their assumption that sex is primarily a personal and essentially self-absorbed experience, rather than an interpersonal one that expresses union between two people and has the potential to create a third.

When our cultural outlook assumes sex has more to do with personal pleasure than with reproduction, we have lost sight of the bigger picture—such as how we got here and what we want to leave behind when we're gone—including any view of sex that goes beyond just ourselves.

While extramarital sexual desires are nothing new to fallen man, easy and free online access to sexualized content has encouraged hordes of people to develop entitled, selfish attitudes about sex—and at such a quick rate that in just a couple of generations this view of sex has become normalized throughout media.

Perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that our cultural acceptance of pornified sex has grown in correlation with the work of abortion-advocacy groups.

Years ago when I heard that Planned Parenthood and other abortion advocacy organizations had determined to take a new approach by portraying sex as "pleasurable," I had to laugh—was this ever in doubt? Perhaps they thought those cultures with traditional mores needed more temptation—er, education—to abandon their values. The result was campaigns like "Treasure Your

Pleasure,” promoted in 2022 by International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in Africa, with a video that exclaims, “maximum enjoyment is the name of the sex game,” and “everyone who wants it deserves sexual satisfaction”⁷ (words that could just as well have been written by the incel community).

Alongside these initiatives, a sex-educational group called the Pleasure Project has grown, “an international education and advocacy organization working to eroticize safer sex by building bridges between the public health world and the pleasure and sex industry.”⁸ *The Guardian* reports that IPPF is joining groups like the Pleasure Project, which has influenced “19 organizations around the world [to use] their ‘pleasure principles,’ designed to help people embark on the journey towards a sex-positive, pleasure-based approach to sexual health; 12 [of these organizations] are based in the global south.”⁹

It’s interesting that the Pleasure Project talks about helping make sex “safer” in the sex industry—the very industry that produces pornography. What the Project perhaps neglects to foresee is the collision course ahead between *pleasure* and *safety*. In a morality-free landscape, there’s no place to shame the person who prefers not to use a condom for their own pleasure, or for porn viewers’ pleasure. And in porn, any display of women’s consent to sex acts is routinely absent, while nonconsensual, abusive scenarios are found in abundance.

With pleasure as the guiding principle, the definition of *safety* has to be adjusted. We see this as states grapple with whether to incriminate those infected with HIV who don’t disclose their status and knowingly expose sexual partners to the risk. We see this as definitions of sexual orientation expand to include adults attracted to minors. We see this as women en masse are prescribed contraceptive medications and devices that pose risks to their health,¹⁰ so their partners and they can have sex with less fear of pregnancy. And we see this in every scenario where a new human being is conceived in sex but, in the face of abortion, cannot find safety in her mother’s womb.

Many of our friends writing in and reading these pages have seen this coming. My father, a physician, says it all started with pharmaceutical birth control. Once our culture adopts the view that sex is solely a matter of personal pleasure and reproduction is extraneous, we lose sight of the big picture. We lose sight of where we all started. We objectify ourselves and we objectify our children.

In the Netflix series *Adolescence*, Jamie’s consumption of sexualized imagery moves him to dehumanize and kill his classmate Katie. No matter how successful such extreme online content may be in gaining clicks, over time objectifying imagery and scripts can bankrupt our sense of humanity. They lead down a dangerous path that feeds addictions and fuels the demand for sex trafficking in prostitution and sex abuse of children. Groups like the National Center on Sexual Exploitation¹¹ in Washington, D.C., see how these many

social ills are interconnected. Reviewing their research or attending one of their conferences will make it hard for you to un-see it as well. Their work should be followed and shared to spread the truth about objectifying media: Exploitation begets exploitation, and the multitude of casualties of our hypersexualized culture include not only those used in sex but the young lives cut short in the womb.

If we want to advance the health of women and children and foster genuine intimacy in our relationships, we can no longer treat pornography and abortion as separate issues; we must actively fight against the powerful current of objectifying media that sell lies demeaning to women *and men* and imperil the lives of the unborn. We must curb our kids' unsupervised Internet access, which means we must keep smartphones out of their hands as much as possible. We should stop consuming X-rated content ourselves, and partake of more of what's good, true, and beautiful. We should spend more time connecting in person with families in our communities, because true fellowship lifts up all of us. The truth will always be more powerful and lasting than counterfeits, but given the distractions of the day, we may need to more actively seek it.

NOTES

1. Anti-Defamation League. (2024, June 26). Incels (Involuntary Celibates). Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://www.adl.org/resources/background/inceles-involuntary-celibates>
2. "Tate is a social media influencer and a self-described misogynist . . . with millions of social media followers. He uses his platform to cannily deliver his disturbing views on rape, relationships and power. Many in his audience are teenagers who are just beginning to understand their own sexuality . . . [Tate] teaches his acolytes that women are inferior and morally deficient beings who are good only for sex and status building, and who deserve to be physically, sexually and emotionally abused." Anti-Defamation League. (2024, March 1). Andrew Tate: Five things to know. Anti-Defamation League. <https://www.adl.org/resources/article/andrew-tate-five-things-know>
3. Common Sense Media. (2023, January 10). Teens and pornography. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://www.common Sense Media.org/research/teens-and-pornography>
4. Culture Reframed. (n.d.). "Understanding the dangers of the Incel movement and its harmful views of women." Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://culturereframed.org/understanding-the-dangers-of-the-incele-movement-and-its-harmful-views-of-women/>
5. Neuroscience News, "Watching pornography rewires the brain to a more juvenile state," December 29, 2019, *Neuroscience News*, accessed July 2, 2025, <https://neurosciencenews.com/neuroscience-pornography-brain-15354/>
6. Planned Parenthood. "Sex and Pleasure." Sex, Pleasure, and Sexual Dysfunction. n.d. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sex-pleasure-and-sexual-dysfunction/sex-and-pleasure>
7. IPPF APO. (14 June 2022). Treasure Your Pleasure—Our Manifesto. [Video] YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSbCSvPVxOQ&>
8. The Pleasure Project. "The Pleasure Principles." The Pleasure Project. n.d. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://thepleasureproject.org/the-pleasure-principles/>
9. Johnson, S. (2022, November 22). 'It's always fear-based': why sexual health projects should switch the focus to pleasure. *The Guardian*. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/nov/22/pleasure-sexual-health-projects-reproductive-rights/>
10. Natural Womanhood. (2024, July 24). Birth Control Side Effects. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from <https://naturalwomanhood.org/topic/birth-control-side-effects/>
11. National Center on Sexual Exploitation. <https://endsexualexploitation.org/>

From the Archives

“The Story of Tom Thumb”

Jérôme Lejeune

Q. Dr. Lejeune, could you please describe the process of human reproduction?

A: It is a very long story, your Honor. Because life has been with us for millennia. But even if life continues from generation to generation, each of us has a very unique beginning, which is the moment that all the information necessary and sufficient to be that particular human being, which we will call later Peter or Margaret, depending on its own genetic make-up, when this whole necessary and sufficient information is gathered.

And we now know from experience both in animals and now in human beings, that this moment is exactly the moment at which the head of the sperm penetrates inside the ovum; then the information carried by the father encounters in the same recipient cell the information carried or transmitted by the mother; so that suddenly a new constitution is spelled out.

It is very curious that biology and the science of the law are speaking the same language.

The voting process even exists in biology, which is the choice of the sperm. Because there are maybe hundreds of thousands or ten thousand sperm swimming around one egg, and one is selected. And that is a voting process. And at the moment the human constitution is entirely spelled out, a new human being begins its career. That's not rhetoric. That's not fancy, or hope of a moralist. It is just an experimental phenomenon.

Q: Dr. Lejeune, where is this information specifically contained?

A: This information is specifically contained in two different parts. One is DNA. DNA is a long thread molecule. And to give you an impression, your Honor, this flat ribbon is roughly comparable to the tape that you put in a tape recorder. But it is very minute.

Inside the head of a sperm there's a long thread of one meter, one yard, say.

Jérôme Lejeune was a French geneticist and pediatrician who discovered the chromosomal abnormalities that cause Down syndrome. A devout Catholic who was fiercely opposed to abortion and eugenics, he dedicated his life to removing the stigma associated with Down syndrome and developing treatments to improve his patients' lives. He was declared Venerable by Pope Francis on January 21, 2021. We reprint above excerpts from the April 13, 1991, testimony of Dr. Lejeune at the trial of Alexander Loce (*New Jersey v. Alexander Loce et. al.*).

And this is so tightly coiled in 23 little pieces that we call chromosomes, that the whole thing is inside the head of the sperm and the volume of it is upon the point of a needle.

In the first place, in so small a volume, all the data which will spell out the way to build all the protein which will make the machine tool inside the cells is entirely spelled out.

The same is true in the ovum, in which 23 little pieces of chromosomes one meter long all together stay there until they receive the help of the 23 from the father. Now that's part of the information and it is a text book.

Most of the people will stop there and tell you that genetic information is carried by DNA. That's perfectly true. But there's another type of information, the amount of which is even much more important and much bigger, which is inside the cell.

Inside the ovum there are prepared billions of highly specialized molecules who will recognize and be recognized by the signals given by the genetic make-up.

And to make the thing understandable, remember that when you use a tape recorder if you buy a mini cassette in which the music of an artist such as Mozart is recorded, then if you put it in your tape recorder, you will get a symphony. But curiously on the tape there are no notes of music, and inside your tape recorder there are no musicians.

Nevertheless, by a special code written on the tape, some information is given to your tape recorder so that it will read it, and it will make the air move by the loudspeaker so that what is coming to you is not the orchestra, not the musicians, not evidence of music, but the genius of Mozart.

That's the way life, the symphony of life, is played. That is inside the egg, which receives the tape band from father and which has its own tape bands, and which make 23 plus 23, 46 volumes of the table of the law of life.

Now when you speak about genetic information, you have to remember you have the long ribbon of DNA which is the mini cassette of the symphony of life, but you have the cell itself which is the tape recorder; and which has an enormous amount of information.

Because the tape recorder, to read a tiny ribbon like this, must be a fantastic machine, extremely complex.

* * * * *

Q: Doctor Lejeune, as the being develops, does it retain its individuality and its membership in the human species?

A: Totally. We, each of us, has never been a chimpanzee. And we are not

going to become one.

No baby goes through different species. It belongs to its own species from the very beginning. And that's true of every species. It's not a special feature of humanity.

But what is written in the human fertilized egg that is in a human zygote, in the human being of one cell, what is written is this humanity.

Q: Dr. Lejeune, at eight weeks how would you describe that being?

A: I would describe that being indeed as a human being. But to tell the Court what it looks like, I would say it's Tom Thumb.

Q: Tom Thumb?

A: Tom Thumb. Because the human being at eight weeks is the size of my thumb. That is, from the head to the rump, he measures one inch. And if you were looking at one of them, having never seen anything about human embryology, if I had an eight-week-old human being in my fist you would not see I had anything inside.

But if I opened my hand you would see a tiny being with fingers, with toes, with a face and with palm prints you could read with a microscope.

You would see the sex. And this story of Tom Thumb, of the tiny human being smaller than the thumb which has always enchanted the young babies and the great mothers, is not a fancy.

It is a truth. Each of us has been a Tom Thumb in the womb of the mother, in this curious shelter, in which only some red light, dim light comes in, in which there is very curious noise, one loud, and strong, and deep hammering which is the heart of the mother and which bangs around a decemperate of a counter bass. And the other is very rapid, like the maracas. And it will come from the heart of this tiny human being. And those two rhythms which we can now detect with hydrophones are typical of the most primitive music any human ear has ever heard, which is the symphony of two hearts; the mother one like the counter bass, 60 times per minute, and the baby one like maracas like 150 per minute: 140 if it is a boy, 160 if it is a girl. This symphony by two hearts is what defines the true story of Tom Thumb.

Q: Dr. Lejeune, what is the effect of an abortion on an eight week human being?

A: It kills a member of our species.

Life and Law in the American Experiment:

A Review of Robert P. George's *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*

Jason Morgan

Princeton professor Robert P. George is perhaps the most prominent philosopher working in the United States today. He is also, arguably, the most accomplished conservative scholar the country has produced in his generation. The director and founder of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, George is also the founder of the Witherspoon Institute, whose journal, *Public Discourse*, is a fountainhead of sound social and economic thought. George's other affiliations, such as with the Heritage Foundation, and his solidly conservative positions on marriage, abortion, euthanasia, and other life issues, make him a lodestar of many political movements on the right. But "conservative" does not quite do George justice. His mastery of Western legal history and moral philosophy, his supple, electric intellect and ability to engage with a wide range of opposing arguments, and his respectful and cheerful demeanor, even when in the heat of the most strenuous debates, have earned him praise and even friendship from many unlikely quarters. Cornel West, another Princeton scholar who is decidedly not in George's camp on any number of political issues, is a close friend, a testament to the high tone of George's rhetoric and the broadness of his mind.

Above all else, George is an eminently *American* thinker. Although his scholarly roots are sunk deep in English soil, having attended Oxford University (under the direction of Australian legal philosopher John Finnis and Israeli legal philosopher Joseph Raz) and achieved a rare command of the thought of English jurists such as Henry de Bracton (ca. 1210-ca. 1268), Sir Edward Coke (ca. 1552-1634), and Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780) (with whom George shares a birthday), George's instincts, the legal-philosophical lifeblood running through his many works, are richly American. The scenery in which his legal reasoning is set is very much Continental American, the tradition of James Madison, of course, as the namesake of one of George's major projects, but also more generally of the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, the blessings of liberty, and the proposition that all men are created equal. Robert George's body of work very much deserves to, and

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

undoubtedly will, take its place in the lists of the greatest legal and moral philosophical thought of the American school. He is a towering figure who represents the best, perhaps the peak in many ways, of the American experiment in ordered liberty.

But at the very height of his powers, as splendidly represented in a new Encounter book titled *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, George reveals not only the moral force of the American legal tradition, but also, in many ways, its limits, even its prefigured downfall.¹ In *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* readers encounter a man whose heart, mind, body, and soul strain with manly vigor to effect what is good and true in the American body politic. Yet, against what does George battle? We know what he is for: human dignity, racial equality, flourishing communities, healthy families, the better angels of our nature all in all. In that I am with him wholeheartedly. But I could not help but wonder, while reading this very important volume, whether George is not also at war with the very tradition that formed him. Is the American system not, in the end, the limits beyond which George's richly moral vision cannot go? Robert George is a faithful Catholic, a man who lives and breathes the teachings of the Church. I wonder if we have not arrived at a point in our republic at which men who seek to do God's will must ask themselves whether the American political tradition is not too narrow an epistemological horizon for the godly vision that calls us all to do what is right in the world. *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* can be read, I believe, as a monument to our legal historical moment in America, a point at which the shortcomings of the American political experiment are becoming fatally constraining, and beyond which something closer to the human heart than Madisonian legal philosophy must prevail. It is a testament to, and a portrait of, the moral power of America at her (and an American at his) best. But it is also a warning that what has sustained us has also hobbled us, blinded us even, and that we must now navigate new territory without much of the comforting old certainties to guide us.

Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth is divided into four parts and twenty-three chapters. Some chapters are short, fewer than ten pages or so, while one chapter, which I will examine in detail below, is nearly seventy pages in length, plus generous endnotes. Despite this variety, the book hangs together marvelously as a whole. Part One, The Human Person: Ethical and Metaphysical Questions, sets the stage for the volume. Here, George (along with occasional co-authors Christopher Kaczor, Christopher O. Tollefsen, and Patrick Lee) explicates considerations of human dignity (chapters one and seven), the nature of the human person (chapters two, three, and six), and the natural law (chapters four and five). The last is of paramount importance to

the present volume and to George's work overall, so I will address it, too, in more detail throughout this review.

Part Two, Constitutional Law and Political Philosophy, is the heart of the book. It is here that George (again with occasional co-authors, this time Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and John Finnis) dives into some of the most contentious cases and thorniest problems in American jurisprudence.² *Obergefell v. Hodges* (the 2015 case in which the Supreme Court found, improbably and with no small degree of acrobatic sophistry, a justification for homosexual "marriage" in the United States Constitution and Fourteenth Amendment), *Dobbs v. Jackson* (the 2022 case overturning *Roe v. Wade*), and the interplay of religion, virtue, liberalism, and the "American civic order" are on offer in Part Two. Anyone who is interested in any of the above topics, whether or not he or she agrees with George and his co-authors, should read at least this section of *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* to get a sampling of intellectual argument in its almost Platonic form. This is legal and moral reasoning of the highest order, and George, his co-authors, and Encounter are to be commended for giving it to the world.

Part Three, Culture and Education, and Part Four, Seekers of Truth and Bearers of Witness, comprise shorter vignettes about current topics in American civic life. In Part Three, George (writing alone from here on out) considers "campus illiberalism," the relative moral merits and demerits of a market economy, and civic and religious approaches to religious pluralism. In Part Four, George pays homage to five men (only one of them American) who have embodied the kind of virtue and moral integrity that George has spent his own life trying to bring to bear on the public square in America. On display here as moral exemplars are Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), whose 1978 Harvard address about the moral dimensions of the Cold War George saw in person as a student; Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), the nineteenth-century German poet who wrote prophetically, and chillingly, about what would happen in his home country should Christianity ever lose its restraining hold on Germanic paganism; Joseph Raz (1939-2022), the Israeli legal philosopher who taught George at Oxford how to construct and advance moral arguments; Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (1948-2020), the famed religious leader in the United Kingdom who, like the Dalai Lama and the pope, gained a moral power that went beyond his own national and religious milieu; and Ralph Stanley (1927-2016), the bluegrass legend who hailed, like George, from hardscrabble Appalachia. Parts Three and Four form a compelling whole, but also a faintly distressing one. While one wishes that American liberals would lend an ear to men of good sense such as those George holds up to be respected and emulated, one also senses that American liberals never will, and that, more to

the point, they will never meet George on the plains of reason and deliberate in good faith over the deepest questions about life and liberty besetting our republic. *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* is at once the moral clarion call of one of America's greatest living legal and political philosophers, and the swan song, as I read it, of the American experiment that he holds dear.

To understand this tragic interplay of moral clarity echoing in a flawed and even doomed system, one need only read chapter nine of *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, "Equal Protection for the Unborn Child: A *Dobbs* Brief," which George wrote with his mentor John Finnis as an *amicus curiae* brief for the *Dobbs* court and which, in the present volume, the authors have "expand[ed] [. . .] fourfold with historical material and analysis" (129). It is a hallmark work in legal scholarship and moral reasoning and alone is worth the price of the book. There are two major elements at work in this chapter. The first is a moral one, grounded in the natural law reasoning that George learned from Finnis, and premised upon the humanity of the unborn and the necessity of protecting them from harm. The second element is legal-historical. George and Finnis have combed through some eight centuries of Anglo-American legal precedent, parliamentary and congressional debate, and political philosophy to establish as fact what the *Roe* court, relying on bad-faith actors and also deploying no shortage of bad-faith reasoning of its own, was at great pains to deny: At the common law, children in the womb have almost always been seen as persons, and abortion has almost always been a crime.

As George and Finnis write at the opening of "Equal Protection and the Unborn Child":

[. . .] The Fourteenth Amendment, sustaining and going beyond the Civil Rights Act of 1866, guaranteed equality in the fundamental rights of persons—including life and personal security—as these were expounded in Blackstone's *Commentaries* and leading American treatises. The *Commentaries*' exposition began with a discussion (citing jurists like Coke and Bracton) of unborn children's rights as persons across many bodies of law. Based on these authorities and on landmark English cases, state high courts in the years before 1868 declared that the unborn human being throughout pregnancy 'is a person' and hence, under 'civil and common law, . . . to all intents and purposes a child, as much as if born.'³

From the earliest centuries at common law, (1) elective abortion at any stage was to 'no lawful purpose' and functioned as an inchoate felony for not just one but two felony-murder purposes, and (2) elective abortion was an *indictable* offense at least when the woman was 'quick with child'—a phrase with shifting meanings [. . .].⁴ (And contrary to *Roe*'s potted history, the sources show that the common law's concern was to protect the child's life, not simply to outlaw procedures dangerous to the mother.)⁵ By 1860, the 'quick-with-child' prerequisite for indictments had been

abandoned in a majority of states, because science had shown that a distinct human being begins at conception. Such obsolete limits to the common law's criminal-law protection of the unborn had been swept away in a cascade of statutes, in almost three-quarters of the states, leading up to the Amendment's ratification. [. . .]

The only counterarguments by any Justice—and by the sole, widely discredited legal-historical writer cited in *Roe*—rest on groundless extrapolations and plain historical falsehoods subsequently exposed in scholarship that has never been answered, to which this brief adds some new evidence. (130-131)

There follows a virtual barrage of legal historical fact establishing that the *Roe* court indulged in outright mendacity (although not all of it of its own design) when it held, one hundred and seven years after the United States Congress had declared that all persons were clothed equally in fundamental rights, that unborn children, consistently understood as members of the human family at common law, were not persons and therefore had no rights. The source of much of this mischief, apart from the liars on the *Roe* court, was Cyril Means, Jr. (1918-1992), an obscure law professor whom George and Finnis rightly show to have been the manufacturer and disseminator of much falsehood across two essays, published in 1968 and 1971 respectively (156). George and Finnis make it crystal clear: The *Roe* court, supported by Means' (and others') lies, badly misunderstood, and often apparently intentionally mistook, the meanings of "quick" and "quickenings" in common law cases (144-151) in order to arrive at the "utterly untenable" denial that "'any person' included unborn children" (155).⁶

George and Finnis accomplish in this chapter intellectually what the Supreme Court, relying on their brief and the *amicus* briefs of others, eventually did in the life of the law, namely overturning *Roe v. Wade*.⁷ For this they are all, scholars and justices alike, to be commended. And yet, this moment of triumph tastes also of despair, a despair that also casts a pall over the life work of the great legal and moral philosopher Robert George. For *Dobbs*, the slayer of *Roe* with the help of George, Finnis, Joseph Dellapenna, and other honest scholars, did not really undo the work of its nemesis. *Dobbs* did not declare human babies to be what they obviously are: persons. *Roe* made abortion legal in America, in willful defiance of eight centuries of legal precedent, the commandments of God, and the natural law shared by all human beings. *Dobbs* answered this outrage by remanding the abortion question to the several states, many of which, by popular referendum, have gone beyond *Roe* in embracing and even promoting the practice of *in utero* murder. All of this is completely democratic, fastidiously in keeping with the procedural niceties of American law. Those who hope that a moral revival will lead the United States to repent of its sins and return to the righteousness once taught

it by preachers of the Gospel must contend with the sobering fact that Americans have become a highly legalistic, and at the same time lawless, people. James Madison would surely have been aghast at what transpired between *Roe* and *Dobbs*, sickened by the moral depths to which his countrymen had sunk, but he would also have had to admit that the post-*Dobbs* rush by many states to enshrine abortion as law was federalism in action. And if there is anything in the writings of Madison, or any other great American political theorist, that might suffice to turn a fallen people back to the straight and narrow of the higher law, then I do not know where to find it.

To put the matter more bluntly, the fallout from *Dobbs*, coupled with the fact that over nearly fifty years Americans killed some sixty-five million children in the name of freedom, democracy, and the liberal American order, takes a considerable amount of shine off the American experiment in ordered liberty. This is no reflection on Robert George, of course, or on his work. No one alive today has done more to breathe moral sanity into the republic than he. But what is one to make of a defense of American ideals in our day when those ideals have been found, time and again by courts throughout the land, to be consistent with, even inevitably resulting in, the practice of virtually unrestricted abortion? This is to say nothing of pronouncements on homosexual “marriage,” against the immorality and societal detriment of which George has been at least as adamantly opposed as he has been to the taking of innocent human life in the womb. God is asked often to bless America, but I wonder what part of it is left to receive the blessing.

If Americans are a legalistic but lawless people, then it would seem the remedy for their condition is to be found, not in the American political and legal paradigm as received going into the second quarter of the twenty-first century, but in something higher than the common law—if not the Gospel, then the natural law. But even here one finds that George, a natural lawyer without peer in America, does not go as far as he might, and that is due, I suspect, to the very nature of the American system. In *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, George argues, for example, against “transsexualism and transgenderism,” stating that “sex is constituted by our basic biological organization with respect to reproductive functioning; it is an inherent part of what and who we are. Changing sexes is a metaphysical impossibility because it is a biological impossibility” (304). Elsewhere, George, writing with Patrick Lee, says that “human beings are fundamentally different in kind from other animals, not just genetically but in having a rational nature (that is, a nature characterized by basic natural capacities for conceptual thought, deliberation, and free choice)” (14). And about marriage, George (here with Sherif Girgis) finds that:

. . . male and female are not just any two sexes, as black and white are just two races. They are *necessarily interdefined*: You cannot fully explain either without reference to the other and a social good. What defines them—at a deeper level of explanation than anatomy or genes—is their biological organization (and, thus, their basic physical potency) for reproducing together. And reproduction, its social value, and its link to opposite-sex composition are not mere constructs. So a relation to an important public end appears on the face of this classification, without resting on any stereotypes. (118)

This is all true, as far as it goes. One could hardly object to any of it without spiraling into unlogic—precisely what George’s opponents often do when attempting to argue that women can become men or men women, that humans are just animals (or, worse, mere clumps of cells), or that marriage is simply a contract between two (or more) consenting adults, and so has nothing to do with what George and Girgis rightly point out to be the “social value” and the “social good” of these things.

Indeed, as George and some of his co-authors argue in *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, the “common good” is a bedrock element of shared human existence, an end toward which political arrangements must be organized (see, e.g., 44-55). George, and his teacher John Finnis, rightly see the natural law—“in no sense a human creation”—as the criterion of “the justifying moral-critical point of law and legal systems, namely, to serve the common good” (49, 55). But here we come to a wrinkle in the legal philosophical fabric. As any student of American political history will tell you, the United States was founded on rather generic notions of divinity, with such natural law as is translated into American political tracts and laws almost entirely disarticulated from the study of the natural law in the Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition. George cites both Aristotle (384-322 BC) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) approvingly many times in *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* (e.g., 202, 243-444). But as Aquinas “Christianized” Aristotle, bringing philosophical truth into the light of divine revelation, so, too, does the natural law need to prompt us to raise our eyes to the God who wrote it in our hearts. Remaining at the level of the common good is not enough, especially when a people, such as Americans have become, are mired in hateful inhumanity toward the weakest among them. I think George and Finnis would agree in principle. The problem is that the American system is not designed to work at that altitude. It is a secular machine, and, while it works well when the people who use it are reasonably well catechized, it falls to pieces when Americans are morally rotten.

Now, to be sure, the natural law is not religious law.⁸ I do not argue here for an American theocracy. George quotes Finnis to argue (rightly, I believe), as George puts it, that:

there's really no *single* and unitary common good within the reach of politics, for each community has its own common good, even if all are ultimately facets of the common good that embraces all others. Seeing the distinction between the particular and higher common goods is vitally important for politics. As legal philosopher John Finnis explains in a penetrating analysis,

“Taking common good in its widest extension, it is for the common good of the members of a political community that they find the truth about divine creation and redemption, live in accordance with that truth, and so enter and remain forever in the altogether fulfilling fellowship of the divine family extending from this world into eternity. But the state is responsible only for temporal common good, and correspondingly the coercive jurisdiction of state government and law has as its defining objective not the widest common good which might include salvation itself, but what the [Second Vatican] Council calls a (or the) ‘basic component of the common good’, namely *public order*.” (243)

This is not wrong. It is principled, prudent, and wise. And yet, it appears also to me to be the limit of the American experiment and one of the unintentional drivers of the moral disorder, even moral collapse, that we find in America today. As George writes elsewhere in *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, agreeing with his other Oxford mentor, the late Joseph Raz, “the common good of political society is fundamentally an instrumental good [that] entails moral limits on justified governmental power” (202).¹⁰ George frames this instrumentalism in terms of subsidiarity, which is a Catholic idea (as George rightly notes) laid out in *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pope Pius XI (1857-1939) in 1931 but stretching much farther back into Church and Western theology and philosophy (203). But subsidiarity works only if the subsidiary parts are not fatally corrupted. George notes the famous dictum of John Adams (1735-1826) that “our Constitution is made for a moral and religious people [and] is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” (213).¹¹ Hear, hear. But what happens when Adams’s foreboding comes to pass? It is here, I think, that we run headlong into the limits of George’s vision of the natural law, as well as the dead end of the American experiment.

In chapter twelve of *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, George and co-author Ryan T. Anderson counsel against throwing out “the baby [with] the bathwater,” that is, against abandoning what George and Anderson see as positive aspects of the liberal tradition. Making a strong claim against the “supposed neutrality or (to use John Rawls’s [(1921-2002)] term) ‘anti-perfectionism’ of contemporary progressive liberalism,” which they see as “appeal to moral neutrality [. . .] [often] function[ing] in practice as smoke screens to disguise the smuggling in of a certain controversial conception of the good—one that progressives hold and just about everyone else rejects,” George and Anderson note, rightly, that “representative government, sepa-

ration of powers, constitutionalism, limited government, and respect for the autonomy and integrity of institutions of civil society (beginning with the marriage-based family), jury trial, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and other basic civil liberties all pre-date John Locke [(1632-1704)] [and] are more than defensible (and are indeed better defended) without invoking Lockean philosophical ideals” (232).¹² This is all very true, and well said. But even if we grant all this, we are still right back where we started. The American Constitution is for a moral people, which many Americans are no longer. The American founders, it might be said, did throw out the baby with the bathwater—the Christ Child, the source of the good and the very Good Himself.

But a God so singular, so personal, cannot be the God of America, for America is, as a political and legal system, committed to pluralism on many registers. And so, what George and many other conservatives and others of good will have done is to invent a kind of religious version of Americanism, a religion that does not exist in practice but which must exist if America is to function as a system. In *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth*, George cites social thinker Robert Bellah’s (1927-2013) critique of the “expressive individualism” of “liberal secularism” that has become an “orthodoxy [. . .] among Western cultural elites” (306). Yes, this critique has certainly been borne out in spades by what has happened in America since Bellah’s passing. But George’s reference to Bellah called to my mind Bellah’s work on “civic religions” and made me wonder whether George did not perhaps feel the need for one to make up the difference between the instrumental common good he advocates, and beyond which the American system cannot see, and the human need for metaphysical good, above all eternal life, that Christianity fulfills. “Onward, Judaeo-Christian soldiers,” George writes at the end of chapter sixteen, “Christianity and Paganism: Then and Now” (291). But “Judaeo-Christianity” is not a religion, but rather an attempt to bring morality to bear on the “public square” (George is very much in line with the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus (1936-2009) on this score) (245). No one worships at houses of “Judaeo-Christianity” on the Sabbath, there being no such places to begin with. Appeals to “Judaeo-Christianity” are tacit admissions that there is something very important that is missing from our shared American lives, something that America, by design, simply cannot and will not supply. And so American natural lawyers, in so far as they are fully both, will be left flailing if the religion that is meant to bolster both the natural law and America is ever lost, and the American people with it.

Americans in their moral blindness no longer have the capacity to see the goodness of the full truth. And so, perhaps, natural lawyers in America are

wont to break things down into terms that secularized Americans can more readily understand. This is not a bad tactic, not by any means. But it strikes me as a losing one, ultimately, if Americans are unable to have their sight restored to take in what is above and beyond their immediate surroundings. To take one example, marriage is not *just* an “institution,” as George writes, but more properly a sacrament (122-125). There is all the difference in the world between whether one sees marriage as primarily one or the other. If marriage is *just* an institution, then it is right for George, and for the state, to debate its contours and particulars, to debate who gets to be part of the institution and who doesn’t. George, as a Catholic, certainly does not believe that marriage is *just* an institution. But to cede the ground, from sacrament to institution, and to argue on the terms of the latter, is to give away the entire game in the opening move. The notion that the state should be involved in marriage at all is an idea rooted in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Code.¹³ The American experiment, while a common law phenomenon, ended up in essentially the same place as the Napoleonic Code on marriage, as religious pluralism in America meant that the state would have to be the arbiter of religious practices impinging on public order.¹⁴ Of course it is possible for state law to respect marriage and even uphold it as a virtuous calling, a sacrament even. But over time it seems inevitable that democratic paradigms, coupled with moral decay, will eventually lead the state to turn its back on marriage as a sacrament, and then to turn against marriage as anything other than another secular institution to be regulated, precisely as has happened in America.¹⁵ In this case, someone in George’s position, who has grounded the natural law in the common good for the sake of advancing debate in the religiously pluralist public square (however much the natural law and the common good are stipulated to be metaphysical in origin and telos), will be up the republican creek without a paddle.

Turning to John Finnis for help rowing may not be enough to get us back to a godly America, either. In 1979, Finnis wrote:

In 1953 Leo Strauss prefaced his study of natural law with the warning that ‘the issue of natural right presents itself today as a matter of party allegiance. Looking around us, we see two hostile camps, heavily fortified and guarded. One is occupied by the liberals of various descriptions, the other by the Catholic and non-Catholic disciples of Thomas Aquinas.’ Things have changed during the last 25 years, and the debate need no longer be regarded as so polarized. Still, the issues tackled in this book go to the root of every human effort, commitment, and allegiance, and at the same time are overlaid with a long and continuing history of fierce partisanship. So it may be as well to point out that in this book nothing is asserted or defended by appeal to the authority of any person or body. I do quite frequently refer to Thomas Aquinas, because on any view he occupies a uniquely strategic place in the history of natural law theorizing.

Likewise, I refer occasionally to the Roman Catholic Church's pronouncements on natural law, because that body is perhaps unique in the modern world in claiming to be an authoritative exponent of natural law. But, while there is place for appeal to, and deference to, authority, that place is not in philosophical argument about the merits of theories or the right response to practical problems, and so is not in this book. My arguments, then, stand or fall by their own reasonableness or otherwise.¹⁶

This is in many ways a commendable position to adopt. And, to be sure, Aquinas also understood, as would any reasonable person of good will, that marriage is a human good, an institution with obvious benefits for families and societies.¹⁷ But what Aquinas taught, more fully speaking, is that "matrimony is instituted both as an office of nature and as a sacrament of the Church."¹⁸ And so the question re-presents itself. Can marriage be a sacrament in America such that the American system will recognize it as such, and only as such? If not, then the debate about homosexual "marriage" will, I fear, go on and on forever, because godless Americans simply cannot understand why sodomy cannot be contractual if we are all equal before the law.

This assessment opens up a broader vista of consideration about the natural law and the American experiment. While Americans—and the West more generally—still had a strong religious background, the American experiment could keep coasting, as it were, on the fumes of Christendom. Morality could continue, under those conditions, to hold up the American Constitution and legal system by supplying the substantive content of the positive law, which, by definition, restrains itself from commenting on metaphysical matters. But here we are in the year of grace 2025, when many Americans have long since abandoned any moral pretense when it comes to marriage (divorce and sodomy are rampant, and have been for decades), abortion (the massacre of the unborn continues three years after *Dobbs*), education (LGBT ideology has infected even American kindergartens and preschools), euthanasia (increasingly gaining acceptance in the United States), and a host of other life issues. It is true that the Supreme Court has provided relief in some cases, acting as a brake on the moral degeneration of our country. But as *Dobbs* shows, and as the metaphysically content-less, albeit metaphysically reliant, American paradigm more generally attests, there are limits to what the law can do. For the common good to be common, there must be more than what George, and Finnis, would institute as social goods, beneficial institutions. To be sure, "new natural law" theorists like George and Finnis (and their predecessors Germain Grisez (1929-2018) and Joseph Boyle (1942-2016)) do not at all rule out higher order, even metaphysical truths; it is simply that their starting point is with human and societal goods (39-41, 53, 57, 60-61).¹⁹ Fair enough, but human and societal goods presuppose humans in society who know how

not to behave like barbarians. I doubt very seriously whether many Americans today have any inkling how to do this. As I was writing this review, the Supreme Court of the State of Wisconsin struck down that state's ban on abortions dating from 1849. The move was purely political, in at least two ways. First, some 60 percent of Wisconsin voters have now declared themselves in favor of broad access to abortion, so the Supreme Court justices simply acknowledged what voters, albeit in their lobotomized consciences, profess to believe. Second, a conservative justice on the Wisconsin Supreme Court is up for election in 2026, and a former Planned Parenthood policy director is mounting a challenge. Killing babies is big business, and so, killing babies wins elections. Any laws that get in the way can be overturned by fiat. Blackstone? Bracton? The Fourteenth Amendment? Those who break God's laws are unlikely to follow man's. That's the reality we face.²⁰

So we are at the end of the line for America, I fear. Or, at the beginning of a long slog back to the fear of God that once buoyed the American system, long ago. The Spring 2025 issue of the *Human Life Review* put it best. In the introduction to a symposium titled "What's God Got to Do with It?" the editors write:

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.²¹

As Notre Dame professor Gerard V. Bradley points out in the Symposium, "The *Dobbs* decision did not recognize the unborn as 'persons' with a right to life."²² George and his co-authors in *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* argue, strenuously and backed by the fulness of the common law and much of the American legal tradition that flows from it, that the unborn *are* persons. There is no doubt, at law or in the Magisterium, that this is so. And yet, the reality is that Americans have learned to live with abortion as a necessary adjunct to freedom and democracy.²³ Babies are not persons because the American system, the instrument of a corrupted people, insists that it must be otherwise. It is true, as Monica Snyder notes in the Symposium, that atheists and other secularists can, and do, become proliferers.²⁴ But this seems to be the exception that proves the rule.

It could very well be that I am wrong. Perhaps there *is* something substan-

tive in the American political system that will lead to the undoing of a great wrong, the repentance and reconciliation needed to bring morality back to bear on the life of American laws. But I fear that *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* will represent both the pinnacle of conservative thought in America, as well as its obituary. Having reduced the natural law to what is socially beneficial, in practice if not in theological and philosophical commitment, leaves even the best and most morally upright American philosophers and legal thinkers, of whom Robert George is the most excellent and eminent, unable to mount a comeback when public morality takes a turn for the worse. We are all of us, in the American way, captive morally to politics, insofar as we buy into the American paradigm of pluralism of belief.²⁵ George writes (along very Finnisian lines) that among the “constructive aspects of human fulfilment” are “knowledge, aesthetic experience, work and play (as skillful performances), friendship, marriage, integrity, and religion (understood as the quest for harmony with the ultimate source or sources of meaning and value)” (59). But this surely will not satisfy the human soul, which craves communion, and not abstract principles. George is against the establishment of religion in the United States (235). So am I. So I confess that I do not know how to make America confessional again. I wish I did. The natural law according to George and Finnis does not tell me. There are no sermons in Judaeo-Christianity to guide me, there being no such religion in the first place. And so I fear that, like the great and good Robert George, I will also go on seeking truth and speaking truth, all while watching America slip further under the waves.

NOTES

1. Robert P. George, *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth: Law and Morality in Our Cultural Moment* (New York, NY: Encounter, 2025).
2. George, Sherif, and Anderson are the coauthors of the 2012 volume *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York, NY: Encounter Books).
3. Citing *Hall v. Hancock*, 32 Mass. (15 Pick.) (1834), 255, 257-58.
4. Emphases in quotes here and elsewhere reproduced from the originals.
5. Citing, inter alia, *Act for the Punishment of Crimes* (1846, s. 103 Supp., enacted March 1, 1849) and *State v. Murphy*, 27 N.J.L. 112 (1858).
6. George and Finnis cite in this chapter also the 2006 book, recently reissued in an expanded edition, by Joseph W. Dellapenna, *Dispelling the Myths of Abortion History* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2023). At 1,283 pages and crowded with footnotes, Dellapenna’s book is the definitive source on the legal history of abortion at the common law.
7. See also Joseph W. Dellapenna, “Brief of *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Petitioners, Thomas E. Dobbs, State Health Officer of the Mississippi Department of Health, et al., v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, et al.,” July 29, 2021.
8. See Heinrich A. Rommen, *The State in Catholic Thought: A Treatise in Political Philosophy* (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2016), 332, citing Francisco Suárez, *De legibus* (1612), III, chapter two, nos. 9 ff., and Felice Cavagnis, *Institutiones juris publici ecclesiastici* (1906), I, i.
9. Citing John Finnis, “Religion and State,” in John Finnis, *Religion and Public Reasons*:

Collected Essays: Volume V (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 94-95.

10. Citing Robert P. George, "The Concept of Public Morality," *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 2000), 17-31.

11. Citing John Adams, *Message to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts* (1798).

12. "Constitutionalism" is not explicated here, so it is not exactly clear to what George and Anderson are referring. There is a complex history to this term not, perhaps, fully represented by the mention in the quote paragraph. See Martin Loughlin, *Against Constitutionalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

13. See Kenneth Stow, "Equality under Law, the Confessional State, and Emancipation: The Example of the Papal State," *Jewish History*, vol. 25, nos. 3 & 4 (2011), 320-325.

14. Cf. Joseph Raz: "The Rule of Law, as I will understand it, is a specific virtue or ideal the law should conform to. There is no agreement about what it is: This lack of agreement is common to important institutions and principles, like freedom of speech. The lack of agreement is often a source of strength—people unite in supporting such institutions and principles in spite of diverse views about their nature. [...] [Rule of Law] principles are not about the content of the law, but about its mode of generation and application: they require that legal decisions and rules be anchored in stable legal doctrines, made for publicly available reasons, applied faithfully observing due process etc." "The Law's Own Virtue, King's College London Dickson Poon School of Law, Legal Studies Research Paper Series, Paper No. 2019-17; Columbia Public Law Research Paper No. 14-609 (2018)," 1-2. See also, more generally, Joseph Raz, *The Authority of Law, Second Edition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

15. On marriage as a social institution, see, e.g., Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), 161-162, 309.

16. John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Second Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) 2011, vi, citing Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 7.

17. See Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, op. cit., 446-447.

18. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Supplement to the Third Part*, Q. 49, Art. 2, Respondeo. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/5049.htm>

19. See, e.g., Melissa Moschella, "Sexual Ethics, Human Nature, and New Natural Law Theory," *Public Discourse*, September 23, 2019 <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/09/55959/>

20. Todd Richmond, "Wisconsin Supreme Court's liberal majority strikes down 176-year-old abortion ban," AP News, July 3, 2025 <https://apnews.com/article/wisconsin-abortion-ban-1849-01658358639a63db7df92aeec34c612d>

21. "Symposium: What's God Got to Do with It?" *Human Life Review*, vol. LI, no. 2 (Spring, 2025), 27.

22. "Symposium: What's God Got to Do with It?" op. cit., 28.

23. Professor Helen M. Alvaré's sentiments in the Symposium are mine, too, almost exactly. "Symposium: What's God Got to Do with It?" op. cit., 42-43.

24. "Symposium: What's God Got to Do with It?" op. cit., 37-39.

25. See David Mills' insightful "Political Capture" section in "Symposium: What's God Got to Do with It?" op. cit., 56-57.

FROM THE WEBSITE

HOW THE CHURCH CAN BE THE VILLAGE

Avery West

America's twin epidemics of isolation and low birth rates intersect in the heartbreaking experience of new mothers in America.

In my short time as a mom (we have two toddlers and another child on the way), I have spoken with women at libraries, pregnancy centers, churches, and parks. Regardless of background or status, their narrative is the same: Mothering in the “little years” is defined by a deep love for their children—but also by a sense of isolation and debilitating anxiety about “doing it right.” Many new moms are the only women they know who are having children. Some of them never held a baby before they gave birth. Women living in poverty—whose babies are most at risk of being aborted—have even fewer community connections than their middle and upper-class counterparts.

American motherhood is broken, but marriage and babies aren't the problem. Fewer women are having babies and Americans are more isolated than ever, so new mothers are often on their own. They don't know what happens to a woman's body postpartum, or the kind of behavior they can expect in an 18-month-old, or what constitutes a happy mothering experience. The typical American woman today lacks a village: a community of women who will support her not only with meals and pediatrician recommendations, but also a late-night phone call when she's crying alongside the baby, or a tearful prayer together when her husband is away for business.

Throughout history, the Church has risen to meet societal needs. Monks established the first hospitals. Sisters founded schools across the world to educate impoverished children. On a smaller scale, priests started cooperative businesses to create jobs in the wake of the Spanish Civil War. These solutions weren't just short-term outreach programs or “serve days.” They were—and are—sustainable institutions. One way the Church can advocate for a culture of life is by offering isolated new mothers the resources and care and friendship of a “village.”

A Church Village Ministry

When my second child was born, I was lucky enough to benefit from a church village that was all about giving and receiving help. Over the years, members brought me weeks-worth of meals, offered eczema creams and tips on what to do when my baby was covered in red spots, and comforted me through a miscarriage. And when it was my turn to give, I dropped off meals, watched kids during doctors' appointments and, with a dear friend, coordinated a weekly

“New Mom Community Night” for two and a half years. By encouraging authentic relationships, we were able to create a space where mothers cried over past abuse, whispered timid dreams about the future, and rejoiced as they were baptized alongside their children.

We were all committed to each other. During different seasons (Christmas, the summer, and the time when *half the group* gave birth within two weeks), we discussed taking a break. The response was always, “No! This group is the highlight of my week. I couldn’t survive without it.” When our church was no longer able to support us with meals and childcare, we willingly switched to a potluck model and rotated hosting the group in each other’s homes. I was shocked that something so life-changing could be so simple: a few moms, meeting every week, talking about highs and lows, sharing some food. That’s it.

Of course, this isn’t a new idea. MOPs (Mothers of Preschoolers) and similar groups have been blessing church communities for decades. However, I believe we need to start thinking of these groups not just as growth opportunities for committed church members but also as an outreach for mothers at risk of abortion—in other words, as a pro-life ministry.

Today, we often separate these two facets of Church life: internal ministry and external outreach. Yet mothers’ experience (e.g., postpartum depression and anxiety; isolation at home or work; dependence on Instagram for parenting advice; feelings of resentment toward their husbands) cuts across socioeconomic lines. The Church has a unique opportunity to meet the desperate relational needs of any woman—whether she bought a \$5 thrift-store crib or a \$1,700 self-rocking bassinet. Yes, a mother dealing with poverty often brings additional needs to the table: She may be underemployed; have unreliable transportation, or a dangerous boyfriend. Yet, where better to learn about new jobs, used cars, and respectful relationships than in a loving community?

This isn’t all theory. Several women in our group had overwhelming needs. No charity program has a quick fix, and often you only see changes when looking back after years. Even so, beautiful stories from our community emerged: A very young mom with no transportation eventually made friends in the group who took her grocery shopping and drove her and her baby to the hospital one night. Another friend, who had no model of what order in a family looked like, began weekly finance and planning meetings with her boyfriend after hearing that this practice had helped another woman in the group stay on the same page with her husband. And one mom, after realizing that her abortion was not something she should “just get over,” experienced profound healing at a Rachel’s Project retreat she learned about through the community. None of this “ministry” was part of our regular programming. It’s just what you do for your friends.

How to Begin?

A mother's support group is not an outreach ministry that tells someone about Jesus while handing out food or clothing: It welcomes struggling individuals into the *culture* and *family* of the Church. To facilitate this pro-life ministry in your church, you'll need to recruit two or three welcoming, nurturing leaders deeply committed to the value of relational ministry. I'd suggest each group leader take a training course like "Beyond Volunteering"¹ or read through *Becoming Whole*. Resources like these fundamentally shift the image of charity from filling another's empty bowl to walking alongside them for the long haul.

These leaders also need husbands who are committed to this important work. They are the ones who will provide comfort when wives share particularly heartbreaking stories, encourage them to persevere with a mother who seems hardened to the world, and take the children to the backyard so moms can discuss sensitive topics. The leaders can determine where the group should meet (i.e., a church nursery, outdoor playground, or in a group member's home) and coordinate potluck-style meals. If the church has extra resources and volunteers, it can even provide meals and childcare (though those things aren't necessary). We learned that authentic connection is the most important element. To help kick off conversation, you can bring in outside experts (we had everyone from financial planners to lactation consultants) or work through a class like *Faith and Finances*² or *Love and Logic*³ together.

To get the word out to the broader community, we partnered with local pregnancy resource centers and nonprofits, hosted (and advertised) events like "maternity clothing swaps," and even messaged women who posted about their loneliness on local motherhood Facebook groups.

A mothers' group taps into an extremely underused volunteer base—mothers. Moms of young kids often can't volunteer at pregnancy centers or other ministries because they aren't allowed to bring their children along. This ministry actually thrives when the host's children are running outside with everyone else's.

My family has since moved from the state where we helped found New Mom Community Night, but the group meets every week and grows steadily. I still get to see the group chat buzzing with inside jokes and loving offers to help with moving, meals, and childcare.

Recently, in our new town, I was speaking to a neighbor who is pregnant with her first child. She shared her anxiety about how having a baby would change her relationship with her husband, what it would be like to go back to work after a short maternity leave, and would there still be time for her hobbies. I asked if she had a support system. "I have you," she replied hopefully, "and I was thinking I should join some kind of moms' group, but I have no

idea where to find one.”

Little did she know that within walking distance there is a church that hosts a weekly get-together, where moms discuss everything from prayer life with a newborn to passing down toddler coats. Sadly, the group hasn’t advertised outside the church walls, so if I hadn’t been there to tell her, how would she have known about it?

A village of Christian mothers is an immense gift that we can share with a world desperate for connection. Let’s not hide our light under a bushel.

NOTES

1. The “Beyond Volunteering” (<https://university.truecharity.us/course/beyondvolunteering>) video series is produced by The True Charity Network, a national coalition of churches and nonprofits that serve people in poverty. Members receive extensive practical resources to help operate their programs with excellence. Read a synopsis of Becoming Whole here: <https://www.truecharity.us/salvation-the-american-dream-and-becoming-whole-a-sequel-to-when-helping-hurts/>
2. A 12-session financial literacy class: <https://members.truecharity.us/page-18088>
3. A 6-session parenting class: <https://members.truecharity.us/page-18099>

—*Avery West works for the True Charity Network, consulting with nonprofit and church leaders as they design poverty-alleviation programs.*

RFK JR., AUTISM, EUGENICS—AND PRO-LIFE SILENCE?

Maria McFadden Maffucci

From its beginning, the pro-life movement has been identifying the reemergence of eugenics, in medicine, law, and society. Indeed, despite the horrors of the Third Reich, the evil ideology never really went away. From Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger’s crusade to get rid of the “dark-skinned” and the “feeble-minded,” to today’s genetic testing of fetuses for disabilities and the abortion and infanticide of disabled babies, to assisted suicide and euthanasia pushed for the sick, elderly, and mentally ill, eugenics is alive and well.

So where is our outcry now? On April 16, in his first press conference, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said this:

Autism destroys families, and more importantly, it destroys our greatest resource, which is our children. These are children who should not be suffering like this . . . These are kids who will never pay taxes, they’ll never hold a job, they’ll never play baseball, they’ll never write a poem, they’ll never go out on a date. Many of them will never use a toilet unassisted.

Reactions were swift and angry from the autistic community, of which I am a member. (My son James is 30 years old and on the spectrum.) Here was my social media post:

What's awful about RFK Jr's comments on autism is that they sound eugenic. "Destroying families," "destroying children" and focusing on causes only rather than the help families need seems like the first step in declaring autism something that should be extinguished. Which means lives are not worth living?

. . . autism is a spectrum, many autistic people are brilliant at their jobs, pay taxes (!That's a pretty cold calculation of worth Bobby) . . . and live independently . . . Others need full-time care and can be terrifically difficult . . . and yes, some families do go through hell. But they do it because they love and cherish their family members. Not wish them away. Today many are rightly angry. And scared.

The answer is never to dehumanize a class of human beings.

While a small contingent of those whose family members have severe autism welcomed the attention, it was because they are desperate for help; there is a dire lack of programs for them. But Kennedy's plans at the National Institutes of Health and the government's proposed budget cuts will most likely only make things worse. A joint statement from 15 leading autism organizations warned that "federal proposals to reduce funding for programs like Medicaid, the Department of Education, and the Administration for Community Living threaten the very services that Autistic individuals and their families rely on."

Then came Easter Sunday, of all days, and Kennedy's appearance on radio show *The Cats Roundtable*. He said to host John Catsimatidis that autism "dwarfs the COVID epidemic and the impacts on our country because COVID killed old people. Autism affects children and affects them at the beginning of their lives, the beginning of their productivity. And it's absolutely debilitating for them, their families, their communities and for our country—just the pure economic cost of autism."

Autism dwarfs the COVID-19 epidemic and the effects on our country because COVID killed old people. The message, as my daughter remarked, is that though autism isn't a disease and isn't fatal, it's worse to be autistic than to die. And the cost is "debilitating." Kennedy sounds like former governor of New York (and Kennedy's former brother-in-law) Andrew Cuomo, whose policies during the pandemic led to the deaths of thousands deemed "expendable"—the elderly in nursing homes and also the disabled in group homes, the latter fact being something that has gotten little attention.

Kennedy then announced that NIH would create an autism registry, which NIH Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya said would compile information from individuals' medical records, insurance claims, government records and even their fitness trackers! There was such a huge explosion of anger and fear from those on the spectrum and their families that Bhattacharya walked this back a few days later. But the fear remains, and many are cancelling diagnostic and medical appointments they may have been waiting months to attend.

The reaction to all this from the pro-life and adjacent (including religious) press? Pretty hard to find. (And if I am wrong, please let me know at maria@humanlifereview.com). Autism is not a partisan issue, but it's being treated as such because it's the mainstream media and the Left who are crying "eugenics" now. For example, in *Forbes*:

The language that Kennedy used about kids with autism was triggering to some people. As Dr. David Gorski, managing editor of Science-Based Medicine, said, "What he leads with is telling: ' . . . these are kids who will never pay taxes, they'll never *hold a job* . . .' (Emphasis mine.) Let me say right here, this is some real, top grade, 'useless eaters' rhetoric."

Saying "those with 'severe autism' 'destroy families,'" Gorski continued, "is very reminiscent of the sorts of rhetoric used to justify the Aktion T4, the 'euthanasia' program instituted by the Nazis around the start of World War II to eliminate those with serious conditions that necessitated lifelong care in institutions."

And from the *New York Times*:

To the medical historian Jacqueline Antonovich, Kennedy's comments reminded her of eugenic arguments from the early 20th century . . . Almost everyone accepted the "basic premise of eugenics," she said—which is that "we need to improve our genetic pool" . . . One such address to the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1912 described the "feeble-minded" as "never capable of self-support or managing their own affairs" adding that they cause "unbearable sorrow at home."

Sound familiar?

The best I've seen, in explaining the entire situation is from Ivan Plis, writing in *The Bulwark*:

But Kennedy's assertions also rest on a more foundational error: an assumption that a life is only worth what it can give back to society. This idea, in turn, is also central to the suggestion that "severely" autistic people—those Kennedy's defenders might say he really has in mind—differ in kind from the rest. Such "productive" autistic people, like Elon Musk, would in the past have been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. (This distinction did not protect Dr. Hans Asperger's own patients, in whose murder by the Third Reich he acquiesced.)

Kennedy seems to have a subtractive view of autism, a belief that it steals a child's "true self" from their innocent parents. This and similar attitudes have been present for decades: One infamous ad campaign depicted autism as a kidnapper of children, threatening parents with ransom notes. This also explains why the puzzle piece has become a symbol of autism: to parents who see it as a disturbance or aberration, something is missing from their child, and they wish for that problem to be "solved." Autistic adults, who are former autistic children, generally dislike the symbol, and some have offered the infinity symbol as an alternative, emphasizing their wholeness—each individual, no matter their condition, is a complete universe. Their goal for the public perception of autism is not awareness, but acceptance.

. . . Today, in its words and deeds, the government seems to treat autistic life as a deadly infection while dismissing the very real threat of preventable disease as merely the cost of liberty. This is exactly backwards. Each human life—no matter how much it might diverge from the expectations of the powerful—is a self-grounding good; it is its own reward. If Kennedy is sincere about finding a cause for the suffering he sees, he would do well to begin his search in his own heart.

Some heart-searching is needed. For so many of us, this past April was indeed the cruelest month.

—*Maria McFadden Maffucci is the Editor in Chief of the Human Life Review.*

RAPE IS A PRO-LIFE ISSUE

Diane Moriarty

Rape is the third rail in both the pro-life and pro-choice camps, but for different reasons. For pro-lifers life begins at conception, and since this includes embryos created during IVF procedures, certainly a child conceived by rape has the same right to life. But defending that right puts one on a collision course with extraordinarily sensitive matters, matters that go so deep more may be called for than showing compassion for the victim's plight and admiration when she agrees to have the baby.

The woman who has been reduced to being a bystander in her own life needs others to really put themselves in her shoes, nigh impossible when pregnancy is viewed by a man for whom pregnancy is impossible. Even a woman who hasn't been pregnant feels in her bones the power of its possibility. Can men ever truly relate to this possibility of the "other" growing inside of them? Or understand how pregnancy is a visceral experience—wonderful if welcome but detested if not?

There are times in life when one finds another person physically repulsive because something about their personality makes your skin crawl. What happens to your nervous system when they touch you? Now imagine that person's issue growing inside of you. Even worse, imagine a vile stranger commandeering your body and a part of *him* growing in you. What it takes to overcome that abhorrence shouldn't be taken for granted by anyone, including women firmly grounded in pro-life sensibilities. It takes real work to see things from the victim's point of view in this most intimate context. What it's like to feel what she's feeling while trying to reconcile it with life beginning at conception; to wrestle with it as a reality rather than resting in the comfort of a noble belief.

And while it's true enough that a pregnancy is a pregnancy is a pregnancy

no matter how it happens, sanctity of life demands that there's no such thing as "just a pregnancy." It's always profound. The moral objection to IVF is that it replaces a human act of love with technology and makes the child a product, that it's playing God. The rapist is playing God with the woman's body. Bad enough he robs her of her most basic self-possession, but the attack has the potential of creating life itself, and something so profound in the hands of a brute scoffs at sanctity. Rape is a pro-life issue.

Some women can find their way to accepting it as just a pregnancy (if he didn't break her teeth off and burn her with cigarettes), despite its traumatic onset. They have a strong sense of self. One that says: No matter how this happened, this baby is *my family*. She's not acting out of self-sacrifice, she couldn't care less if anyone admires her, she just possesses a level of autonomy the "prostitution is empowerment" crowd can only dream of. She confronts the pro-choice third rail and turns it into their nightmare.

Even though almost all anti-abortion legislation since *Roe* has exceptions for rape, when *Roe* was overturned the battle cry "Not Even for Rape" was shouted from the ramparts second only to "Women Won't be Treated for Ectopic Pregnancy." The latter can be countered with education, but the former has a more insidious hold. The subject of rape can consume women's emotions and create fertile ground for *Handmaid's Tale* dystopia. It's the ultimate "It's a Man's World and they can do whatever they want and get away with it" chagrin, the gut-punch feeling that men hold all the cards.

The pro-choice camp wastes no time exploiting this emotional minefield. Or should I say mind-field? If it's wrong, wrong, wrong for a woman to be "forced" to give birth even though she had sex willingly, what can be made of a scenario where a woman is asked to rise to the occasion and take pity on a baby conceived in rape, who is as much an innocent bystander as she is? Any woman who would allow herself to be cajoled into it by "she has the heart of a saint" platitudes, the pro-choicer howls, is a fool! But the woman who sees the child as hers no matter what the circumstances is the most dangerous of foes because it's impossible to belittle her with mockery.

Rape is a third rail issue because it is so fraught with emotion for anyone who nears it. Daring to go there, for the right reasons, contributes to an important discussion underway in the pro-life movement, and hopefully promotes effective cultural change concerning this age-old problem, which ultimately is more powerful than law. Pro-choice groups exploiting it, on the other hand, can never change anything.

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

MY CARDINAL TO THE END

Brian Caulfield

[This article appeared in a slightly shorter form in First Things on May 3, 2010, ten years after the death of Cardinal John O'Connor. It is reprinted here, with the magazine's permission, to mark the 25th anniversary of the beloved Cardinal's passing.]

I first got to know Cardinal O'Connor from his weekly column in *Catholic New York*. His personal and confessional style drew me closer to a Church I had drifted away from in my 20s, and I looked forward each week to reading his thoughts on the latest news item or his memories of growing up in Philadelphia's Catholic "ghetto."

I was a sports journalist at the time, dealing in the unchangeable facts of box scores and final standings. The cardinal's column intrigued me because he appealed to another sort of truth. There was a simple humility of facts built upon facts that led to faith, or was it faith that informed the facts and made them intelligible? Whatever the dynamic, Cardinal O'Connor won my heart because I knew that someone greater had won his. I wanted to know that someone else.

In 1984 I was on the fence of the issue of our time—abortion. My libertarian leanings had me thinking that a little growth inside the womb was like a hangnail that could be snipped off at will. Yet something deep inside me said a world like that could only be cold and cruel, and I knew no one could live there long. Cardinal O'Connor again convinced me.

I was happily back at Mass, indulging in the Real Presence and the mystery of forgiveness, when I read his response to Mario Cuomo's famous Notre Dame speech. I had seen the *New York Times*' coverage of Cuomo and the hoorays that followed, but I failed to follow his argument. It was a speech poised solely for effect and was accepted only for its conclusion—you can be Catholic and "pro-choice." After reading the cardinal's response I understood why Cuomo's stand was so popular. To abandon the calculated "personally opposed but" position was to realize the horror that has been unleashed on our land and the obligation to stop it. To take the side of O'Connor, which was to take actions and their consequences seriously, was to become a modern-day abolitionist. Soon I was praying outside of abortion clinics and counseling women, as part of our nation's longest-running grass-roots social movement.

When it came time to finally decide what to do with my new-found life as a Bible reading, rosary toting, daily Mass Catholic, I read these words of Cardinal O'Connor: "Priests Needed." He asked in his column for single men, devoted to the faith, who were willing to take on the sufferings of the people by standing at the altar of God. I signed up to be his seminarian.

I finally got to meet him in the flesh when I served Mass with my classmates at St. Patrick's Cathedral. "Well done, well did, well deed," he joked, as he thanked the servers after Mass, extending his bony hand. One time when I held up the thurible for him to pour in incense, he sensed my tense uncertainty and dropped a few grains down the sleeve of my cassock. He smiled that warm smile that said to me he understood everything and told me not to worry, without a word. I was not called to be his priest, to serve in his ranks for the salvation of souls. God had another plan, and it was the cardinal who helped me see it, once again.

I left the seminary and became a reporter for *Catholic New York*, his weekly newspaper, where my journey back to the Church had begun. I got to match my love of writing with my love of the Church, and record the words of the cardinal each week, as he preached from the nation's most visible pulpit and made front-page news with his comments on abortion, politicians, exorcism and his fight with Mayor Koch over condoms and conscience. "O'C" was a fixture for the *New York Post's* headline writers, and at *Catholic New York* we prided ourselves in telling the story behind the sensation and sound bites. Fellow journalists asked me if I felt constrained by writing for the Church, and I always said no. I got to tell the whole story, with the full truth of the Gospel and the Christian understanding of the human person as my sources. What were the vagaries of the daily news cycle compared to the Sermon on the Mount?

After what he described to his brother bishops as "a great ride," Cardinal O'Connor fell ill with cancer but did not succumb. He was active until the last possible day, still preaching, teaching and making converts out of seekers like me. I was privileged to cover his funeral Mass, and was there when a pro-life ovation erupted in the cathedral in the presence of a host of pro-abortion politicians. It was a great time to be alive, to be Catholic, to be pro-life and fired with faith. It was a moment brought about by Cardinal O'Connor, who even in death, was a witness for life.

—Brian Caulfield writes from Virginia.

A PRO-LIFE FIELD HOSPITAL

David Poecking

[This reflection was written and filed in the interregnum between Pope Francis's death and Pope Leo XIV's election.]

It has long been observed that the Church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. And yet, it's not a hospital where people come if they like or seek treatment elsewhere. Not a hospital where clinics are subject to

rigid quality control and physicians administer rarefied treatments for exotic diseases—though both of these modern developments are welcome.

Instead, as the late Pope Francis famously insisted, the Church is a *field hospital*, operating near the fighting and among the wounded, applying the crudest treatments to those with life-threatening injuries. Pope Francis used the analogy of “field hospital” to describe the drama of evangelization in the New Testament and in our own day. People are spiritually dying, and the resulting despair and violence take a bodily toll.

Older Americans who watched *M*A*S*H*, the highly praised 1970s sitcom—about the (fictional) 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH)—will understand the concept. Ostensibly set during the Korean War, but more broadly concerned with the U.S. and the Western world during the Cold War, the show’s depiction of the life-or-death urgency of field medicine, punctuated with gallows humor, made for gripping drama and tearful comedy.

Like the medics in *M*A*S*H* who attend to physical survival, we who attend to spiritual survival also recognize the comic weakness of our effort. As much as we attempt to forge friendship and fellowship with each other, there is always someone who betrays fellowship by competing for power or posturing as a victim. As much as we proclaim the Gospel, we are shouted down by dissenters on TV and social media. Nitpicking complaints or the lure of easier gratification elsewhere erode our shared worship.

Still, our comic inadequacy is overshadowed by the life-or-death urgency of saving souls. In one episode of *M*A*S*H*, a frustrated character declares: “If I had all the answers, I’d run for God” (as if God were a political position he could run for). Francis didn’t have all the answers, but he reminded us that proclaiming the good news of Jesus really is a matter of life and death—*eternal* life and death.

But neither is it an occasion for being grim or humorless: Our job is to transmit the joy and friendship made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice for us and the promise of his resurrection. When Jesus rises from the dead, he does not seek retribution from those who failed him. Instead, he invites them to breakfast!

The same paradox is at the heart of the pro-life movement. On the one hand, our mission—extending the protection of the law to the unborn—is a matter of life and death. It does no good to stand aloof or dispense prissy moralisms as if we were consultants in a cosmetic surgery clinic. Instead, we do better to imitate the laborers in a field hospital as we bring hope to despairing mothers or refuge to unwanted children.

And on the other hand, we want to bring *life*. Human life is more than survival: It requires joy shared with others. When we allow the seriousness of the pro-life cause to eclipse our shared life or our appreciation for others,

we cripple our own movement. If we want to inspire hope among mothers, fathers, and the general public, we've got to show that we cherish their lives as much as we want them to cherish the unborn.

So for everyone's sake, let us follow our pro-life calling with all the diligence and urgency appropriate to a field hospital. But at the same time, let us sustain all the joy and conviviality we want for the mothers and children at risk. Anything less would be a failure to signal the life and love that are the foundation of our calling.

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

AN ORDINARY PERSON

Victor Lee Austin

C. S. Lewis, a character in his own story, saw her approaching from afar. She was radiant. Leading her were bright angels, joyous children, and musicians. Multitudes of animals followed after. It was a great procession coming down from the high country.

Lewis thought he was seeing, you know, *her*, the Virgin Mary. “Is she—?” he asks his guide, who seems to smile at Lewis's naivete. In earthly life, this woman was ordinary and unknown. Now, in the high country of heaven, she is filled with glory as she lives completely in Love. Her name is Sarah Smith. She lived in Golders Green. Unnoticed to the world, she had been a mother-like friend to all the children who came to her door—and the birds and the beasts also had their place in her love. All who knew Sarah Smith were touched by something that somehow made them more themselves: a simple love that wasn't “greatness” or “brilliance.” We might call it self-sacrifice, yet they were never made to feel it as such. True self-sacrifice just is self-giving, which in turn lives on the self-giving of divine love.

One imagines she knew their names, that she told stories to the children and delighted them. One imagines she gave them hugs and they gave her hugs back. She may have made clothes for them. None of this was fancy. None of this brought attention to her in anyone else's eyes. She was, in a sense, a person who passes through life and leaves behind no monuments, no worldly achievements.

The key to the scene is in the children dancing along with her. To be pro-life is (among other things) to notice children, to get to know them, to help them along and be open to friendship with them. How easy it is to do otherwise! There is work that has to be done. There is a home that needs upkeep.

There are vacation plans to be made. There are texts that keep popping up, posts that need responding to, news updates we want to keep reading. Where do—how can—children fit into this, our typical life?

There was one person who did not respond to Sarah's love, and the reason she has come down from the high country is to meet him, her husband, Frank. She finds him, as we see, a split person: a tall tragedian holding a chain on the end of which is a little man. Arriving, she bends down to speak to the diminished remainder of her husband. He speaks of his own sacrifice, insincerely, like a bad actor. Bent down, Sarah lovingly teases him, getting him (almost) to laugh at himself. He nearly begins to glimpse a world without himself at the center of it. But there is only a spark of his humanity left. He is the sort of husband, one thinks, who always resented the things his wife gave away to children. He may have wanted all her love for himself. One thinks, he never paid attention to the children.

In Frank's case, his eternal destiny hangs on his finding even just a wee bit of something to love other than himself. He would have been more of a person if he had noticed children. His failure to be other than completely self-centered is, it seems, the cause of his vanishing into nonexistence.

These are old truths. We can be famous and yet, in the end, insignificant. Or we can—for instance—pay attention to children. Lewis's big point in *The Great Divorce*, the book (which he called a "dream") in which this encounter appears, is that at the end there are two kinds of people. There are those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and there are those to whom God says, "thy will be done." —*The Rev. Canon Victor Lee Austin is theologian-in-residence for the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas.*

WASHINGTON POST TRIES AND FAILS TO DEBUNK STUDY ON MIFEPRISTONE DANGERS

Jacqueline O'Hara

Is the abortion drug mifepristone truly "as safe as Tylenol"? A new report from the Ethics and Public Policy Center is disputing the claim.

Data from the report reveals the real world failure rate of mifepristone is at least 5.26% — double the rate from U.S. clinical trials. They also show 10.93% of women experience a serious adverse event after taking the pill—22 times the rate of the "less than .05%" on the drug label. These numbers are mere statistics until one realizes that they represent a whopping 94,605 adverse events women experienced associated with mifepristone from 2017 to 2023.

The study found that about one in seven women experience at least one

serious adverse event or repeated abortion attempt within 45 days of taking the mifepristone drug. It's worth noting that the adverse events include sepsis, infection, hemorrhaging, or other serious side effects related to the pill.

Mainstream media outlets that champion chemical abortion were quick to claim that the EPPC study was faulty and unnecessary. The *Washington Post*, for example, lambasted the study, strongly implying that the study's alleged lack of peer review, failure to disclose the database used, and alleged inclusion of conditions that were not serious, among other complaints, rendered it hopelessly flawed.

A closer look at the paper's critiques proves them to be partisan quibbles, rather than serious concerns, while ironically mostly affirming the substance of the report.

The *Washington Post*'s outrage over the lack of peer-review is interesting considering that policymakers often rely on think tank reports, reporting, and other non-peer-reviewed studies or news to inform their decision-making. The paper also took issue with the fact that the EPPC study did not disclose the database it used for the insurance data in the study—despite the fact that EPPC spokesman Hunter Estes said this information was unavailable due to confidentiality agreements with the vendor.

“Given the high level of politicization and public scrutiny surrounding this topic, there are concerns . . . about potential backlash or reputational harm to entities associated with this research,” Estes told the *Washington Post*, adding that anyone could replicate the EPPC's work: “We do not view the confidentiality of our specific dataset as a barrier for others interested in obtaining similar data and replicating or extending this research.”

The paper downplays the study's finding that 5.68% of women experienced “other abortion-specific complications” because these were “vague.” However, Estes told the *Post* that these included complications that sound not only specific, but more serious than the paper seems to want to admit: damage to women's internal organs from the abortion, fetal tissue left inside the woman's uterus, kidney failure, and life-threatening mental health diagnoses.

The *Washington Post* additionally took issue with the inclusion of the EPPC's statistic of 4.73% of women who had emergency room visits following their chemical abortion—not because it was inaccurate, but because clinical studies in the United States already found that as many as 4.6% of patients had an emergency room visit. You'd think that seeing real-life confirmation of clinical studies ought to be a sober reminder of the risks associated with the drug, but the paper instead saw it as an opportunity to downplay the significance of mifepristone-related ER visits.

The EPPC study additionally found that 3.31% of the total serious adverse events associated with mifepristone involved hemorrhaging. The *Post* notes the significance of this statistic, which is 33.1 times larger than the previously

reported statistic of 0.1%. Predictably, however, the paper downplays this stat by arguing that “normal bleeding occurs with a medication abortion.” There are many women who have experienced a chemical abortion, or used mifepristone in the case of a miscarriage, who can attest that it was one of the most painful experiences of their lives and involved significant bleeding that cannot be minimized as merely “normal.”

The *Washington Post* was additionally concerned by the fact that the EPPC study included repeated (surgical) abortions as part of the total serious adverse events. The EPPC study found that surgical abortion accounted for 2.84% of total serious adverse events associated with mifepristone. The drug’s label does warn that there is the possibility that the abortion pill will fail in 2.6 to 3.8% of cases, which the paper cites as evidence that the inclusion of this statistic was unnecessary. However, it’s important that the study highlights the rate of surgical follow-ups, which certainly constitute treatment failures and serious adverse events, even if clinical studies already warn that they could happen.

Among other critiques, the *Post* also claims that mifepristone isn’t supposed to be used with ectopic pregnancies. Ironically, however, this assertion ignores the reality that due to the rollback of commonsense protections on mifepristone, in many cases women are able to acquire abortion drugs online without an in-person consultation, which experts warn is urgently necessary for screening for ectopic pregnancies.

Given the very real possibility that women could acquire mifepristone before confirming an ectopic pregnancy, it’s odd that the paper would take issue with the inclusion of the 0.35% of serious adverse events associated with ectopic pregnancies. If anything, this statistic reflects issues with the reckless dispensation of mifepristone rather than the merits of the report.

At the end of the day, the EPPC report findings suggest very real, concerning rates of serious adverse events associated with mifepristone that Americans and policymakers should not take lightly. Those truly concerned with protecting women ought to reflect on the report’s findings, rather than nit-picking them without actually debunking what they say.

—*Jacqueline O’Hara is a Catholic writer from rural Virginia.*

THE SECRET OF LIFE IS IN THE TORAH

Cecily Routman

In the book of Leviticus, God calls on the Israelites to accept thoroughly, and follow willingly, the Divine blueprint for living given to Moses on Mt. Sinai (26:3—27:34). The Almighty commands the nation of Israel to embrace

this new way of life so that they may glorify Him and testify to His greatness to all the people of the world.

At this point in their history, the Israelites had only recently been liberated after hundreds of years of enslavement to Pharaohs and paganism—a time during which idolatry, child sacrifice, sexuality without boundaries, and wanton murder had become normalized. God, knowing they are unpracticed and skeptical, encourages them by setting forth the earthly rewards they will receive if they choose a holy way of life: abundant harvests, peace, fertility and healthy children, successful warfare, happiness, and the inner peace and satisfaction in life that come from unconditional obedience to God’s will. Life will be wonderful.

God also spells out the dire consequences of rejecting His guidelines and pursuing their old ways of being: famine, sickness, barrenness, invasion, and dispersion into foreign lands where they will be oppressed by tyrannical rulers, persecuted, and killed. Life will be awful.

These natural vectors of positive and negative energy represent Divine spiritual laws given to the Jews at Mt. Sinai. And because God’s covenant with us remains constant, vital, and enduring, we alone are responsible for their force and direction. This is the secret of life in plain sight, and it applies to the whole human family.

Holiness as moral objectivity in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) was to be humanity’s future and legacy. God’s guarantees for peace, prosperity, and security serve as encouraging evidence to anyone or any nation looking for relief from self-imposed existential agony. These first ten guidelines include all the ways for achieving life-affirming personal, business, and national outcomes.

The books of the Torah from Exodus to Malachi chronicle cycles of holiness and wickedness. They demonstrate an obvious alignment with the spiritual axiom noted above. When citizens and kings choose holiness, nations have peace and prosperity. When they choose wickedness, invasion and the horrors of war result.

Since the biblical period, humanity in general has fallen deeper into evil and chaos. Our current global experience is in some ways the worst it has ever been. Of the many reasons for this tragedy, two stand out: Human nature naturally resists holiness; and a human mind devoid of a holy moral conscience chooses evil unconsciously.

These unfortunate factors explain why despite demonstrative correlations between holiness and human flourishing, and wickedness and human suffering, wickedness all too often wins the day. The best reason for anyone or any nation—including those who reject the Bible—to live an objectively moral and holy life is so we don’t end up where we are now.

We are once again experiencing horrific chaos and human suffering as a result of spiritual forces that go unidentified and unaddressed by secular policy makers and confused citizens. In America and around the globe, faux religious movements without moral foundations encourage unbounded sexual activity; legal abortion in the millions normalizes child sacrifice, and growing acceptance of “medical aid in dying” threatens the vulnerable sick and elderly. These unholy practices invite ever intensifying problems that call for action.

The lives lost, the immense tax burden incurred, the corruption and gas-lighting and political maneuvering that all too often characterize changes in public policy, drain our individual and national resources. We get temporary improvements at best and, at worst, really bad outcomes.

A secular view that presupposes human conditions can be changed to improve outcomes can generate much human activity, and, depending on what changes are made, bring about either temporary improvement or disaster. However, we know from the biblical record that peace and human flourishing come from restoring a moral contract with the Almighty, that is, changing wickedness to holiness and then forming policy on that foundation. Without this clear understanding, and despite the best efforts of intelligent and caring stakeholders, humanity falls deeper into desperation.

Human flourishing requires that individuals and nations effectuate a return to holiness before they create and implement policy changes. God allows us to create a living hell so that we eventually lose faith in our limited human understanding and abilities. We then acknowledge our need for Him, align our will with His, and look to Him for help, favor, rescue and salvation. Hope for humanity endures because God promises to redeem us no matter our failings or mistakes—if and when our repentance is absolute, intentional, and serious. We can believe this because we know that God exists and that He loves us enough to save us from ourselves. His Presence reveals itself with each miracle of life, healing, and renewal—gifts from which there is no human agent.

—Cecily Routman is the founder and president of the Jewish Pro-Life Foundation.

APPENDIX A

[Kathryn Jean Lopez is religion editor of National Review. Her following interview with Anne Conlon, then managing editor of the Human Life Review and editor of The Debate Since Roe, was posted on NRO (www.nationalreview.com) on January 20, 2012.]

Combating *Roe*: One Word at a Time

Kathryn Jean Lopez & Anne Conlon

On January 23, opponents of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* ruling will gather as they have for almost 40 years now, to protest the decision. To keep a record of these dark years for human life, the *Human Life Review* was established. They have a volume, *The Debate Since Roe*, that serves as a reference and primer for any student of this issue—a must-read for the voter, the activist, the undecided. In an interview about the volume, the *Review*'s managing editor, Anne Conlon, talks openly about real life.

KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ: Didn't the concept of "The Debate Since *Roe*" sound like it could be an utterly depressing project?

ANNE CONLON: Jim McFadden, the late founding editor of *The Human Life Review* (he died in 1998), believed there had to be a record of the abortion debate so no one could claim, as some Germans did about the Nazis, that they didn't know what was really going on. Distilling a 37-year record into a single volume, a pro-life reader of sorts, was a challenge. What was somewhat—not *utterly* but somewhat—depressing, during my long trek through the archive, was the growing realization that all the important arguments against abortion were being made, and eloquently so, from the very beginning of the debate. It makes me nuts, for example, that anyone could have ever entertained the feminist claim that unborn children were simply "blobs of tissue." I chose to include in the book Sen. James Buckley's 1973 Senate address introducing his Human Life Amendment (a few months after the *Roe* decision), not simply because of its historical significance, but because in it he quotes an extended passage from the work of a researcher in fetal physiology whose description of the physical and biological characteristics of the unborn child is as illuminating as any sonogram.

LOPEZ: Why did you start with eugenics?

CONLON: The book is largely, though not completely, chronological. I thought Mary Meehan's "The Road to Abortion," written several years after *Roe v. Wade*, was the right place to begin because it supplies important context for how such a culture-rupturing decision could have happened in the first place. Meehan, who's one of the most formidable researchers about the eugenics movement—she spends a great deal of time in public libraries and private archives, excavating important facts

and details from dusty old boxes of personal papers and correspondence—shows in that essay how the abortion movement of the Sixties was both peopled and paid for by supporters of an earlier eugenics movement, one very much committed to breeding a “better” human race. This included not only people like Margaret Sanger and Alan Guttmacher of Planned Parenthood fame, but also establishmentarians like John D. Rockefeller Jr. and George Eastman (of Eastman Kodak).

LOPEZ: You contend that in the years since *Roe*, the “bitterness” has “intensified.” What accounts for that? Pain?

CONLON: That’s a hard question. And I’m not sure I have a good answer. But here’s a roundabout way of telling you what I think. I’m 60 years old. When I was a freshman in college, in 1970, a dorm mate who suspected she might be pregnant breezily assured me that if she were she’d just go to New York and get an abortion. It wasn’t legal yet (it became so in New York in 1971), but loopholes in state law made getting an abortion there pretty easy, or at least that’s what she thought. I was shocked that she would even consider having an abortion, but it didn’t occur to me to think of her as a bad person.

Ten years later, when I was working as a copywriter at an ad agency, a colleague confided that while she would never have an abortion herself, she didn’t think she had the right to tell someone else she couldn’t have one. I didn’t realize it at the time, but that was my introduction to the “personally opposed, but” abortion credo. And for a while, “personally opposed, but” pretty much described my attitude, too—though I would never let anyone get away with assuming I was pro-abortion, an assumption most people at my agency would make whenever the subject came up (there aren’t many pro-lifers on Madison Avenue). One day when I was about six months pregnant, my boss, the creative director of the agency, matter-of-factly asked if I’d had an amniocentesis yet, as I’d want to make sure everything was “okay.” No, I told him, I would take what I got.

That was in 1986. My obstetrician, of course, also expected I’d have an amnio and insisted I sign a note saying I had refused the test—why have it, I said, if I wouldn’t have an abortion. I didn’t know then that this doctor, who subsequently got my son safely through a tough delivery, was also dismembering the unborn children of her patients who didn’t want to give birth. I found that out after I started working for the *Review* in 1995, when on hearing about my new job, she replied, “Well, of course you must know that I do abortions. But only up to eight weeks.” She even assured me she had counseled patients carrying children with dwarfism not to abort them for that reason. Well, I hadn’t known about her abortion practice and I was shocked. But, because of our personal history I suppose, I couldn’t bring myself to think that even she—an abortionist, for heaven’s sake—was a bad person. I saw her a few weeks ago. It happened to be my son’s 25th birthday and we recalled how what had begun as a routine induction ended 20 hours later in a 4 a.m. emergency Caesarian for a baby in acute distress. “The umbilical cord is wrapped around his neck and arm,” I heard her say as she went about rescuing him from what had become

a lethal lifeline. She's no longer delivering babies, and I'm not sure she's still doing abortions, though something she said about "the Pope who wants to put us out of business" made me think that she is. She said it with a smile, but it was a bitter remark—and one which evoked a bitter feeling in me. Like me, she doesn't think I'm a bad person because I disagree with her about abortion, but my disagreement, I realized at that moment, causes her pain, just as hers causes me pain. There is no way to compromise on the matter of killing human beings. But today, in navigating a culture permeated by abortion, most of us have at least some people in our lives with whom, on this contentious subject, we have in essence agreed to disagree. But there is a cost for this uneasy agreement, and that cost is a massive suppression of pain—on both sides of the debate. So getting back to your question: I don't think pain by itself causes people to become bitter. I think the suppression of it does.

LOPEZ: Why are people "more confused than committed"?

CONLON: It's not just pain we've been suppressing for going on four decades, but common sense, and, for those old enough to remember it, logic. Most people tell pollsters they are against most abortions. Yet they still want it to be legal. This includes, in some polls, people who also say abortion is murder. This makes no sense—what other kind of "murder" would people be so blasé about? Then there are those who are against abortion but don't have a problem with physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. Or maybe they reject both abortion and euthanasia but support embryonic-stem-cell research and cloning. A lot of people, I think, are feeling their way to a position on these issues rather than thinking them through. And it doesn't help that our culture has substituted entertainment for imagination. It takes imagination—moral imagination—to see that so-called spare embryos created in petri dishes are our brothers and sisters. That they, too, being part of the human community, deserve our respect—and protection. The good news from recent polls is that young people are trending in a pro-life direction. But I don't think logic has as much to do with it as perhaps a growing awareness on their part of the missing—siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles who may have been aborted—and an inchoate sense that "there but for the grace of my mother, go I." They have also been taught that virtually any sort of discrimination is evil, and the unborn are indeed the tiniest and most helpless victims of discrimination.

But even if you think you're keeping your logical head while all around you are losing theirs, you can still feel confused by the affection you feel for people—like my obstetrician—who either think abortion's okay or don't bother to think much about it at all. I'm a committed pro-lifer. But the last thing I want to do is hurt someone during a conversation about abortion. I think the statistic now is that one in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. When you add in all the people who may be complicit in that abortion—expectant fathers, parents, siblings, grandparents, friends—I suspect we could be talking about a majority of people in the country. I sometimes feel like Hamlet: "Should I say something or not?"

But then there are the times when I don't have much of a choice about saying

something because someone who knows I'm against abortion is verbally accosting (or maybe just needling) me about it. After 16 years of working for the *Review*, I can articulate and defend the pro-life position pretty well. *The Debate Since Roe* is for anyone who wants to be able to do the same—it will give them greater command of the facts and arguments about abortion. But then we must remember, too, that it's possible for even wise men to rush in where angels fear to tread. *How* we make our case is so important. And this is especially so for people who are representing the pro-life movement. I've been asked on a few occasions to do a talk-radio or TV interview on some abortion subject and I've always declined—I can be too much of a hothead when provoked.

LOPEZ: What does Tom Thumb have to do with anything?

CONLON: Earlier I talked about a researcher whose illuminating description of fetal development, quoted by Senator Buckley in a Senate address, is part of the Congressional Record. Tom Thumb—the fairy-tale character smaller than a thumb—is in the Congressional Record, too. He was put there by the French pediatrician and geneticist, Jérôme Lejeune, when, back in the Seventies and Eighties, he testified in the Senate, first in support of a Human Life Amendment, and later a Human Life Bill (the latter testimony is in the book). Doctor Lejeune was well known for having identified the chromosomal abnormality that causes Down syndrome—he received the Kennedy Prize for it in 1962 from the president himself. He used Tom Thumb to make the point that each individual's unique physical character is contained in the chromosomal marriage that takes place at conception. At two months of development, he said, we were all Tom Thumbs in our mothers' wombs, two inches long but complete with hands, feet, head, organs, and brain. As far as I know, no reputable scientist ever publicly defended the “blob of tissue” canard, but it's also true that the science establishment as a whole wasn't interested in taking on noisy feminists—and the influential politicians (like Ted Kennedy and Al Gore and Bill Clinton) they converted to the pro-abortion side—so there weren't legions of scientists publicly denouncing it either. Just as there aren't legions of scientists publicly denouncing Harry Blackmun's “We don't know when human life begins” canard—actually what he wrote in his majority opinion for *Roe* was “We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins.” Thanks to the silence of scientists and doctors and, of course, the press, that very-easy-to-answer question—just consult an embryology textbook—is still very much with us. Especially at election time, when it provides convenient cover for self-proclaimed Catholics like Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden.

LOPEZ: What did you learn from Sandi Merle?

CONLON: Sandi Merle was one of those people who walk into your life one day and make such an impression that now, six years after she died, I can conjure up our first meeting as if it had happened yesterday. Cardinal O'Connor—he and Sandi were great friends—sent her to us sometime back in 1999. Sandi, who was a novelist and Broadway lyricist, had started a group for Jewish women in the arts

who were against partial-birth abortion. She had produced, along with Dr. Mary Nicholas, what they called a Jewish/Catholic Dialogue about partial-birth abortion, and the Cardinal thought we might be able to help them get it published. It was much too long for the *Review*, but a sister organization, the Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, did publish a lengthy excerpt as a pamphlet later that year. Sandi, bless her, made sure that pamphlet got into the hands of every member of Congress. This was the era of the partial-birth-abortion legislative battles, which Sandi vividly recounts—along with her friendship with Cardinal O'Connor—in the essay of hers in the book. I remember attending an event here in New York with Sandi years ago. Carlos Menem, a former president of Argentina and a great pro-lifer, was being honored by the Vatican. It was held in an auditorium, I can't remember where, but Sandi was sitting on the aisle. I'll never forget how, as Rep. Chris Smith, another great pro-lifer, walked up to take his seat, Sandi, in one smooth thrust, landed a copy of the pamphlet smack in his belly.

You asked what I learned from Sandi Merle? How to get stuff done. But on a more serious note, I learned how important it is for the pro-life movement to have a big tent. Unlike Sandi, not all the women in her group were against abortion per se; they just couldn't believe that six-, seven-, eight-, and even nine-month-old unborn babies were being butchered in America. It was a start. Most people don't know, as Sandi did, that Jewish law proscribes most abortions. In 2001, Sandi helped put together a conference at Fordham, titled "Exploring How Jews and Christians Can Work Together to Sanctify Human Life." One of the speakers was Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. The text of the address he gave there, which has never appeared anywhere except in the *Review*, is also in *The Debate Since Roe*.

LOPEZ: What was the easiest essay to decide on including? The hardest?

CONLON: The easiest was Ronald Reagan's "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation." When a sitting president writes an essay for your journal, as he did in 1983, you not only run it, you reprint it from time to time, and, if you're doing a collection, it's the first thing you think of including. What was hard was having to leave so many excellent essays out. My aim wasn't to produce a "Best of the *Human Life Review*," but rather a reader that would not only help pro-lifers become better articulators of their argument, but also give them some history, some understanding of the anti-abortion movement's decades-long struggle. Along with Senator Buckley and Doctor Lejeune, I included such other legislative landmarks as Henry Hyde's House speech introducing a Human Life Bill in 1982, and Hadley Arkes's House testimony on the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act—Professor Arkes's brainchild, which George W. Bush signed into law in 2002. All of these, by the way, are beautifully written, compelling pieces. Jim McFadden always said that our side would get the best "vendors of words," because what writer who was proud of his gift would want to "befoul" his reputation by defending the killing of unborn babies? He sure was right about that.

LOPEZ: How does one find herself managing editor of the *Human Life Review*?

CONLON: Actually, I have NR publisher Jack Fowler to thank for that. The ad agency where I worked for twelve years went out of business in 1991. After four years of working freelance, I decided I wanted a career change and sent NR a letter saying I'd be happy to start at the bottom again and would even make the coffee if they had a spot for me. They didn't, but Jack dutifully filed the letter and résumé away. Not long after that, when the *Review*'s then-managing editor announced she was leaving in three weeks, Jack, who had worked for the *Review* before joining NR, pulled my letter out and gave it to Maria [McFadden, then executive editor, now editor], who gave it to her father, Jim. I came in for an interview, hauling my ad portfolio, which he didn't look at, and a few letters to the editor I'd written about abortion, which he did. He hired me on the spot—that is, after I practically got down on my knees and begged him for the job. And, by the way, it was Jim who always got into the office first and made the coffee.

LOPEZ: Why would anyone want to subscribe to a journal that is all about abortion?

CONLON: Well, it's not all about abortion. From the very beginning, and for obvious reasons, the *Review* was also focusing on euthanasia and other assaults on the sanctity-of-human-life ethic. Over the years, we've responded to what *Roe* has wrought with articles on physician-assisted suicide, fetal genetic testing and experimentation, designer babies, cloning, embryonic-stem-cell research, et al. "What *Roe* Has Wrought" is the working title of another volume I'm putting together, of essays from our archive on these subjects. I had started off including them in *The Debate Since Roe*, but the project just got too unwieldy. That's why some of our longtime contributors, anti-euthanasia advocates like Wesley J. Smith and Rita Marker, for instance, aren't included here but will be in the second volume.

LOPEZ: What's the single most effective piece *HLR* has run?

CONLON: Literally effective, as in having an effect? Probably President Reagan's essay. It sure got us notice. But here's what else I'd say: We aim to be effective in different ways. You never know what kind of argument will persuade an individual to change sides—political, philosophical, religious, psychological, legal, medical, or maybe some piece of personal testimony. We feature articles by doctors and lawyers, politicians and political scientists, philosophers and clerics, journalists and, as Jim once called them, "those who bring a layman's view to the meaning of it all." Most of the articles we run are written, as Reagan's was, especially for the *Review*. But we're keeping a record of the abortion debate, so along with original pieces we also reprint, as I've already mentioned, the texts of political speeches—and Supreme Court decisions—as well as essays and columns published elsewhere. For example, back in the mid-Nineties, the feminist Naomi Wolf created quite a stir with an essay she wrote for *The New Republic*, titled "Our Bodies, Our Souls," in which she argued that abortion was a "necessary evil." We not only reprinted it but ran a

symposium addressing—and I don't need to say, refuting, respectfully refuting—her argument. Her essay isn't in the book but another one from that time is: George McKenna's "On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position," a masterful analysis of the abortion debate that originally appeared in *The Atlantic*. McKenna, a political scientist who has since written several original essays for the *Review*, told me back then that *The Atlantic* had never received as many letters to the editor as it had for that one.

LOPEZ: A few months ago, you honored Paul Greenberg at your annual Great Defender of Life fundraising dinner. How did you come to that decision?

CONLON: We wanted to honor him because he deserved to be honored—he is the epitome of what it means to be a Great Defender of Life. A fearless pundit—also a Pulitzer Prize-winning one—his writing is powerful and eloquent. The longtime editorial-page editor of the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, Greenberg writes three (long) columns a week, mostly on subjects that have nothing to do with the pro-life struggle, by the way. Bill Murchison, another syndicated columnist, and one of our senior editors, in his introduction to a collection of Greenberg's pro-life columns we just put together, wrote that Greenberg "may be America's most brilliant living newspaperman." He wasn't always pro-life; in fact, in the Eighties, while he was at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, he sparred over the legality of abortion in that paper's pages with a local pastor named Mike Huckabee. The first time Jim reprinted one of [Greenberg's] columns, he wrote that Greenberg had been on "a slow road to Damascus." But his conversion proved Jim's point about "vendors of words"—Greenberg's one of the best of them. He gave a wonderful address at the dinner, ruthlessly honest about the self-delusion he engaged in for years in order to defend abortion but was finally able to throw over. There's comfort in that, he said. If he could change his mind, others could as well. Maria McFadden and I and the rest of the people at the *Human Life Review* believe that, too. That's why we do what we do.

APPENDIX B

[*John M. Grondelski (Ph.D., Fordham) is former associate dean of the School of Theology, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. He is especially interested in moral theology and the thought of John Paul II. The following appeared on July 18, 2025, in the National Catholic Register (www.ncregister.com) and is reprinted with permission.*]

Adoption: The Life-Giving Option America Overlooks

John Grondelski

“Adoption, not abortion!” has been among the staples of pro-life mantras. It was emblazoned on the very first pro-life bumper sticker I got for my parents’ car right after *Roe v. Wade* was decided.

The problem is: There’s no follow-through.

Americans have always been ambivalent about abortion. When asked specifically about particular cases or stages of pregnancy, many have a visceral opposition to abortion. But when it comes to actually translating those feelings into law, they pull back.

The same can be said of adoption. Most Americans will applaud adoption, salute adoptive families, and consider adoption an alternative to abortion. But again, the problem is: no follow-through.

Brad Wilcox’s Institute of Family Studies in Virginia, just published “Why Most Americans Admire Adoption But Don’t Choose It.” Numbers don’t lie: in 2022, there were about two million abortions but only 25,000 adoptions in the United States. That’s 1.25%. The odds of a woman placing a child for adoption versus procuring an abortion are 50:1.

Why? Authors Kirk and Hanlon cite three reasons.

First, many woman imagine their child will live in a bad situation. They think of adoption as being put into some kind of welfare or perennial foster care system, where kids are neglected or abused. They believe they have no say in their child’s placement and will be forever cut off from him. Some even imagine it will cost them money they don’t have. *None of these things is true.*

Second, adoption ranks third among pregnancy “options.” Fifty years of “choice” rhetoric has tarnished the idea of delivery and handing over a child for adoption as “giving up” rather than exercising self-defining autonomy. For women not culturally pressured into “getting it over with” and having an abortion, the usual second choice is raising the baby herself. Sometimes family pressures encourage this; at other times, that decision leads to family abandonment. The father is often out of the picture. As the clock for a “safe” abortion ticks away, time pressures multiply and arranging an adoption is seen as the most arduous, time-consuming process.

Third, an emotional attachment. Many women simply cannot conceive that they can “give away” a baby they gave birth to. They imagine they cannot cut the emotional bond that delivery produced. It’s paradoxical but true: they may feel less connection to a baby suctioned up a vacuum tube at 12 weeks than a baby she’s

carried for 40 weeks and delivered. We shouldn't be surprised: pregnancy naturally is supposed to be a bonding experience.

The authors suggest women with a crisis pregnancy are often victims of a lot of mis- and disinformation. The great advocate of "reproductive health care," Planned Parenthood, would make no money steering babies to adoption. Abortion has always thrived on the myth that somehow the procedure will make "everything go away," as if "it never happened." When that kind of magical thinking accompanies the pressures of "doing something," it seems like a quick-and-easy solution compared to the additional process adoption involves. And let's be honest: adoption always leaves open the possibility that, maybe even decades later, an unknown person will knock at the door and say, "Mom?"

Kirk and Hanlon's main recommendation is that states require women seeking abortions, under the bioethical criterion of "informed consent," to receive detailed information about adoption possibilities in that state. That information must be more, they insist, than "perfunctory" or "pro-forma" lists of adoption agencies. It should involve explanations that adoption is not foster care, private adoption can involve the birth mother, and that legal and financial help is available. They also advocate inclusion of that information in high school health, physical education, and/or family life requirements so that every person graduating in the state has an accurate view of what adoption is and isn't.

Let me extend their list further. *Every* parish should include such an "adoption information handout" in the parish bulletin at least annually. The handout should be in any welcome kit for new parish registrants. There should be an annual presentation in the parish about adoption options, both for people wanting to surrender their child and those wanting to adopt. Parish offices and pro-life groups should have the local Catholic adoption agencies' telephones on speed dial.

A similar presentation on adoption should occur annually at priests' gatherings or presbyteral councils. It would not be a bad thing for each bishop to write a pastoral letter now on the value of adoption.

State Catholic conferences also have to get loud about local restrictions that handicap Catholic adoption agencies, like "gender-affirming" requirements for placements. We must not let politicians drive us out of business at this moment, and must be ready to sue on religious freedom grounds to stop them if they try. That is doubly true in states (Massachusetts, New Jersey) where the local political establishment also targets crisis pregnancy centers.

Roe's reversal three years ago caught the pro-life movement in a reverse whiplash from 1973. In 1973, local control of abortion was lost. In 2022, it all came back, even though much of our local support structure had atrophied because of 50 years of abortion federalization.

But with local control, abortion has become not just a political but also a social issue in the local community. Pro-life advocates are now confronted not just by the theoretical legal status of abortion but the practical needs of mothers in distress here and now. And, while adoption seems a solution, the data suggests it's less of a solution than we

perhaps imagine.

The Kirk-Hanlon research confirms what we've been learning for a while: adoption consistently comes in last among "choices" for problem pregnancies. Speaking at the 2024 Cardinal O'Connor Conference for Life at Georgetown, Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley noted the same phenomenon, asserting there are 86 abortions for every adoption. Based on Kirk-Hanlon numbers, the cardinal is generous.

If adoption is to be more than a theoretical option—nominally on the table but rarely exercised—we need to invest more in its promotion.

APPENDIX C

[Wesley J. Smith is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism and a consultant to the Patients Rights Council. The following appeared on National Review online on July 23, 2025 (www.nationalreview.com). Copyright 2025 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.]

Organ-Procurement Organization Lapses Threaten Trust in Transplant Medicine

Wesley J. Smith

The "dead donor rule" is the cement that binds the public's trust in organ transplant medicine. Under the DDR (other than in living donations, such as of one kidney) organs cannot be procured unless donors, in the words of the Munchkins, are not merely dead but really most sincerely dead.

There are two means of declaring death. Let's call the first "heart death," that is an irreversible cessation of all cardio/pulmonary function. The other is popularly known as "brain death" (death declared by neurological criteria), in which function in the whole brain and each of its constituent parts have irreversibly ceased. The key word in both means of declaring death is "irreversible."

But something appears to have gone badly off the rails in the field of procuring organs after heart death. A long *New York Times* expose found cases of patients who were clearly alive when organ procurement began. At the same time, a very disturbing report by the Department of Health and Human Services contained similar findings. First, the NYT. From "A Push for More Organ Transplants Is Putting Donors at Risk":

Last spring at a small Alabama hospital, a team of transplant surgeons prepared to cut into Misty Hawkins. . . . Days earlier, she had been a vibrant 42-year-old with a playful sense of humor and a love for the Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally. But after Ms. Hawkins choked while eating and fell into a coma, her mother decided to take her off life support and donate her organs. She was removed from a ventilator and, after 103 minutes, declared dead.

A surgeon made an incision in her chest and sawed through her breastbone. That's when the doctors discovered her heart was beating. She appeared to be breathing. They were slicing into Ms. Hawkins while she was alive.

The horror! Why are such awful things happening?

In recent years, as the system has pushed to increase transplants, a growing number of patients have endured premature or bungled attempts to retrieve their organs. Though Ms. Hawkins's case is an extreme example of what can go wrong, a New York Times examination revealed a pattern of rushed decision-making that has prioritized the need for more organs over the safety of potential donors.

In New Mexico, a woman was subjected to days of preparation for donation, even after her family said that she seemed to be regaining consciousness, which she eventually did. In Florida, a man cried and bit on his breathing tube but was still withdrawn from life support. In West Virginia, doctors were appalled when coordinators asked a paralyzed man coming off sedatives in an operating room for consent to remove his organs.

These examples are cases of procurement after planned "heart death" under an approach known as the Pittsburgh Protocol. First, life support is removed. After the patient's heart stops, there is supposed to be a waiting period to ensure irreversibility—three or five minutes. Only then can the procurement begin. If the patient does not die, he or she is returned to the ward.

This system works only if the absence of physiological signs of life are accurately identified. But the push for organs has apparently grown so intense that corners may be being cut, endangering still-living patients and treating them as so many organ farms:

The Times found that some organ procurement organizations [OPO]—the nonprofits in each state that have federal contracts to coordinate transplants—are aggressively pursuing circulatory death donors and pushing families and doctors toward surgery. Hospitals are responsible for patients up to the moment of death, but some are allowing procurement organizations to influence treatment decisions.

Fifty-five medical workers in 19 states told *The Times* they had witnessed at least one disturbing case of donation after circulatory death.

Workers in several states said they had seen coordinators persuading hospital clinicians to administer morphine, propofol and other drugs to hasten the death of potential donors.

Hastening death is strictly forbidden by the dead donor rule. Any such advocacy should result in job terminations, and if actually done, criminal prosecutions.

HHS has also issued a harrowing report about the same seeming crisis involving one OPO. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) revealed disturbing lapses — apparently including cases of inaccurately determined brain death. From the press release, "HHS Finds Systematic Disregard for Sanctity of Human Life in Organ Transplant Medicine:"

HRSA examined 351 cases where organ donation was authorized, but ultimately not

completed. It found:

- 103 cases (29.3%) showed concerning features, including 73 patients with neurological signs incompatible with organ donation.
- At least 28 patients may not have been deceased at the time organ procurement was initiated—raising serious ethical and legal questions.
- Evidence pointed to poor neurologic assessments, lack of coordination with medical teams, questionable consent practices, and misclassification of causes of death, particularly in overdose cases.

Yikes!

HHS is demanding that the OPO reform its practices:

Vulnerabilities were highest in smaller and rural hospitals, indicating systemic gaps in oversight and accountability. In response to these findings, HRSA has mandated strict corrective actions for the OPO, and system-level changes to safeguard potential organ donors nationally. The OPO must conduct a full root cause analysis of its failure to follow internal protocols—including noncompliance with the five-minute observation rule after the patient’s death—and develop clear, enforceable policies to define donor eligibility criteria. Additionally, it must adopt a formal procedure allowing any staff member to halt a donation process if patient safety concerns arise.

Indeed. Uniformity of medical approach—both in heart- and brain-death cases—is often lacking. Time for that to change all across the country!

This isn’t the first such warning about the potential perils of the Pittsburgh Protocol. For example, I posted this piece (<https://www.nationalreview.com/human-exceptionalism/devastating-critique-heart-death-organ-donation-protocols-wesley-j-smith/>) issuing a similar alarm in 2009!

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND WEB CONTENT

Subscriptions: The *Human Life Review* accepts regular subscriptions at the rate of \$40 for a full year (four issues). Canadian and all other foreign subscriptions please add \$20 (total: \$60 U.S. currency). Please address all subscription orders to the address below and enclose payment with order. You may enter gift subscriptions for friends, libraries, or schools at the same rates.

Additional Copies: this issue—No. 3 Volume LI—is available while the supply lasts at \$10 per copy; 10 copies or more at \$8 each. A limited number of back issues from 1996 to this year are also available. We will pay all postage and handling.

The current issue of the *Human Life Review* is available in its entirety on our website, **www.humanlifereview.com**. Regular subscribers may create (free) digital accounts in order to access and download articles from this and older issues on the site's Archives page. Digital subscriptions are also available at the cost of \$20 per year.

Address all orders to:

The Human Life Foundation, Inc.
271 Madison Avenue
Room 1005
New York, New York 10016
Phone: 212-685-5210
editors@humanlifereview.com



“And what we are obliged to do now is to bear witness together; and more than bearing witness, to effectively collaborate together in advancing the arguments along with many others, until finally they find effective political and legal expression, and, most important, find expression in the everyday habits and mores of the American people. To secure the conviction that there is no such thing as *lebensunwertes Leben*. To persuade our fellow citizens that every life is a juncture between the finite and infinite purpose, destined from eternity and called to eternity.

Whether we will prevail or how we will prevail, this cause will prevail, this truth will prevail, because it is the truth of the God of life.”

—Richard John Neuhaus “Together for Life”