THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

VOLUME LI No. 4 ◆ FALL 2025

◆FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE◆

Edward Short on
THE TOCSIN OF TRUTH IN THE AGE OF AI

Wesley J. Smith on
WE NEED TO SAVE THE HOSPICE MOVEMENT

Leanne Hart on
PRO-CHANCE

William Van Ornum on
SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Stephen P. White on
CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE FUTURE OF THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT

Alexandra DeSanctis on
THE DEBATE OVER WHETHER LIFE MATTERS

Jason Morgan on
MODERN ANTINATALISM: AGAINST LIFE, AGAINST HUMANITY

Peter Pavia on
THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

◆ALSO IN THIS ISSUE◆

FROM THE ARCHIVES: WILLIAM MURCHISON ON
Children of Men: Read the Book!

From the Website: John Grondelski ◆ Laura Echevarria ◆ Diane Moriarty ◆ Tara Jernigan

Appendices: Mary Rose Somarriba ◆ Clarke D. Forsythe
John Mize ◆ Tessa Gervasini

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"His heart just stopped." So spoke Nancy Murchison when she called with the sad news that her husband, William Polk Murchison, Jr., had died in Dallas on Oct. 8. And what a big heart his was. Bill reported on the unruly clash of politics and religion, graciously making sense of the nation's escalating ruckus in over 100 articles he wrote for us. Jim McFadden—who had "cottoned," as Bill once put it, to the Texan's writing in *National Review*—invited him to do something for the *Human Life Review* in 1992. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful association. Friendship, actually, is a better word to describe it, even though the two never met. In introducing "Choice Is for Voters" (Spring 1992), Jim reminded readers that "a quarterly journal like ours rarely enjoys the luxury of running 'news'—events distort realities, ours is a long view." But "Murchison's reportage will remain perceptive," he went on, "even if, by the time you read it, some 'facts' may already be outdated." This was because "good-reporter Murchison fills you in on all the as-we-go-to-press stuff, the kind of thing historians will ponder, a snapshot of 'How It Looked, way back now.'" Bill continued to fill readers in for 34 years, his inimitable voice as vigorous in his last article for us ("There Are Boys; There Are Girls," Summer 2025) as it was in "*Children of Men*: Read the Book!" (Spring 2007), which we reprint here in memory of our faithful senior editor and friend.

As it happens Bill's death coincides with my retirement. I joined the *Review* as managing editor in 1995. When Jim McFadden died in 1998, Maria McFadden Maffucci (now our editor-in-chief), became my new boss. I like to think I have helped her over the years to carry the load she assumed as a young wife and mother in keeping the promise she made to her father that his precious *Human Life Review* would survive him. It is a job I have loved since the start, working for a family—and with an extended "family" of colleagues—I have grown to love as well. In 2020, Maria named me the *Review*'s third editor. What a privilege it has been to mind the record of the abortion/euthanasia debate—what Jim considered this journal's reason for being. I have had help editing this issue from Mary Rose Somarriba and Chris Reilly, the *Review*'s new co-editors, who will take over for me in the new year. And due to a family medical crisis that deprived me of the ability to focus on anything else, our other longtime senior editor, Ellen Wilson Fielding, has written the smashing introduction that follows. Thanks to each of them, and to Maria, for letting me temporarily reclaim this space (where I wrote for two decades). Finally, thanks to you, dear reader, for your kind attention during my tenure here.

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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.

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the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

Fall 2025
Vol. LI, No. 4

INTRODUCTION

As I write, news outlets are reporting what AP calls "the first reported use of [Chinese] artificial intelligence to direct a hacking campaign in a largely automated fashion." On the euthanasia/suicide front, a Canadian reports losing two grandmothers to Medical Assistance in Dying.

Serendipitously, we open this issue with a doubly timely essay by Edward Short alerting us that "with AI knocking on the door, and the prospect of so influential a technology falsifying language to an extent scarcely imaginable . . . Christ's insistence that we follow Him as 'the way, the truth, and the life' has never had so urgent an import." Noting that "We have been sounding the tocsin of truth about the evils of killing innocent life in and outside the womb for over five decades," Short exhorts prolifers to "continue ringing that tocsin on behalf of the life of all those threatened by . . . the culture of death." Among the newly threatened are the aged and infirm of England if, as seems likely, Parliament succeeds in legalizing assisted suicide. Short highlights the address in the House of Lords of Baroness May of Maidenhead, the former Prime Minister Theresa May. Not recognizable in her political heyday as a pro-life defender of any stripe, May vigorously opposed this bill: "I worry that, as we have seen in countries where there is such a law, people will feel that they must end their lives simply because they feel that they are a burden on others. I worry about the impact that it will have on people with disabilities, with chronic illness and with mental health problems, because there is a risk that legalizing assisted dying reinforces the dangerous notion that some lives are less worth living than others."

Next, longtime contributor Wesley Smith eyes the imperiled legacy of Dame Cecily Saunders, founder of the hospice movement. Smith, who has served as a hospice volunteer and has seen the difference hospice care made for his parents, notes, "Before the emergence of the modern hospice movement, dying had become institutionalized, with most deaths occurring in sterile hospital rooms rather than in one's own bed. It was almost as if people died hidden away in dark corners." Unfortunately, today he hears "horror stories of poor-performing hospices. Some even believe that hospices are more concerned with patients dying sooner rather than with providing the level of care that Saunders pioneered and championed." And alarmingly, "For the past several decades, euthanasia/assisted-suicide ideologues have . . . strived—too often successfully—to redefine homicide or the prescription of poison as 'medical treatment' they euphemistically call MAID (medical aid in dying)." Smith lays out the kind of guard rails needed to ensure the integrity of hospice care in the era of assisted suicide.

Leanne Hart, a newcomer to our pages, offers her perspective on the pro-life world as a "Chinese; adoptee; Catholic; and business owner." In response to segments of the adoptee community who argue that "You have a 'good' adoption story, Leanne, and not all of us have that," Hart expresses her conviction that "For me, adoption was not perfection or tragedy, it was a possibility to experience life. And

sometimes the possibility itself is miraculous." Sadly, "One of the sharpest divides I've felt is between pro-life and pro-choice adoptees." In certain circles, "there's an assumption that we support a woman's 'right' to abortion to prevent more 'bad' adoption stories." But Hart takes a different path: "What matters to me now is bearing witness to the dignity of life, to the complexity of adoption, and to my Catholic faith that holds me steady when nothing else does."

William Van Ornum shares another area of pro-life involvement in "Supporting People with Developmental Disabilities." The father of a 40-year-old man with Down syndrome, Van Ornum recounts some of the failures, missteps, genuine progress, and continuing challenges America faces in better recognizing the moral and legal rights and needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. Arguing that "the dignity and quality of life of developmentally disabled people falls under the direct purview of the pro-life movement," Van Ornum reminds us that "the pro-life commitment does not end at birth."

First-time contributor Stephen P. White also has in mind a more capacious set of pro-life concerns and suggests that Catholic social teaching can offer a way of identifying, understanding, and framing these concerns. White advocates "for a vision of what is best for the human person rather than merely a defense (as necessary as such a defense may be) against what is worst." As we navigate "a post-*Dobbs* world, with new challenges to human dignity growing under various guises—from advancing euthanasia to the rise of artificial intelligence,"—White recommends Catholic social teaching to prolifers as "a way to frame these challenges that is comprehensive, durable, flexible, and consistent."

Turning to abortion, Alexandra DeSanctis grapples with the difficult truth that for most Americans, "while abortion may be an evil, it's one we can't do without." DeSanctis unravels the daunting implications of "why young Americans are more likely to identify as pro-life than older Americans but are nevertheless also more likely to say that they'd drive their friend to an abortion clinic." We will have our work cut out for us in the years ahead, she warns, since the unsavory truth is that "some of our fellow citizens—perhaps more of them than we'd care to admit—believe that killing innocent human beings is an acceptable trade-off for preserving our present social order."

Next, Jason Morgan takes a deep dive into the world of "Modern Antinatalism: Against Life, Against Humanity." While some people have always made the case that life isn't worth the pain, today, "What many antinatalists are saying is that it is not just inconvenient to be born or better to put oneself out of one's misery, but that it is morally wrong to give life to another person." Morgan's counterargument focuses on a wider perspective: "Human lives may or may not be 'meaningless' [. . .] from the perspective of the universe. But the universe is not at issue here. Human lives are. And human lives most certainly are not 'meaningless' to other humans." His "pronatalist" conclusion packs a punch: "Human beings have always known that life is hard and that suffering is the lot of all who see the light of day. But almost all of us have chosen to live anyway. Not because we expect the pleasure that might

await us to cancel out some of our pain. But because there are others whose certain pain, should we no longer exist, stays our hands and opens our hearts once more to the gift of life we have been given."

That takes us to Peter Pavia's "The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of," a change of pace that also reflects on whether life is worth living—and what makes it so. Pavia presents a film-noir-like telling of two would-be authors moving through life from youthful optimism to tempered ambitions. As it opens, "we were convinced the pot of gold would be ours as soon as a few conflicts got resolved in our favor. Prizes. Awards. We'd live like mini-Hemingways— expatriates, bullfights, all of that." Near the close, Pavia references *The Maltese Falcon* whose last line provided his essay's title:

> The "priceless" figurine of the title is within reach of all the principals. The stuff of dreams is at hand, standing in for luxury and limitless sexual license—and expatriatism and bullfights—but for one brutal reality: The bird is a fake, a lacquered manque of no provenance, a fraud, a fugazi, a nothing. It's worthless. Does an authentic Falcon even exist, or is it a myth, itself the mere stuff of dreams? We never find out.

We'll let readers "find out" what led him to this observation, and what followed.

In October we learned of the sudden death of our faithful contributor and senior editor William Murchison. Anne Conlon has written a stirring tribute to him (see the inside front cover): she also takes her final editing bow, as she is retiring after thirty years with the *Review.* In this issue we retrieve from our archives a 2007 article by Mr. Murchison on *Children of Men*, the movie adaptation of P.D. James's novel *The Children of Men*. A fan of the book, he did not like the "dark, dingy and weird" film; yet, he writes, out of bad may come good if a defective movie stirs customers to see what the book is all about." We will sorely miss his unique voice in our pages.

* * * * *

This issue's From the Website selections include John Grondelski's account of our October conference in DC, "Leading with Love," a gathering of national pro-life pregnancy-care leaders. (Appendix D is a reprint of the Catholic News Agency's Tessa Gervasini's take on the conference, which was co-sponsored by Catholic University.) Also from the website: richly rewarding offerings by Laura Echevarria, Diane Moriarty, and Tara Jernigan. Our appendices include Mary Rose Somarriba's *Verily* interview with Kylee Jean Heap of Support After Abortion, Clark D. Forsythe's argument against prosecuting women undergoing abortion, and John Mize on the brutal reality of coerced abortion.

Ellen Wilson Fielding
Senior Editor

The Tocsin of Truth in the Age of AI

Edward Short

> "Without truth there must be a dissolution of society. As it is there is so little truth,
> that we are almost afraid to trust our ears;
> but how should we be, if falsehood were multiplied ten times?"
> —Samuel Johnson quoted in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word Truth is defined as "conformity with fact; agreement with reality." It is also defined as "disposition to speak or act truly or without deceit; truthfulness, veracity . . ." and illustrated by a quotation from Shakespeare: "Love is all truth, lust full of forged lies." Montaigne, speaking of lies, confirms the primacy of truth by reminding his readers that:

> Lying is a villein's vice, a vice which an ancient [Plutarch] paints full shamefully when he says that it gives testimony to contempt for God together with fear of men. It is not possible to show more richly the horror of it, its vileness and its disorderliness. For what can one imagine more serf-like than to be cowardly before men and defiant towards God?

For Montaigne, the betrayal of truth wreaks particular havoc on language. Why? "Our understanding is conducted solely by means of the word; anyone who falsifies it betrays public society. It is the only tool by which we communicate our wishes and our thoughts; it is our soul's interpreter: if we lack that, we can no longer hold together; we can no longer know each other. When words deceive us, it breaks all intercourse and loosens the bonds of our polity." Montaigne's celebrated skepticism might have put "saucy doubts and fears" into a generation desolated by the Church's "bare ruined choirs," but he knew the difference between truth and lies.

Francis Bacon, with Montaigne in mind, regarded truth as peculiarly susceptible to lies not only because of "the difficulty and labour men take in finding out of truth" but because of what he called the "corrupt love of the lie itself." We prefer lies to truth because of our fallen nature. Our vanity also disposes us to love lies. Swift mocked the irreligion of his age by arguing that if his contemporaries were ever to restore belief in

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Edward Short is the author of *Newman and his Critics*, the third volume of his trilogy on St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, as well as *What the Bells Sang: Essays and Reviews*, both published by Gracewing.

Christianity it would "destroy at one blow all the wit and half the learning of the kingdom."

Yet Bacon also understood that "despite men's depraved judgments and affections," truth remains central to human well-being. Indeed, the scholarly Christian in him knew this in his very bones, because, as he says, "the inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature." Conversely, for the lawyer and statesman in Bacon, "There is no vice that doth so cover man with shame as to be found false and perfidious," for such "winding and crooked courses are the goings of the serpent . . . ." This is why Bacon agreed with Montaigne about the profound wickedness of lies. They disposed men to be "brave towards God and a coward towards men"—brave here meaning bold, with the implication of defiant audacity.

Moreover, Montaigne and Bacon recognized the vitality of truth because they recognized the vitality of Christ's words to Thomas: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me," while never forgetting, like Jeremiah, that to be "not valiant for the truth," was "to proceed from evil to evil . . ."

Now with AI knocking on the door, and the prospect of so influential a technology falsifying language to an extent scarcely imaginable, these old truths assume new force. Christ's insistence that we follow Him as "the way, the truth, and the life" has never had so urgent an import, especially at a time, when, being so long cowardly, not valiant for truth, we have indeed proceeded from evil to evil.

The murders that have been committed in America recently as the result of the abominable lie of transgenderism certainly bear this out. The equally flagitious lie of abortion—against which the *Human Life Review* has fought with such valiant fidelity to God's laws, not God's scofflaws—is another example. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill—the bill to legalize assisted dying in England and Wales—is yet another example, which, at time of writing, is being debated in the House of Lords after the House of Commons, in two readings, voted in favor of it. Even if the Lords were to reject the Bill, the House of Commons could still invoke the Parliament Act to override them. Thus, England's voting in favor of allowing doctors to help its ancientry commit suicide is now a likelihood. Surely there could be no better evidence of a society going from "evil to evil" than that.

Madeline Grant, the *Spectator*'s wittiest columnist, had praise for many of those peers opposed to the Bill's passage:

> Baroness Butler-Sloss, still formidable at 92, completely dismantled the fantasy of the proposed Death Panels as a safeguard with a series of barked questions: 'Will they meet in public? Will they meet at all? Why no Coroner? There was a good bit of Latin from the Bishop of Chichester, this debate he said, was full of 'lacrimae rerum,' the things of which tears are made. He also reminded the House that contra the arguments of the lobbyists for the bill, sanctity of life was not some monstrous conspiratorial Christian imposition but the basic assumption that underpins all of our law. . . . Baroness Fox of Buckley warned that there would inevitably be legal demands to expand the law; 'God help us once human rights lawyers get involved.' Meanwhile Lord Frost offered a philosophical critique of the bill, reminding peers that it essentially enshrined utilitarianism as the guiding ethical principle for the law, and that this would lead to very dark places indeed.

Yet it is heartening that one of the most eloquent voices opposed to the Bill was not that of any pro-life peer but a former prime minister better known for her faddish environmentalism than her solicitude for the sanctity of life. "Plastic waste is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world," Theresa May, now Baroness May of Maidenhead, told the press in 2018, after praising the U.K. government, without the least facetiousness, as "a world leader on this issue." However, this same lady, a vicar's daughter, stood up in front of the Lords and defended the sanctity of life with splendid cogency by calling attention to the lies not only of the framers of the bill but all those misguided souls throughout England and Wales who have convinced themselves that the macabre bill actually has something to do with the dignity of dying.

> My Lords, I declare my interest as an ambassador for Thames Hospice, but the views that I express today are my own. I recognise that across this House there will be very firmly held views on both sides of this argument, some coming from personal experience, as we heard from my noble friend Lord Forsyth. [The suffering experienced by Lord Forsyth's dying father changed his long-held opposition to assisted dying.]
>
> However, I oppose this Bill and wish to set out my main reasons. First, I do not believe that the safeguards in the Bill will prevent people being pressurised to end their lives, sometimes for the benefit of others. I worry that, as we have seen in countries where there is such a law, people will feel that they must end their lives simply because they feel that they are a burden on others.
>
> I worry about the impact that it will have on people with disabilities, with chronic illness and with mental health problems, because there is a risk that legalising assisted dying reinforces the dangerous notion that some lives are less worth living than others. Again, as we have seen in other countries, once a law like this is passed, the pressure grows to extend the scope of it. I also oppose the Bill because I believe that, by disapplying the default of a coroner's report, there is a danger that this could be used as a cover-up for mistakes made in hospital or for a hospital-acquired infection which has led to an increased likelihood of death. I have a friend who calls it the "License to Kill Bill."

> This is not an assisted dying Bill but an assisted suicide Bill. As a society, we believe that suicide is wrong. The Government have a national suicide prevention strategy. We bemoan the number of young people who are lured into committing suicide by social media and by what they read on the internet. This week, we had World Suicide Prevention Day. Suicide is wrong, but this Bill, in effect, says that it is okay. What message does that give to our society? Suicide is not okay. Suicide is wrong. This Bill is wrong. It should not pass.

What is striking about the reference here to the Bill's safeguards is that it warns against the very same "slippery slope" inherent in David Steel's Abortion Bill of 1967, which may have passed initially with a few well-meaning safeguards but now allows for abortion on demand. The Baroness' warnings also recall what Lord Alton of Liverpool had to say when he spoke on the issue of "incrementalism" in 2006. "Much has been made of the experiences in Holland and Oregon," he reminded his fellow peers. "In Holland, it started with turning a blind eye; then voluntary euthanasia; and then involuntary euthanasia, with 1,000 deaths now occurring each year. As others have said, that has led to the killing of spina bifida children. It has happened already at Groningen Hospital where it was done in order to push the law further. That is what happens when we move in that sort of direction." [Groningen devised guidelines for the euthanasia of newborns and infants in the Netherlands that make a mockery of medical ethics.]

Of course, the Baroness is no papist, but she does nevertheless uphold the same case against euthanasia that can be found in the Roman Catholic Catechism, which states with unambiguous clarity:

> Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. Thus, an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.

Here, indeed, is what Hamlet styles the "Everlasting's canon 'gainst self-slaughter," which another life peer, Lord Roberts of Belgravia, invoked to argue that, in the case of assisted dying, as in the case of war, there might be morally permissible exceptions to the sixth commandment, a piece of unpersuasive special pleading. Roberts, a friend of mine as it happens, should consider looking at the second edition of John Keown's classic study, *Euthanasia, Ethics and Public Policy: An Argument Against Legalisation* (Cambridge), first published in 2002 and revised in 2022. Richard Myers, writing in *The Ave Maria Law Review,* wrote of the book: "In the new edition, Keown does an admirable job of updating the earlier work. The second edition provides a

wealth of information and critical analysis of the issues involved. The work is marked by a sophisticated analysis of the legal issues and by an acute understanding of the actual practice of assisted suicide and euthanasia in those jurisdictions that have legalized these practices. His analysis should inform the ongoing debate about these practices."

How to conclude? If Baroness May of Maidenhead can find her voice in defense of life, so can the rest of us, and not just when it comes to euthanasia and abortion but also the equally pernicious lie of transgenderism. For prolifers, despite the savagery and mayhem we continue to witness in a world sworn to lies and contemptuous of the truth, this should be a time of renewed hope, renewed pertinacity, renewed courage. We have not looked on truth askance and strangely. We have been sounding the tocsin of truth about the evils of killing innocent life in and outside the womb for over five decades. We must continue ringing that tocsin on behalf of the life of all those threatened by the "winding and crooked courses," the "goings of the serpent" so indicative of the culture of death. After all, we are a pilgrim people, the people of life and for life, and we must continue to rebuild the culture of truth, in caritas and joy, in order to reclaim the culture of love.

"Is this about me always taking a penny, but never leaving a penny?"

We Need to Save the Hospice Movement

Wesley J. Smith

The modern hospice movement is one of the great humanitarian advances of the last hundred years. The story began shortly after World War II, when a young, devout, Anglican medical social worker named Cecily Saunders befriended a Jewish émigré named David Tasma. Tasma had escaped the Warsaw Ghetto only to be dying at age 40 in a London hospital. He was alone in the world, and Saunders made a special point to visit with him every day. Their friendship changed how we medically treat—and perhaps even more importantly, *perceive*—people who are dying.

I was honored to interview Dame Cecily (as she is affectionately known in the United Kingdom) in 1998 while researching my book *Culture of Death*.[1] In reflecting on her friendship with Tasma, she recalled experiencing an epiphany: "I realized that we needed not only better pain control but better overall care. People needed the space to be themselves. I coined the term 'total pain,' from my understanding that dying people have physical, spiritual, psychological, and social pain that must be treated. I have been working on that ever since."[2] (Tasma bequeathed Saunders 500 pounds to begin her work, telling her, "I will be a window in your home." Saunders told me, her eyes moistening, "It took me 19 years to build the home around that window.")[3]

Urged on by her deep desire to help dying people, Saunders enrolled in medical school at the age of 33, this at a time when there were still few women doctors. Upon entering practice, she focused on the care of dying patients, which was not then a specialty. She obtained a fellowship in palliative research and began work in a hospice run by nuns, where pain control was unevenly applied—a nearly universal problem at the time, causing much unnecessary misery. That was when Saunders conceived of putting patients on a regular pain control schedule, which, in her words, "was like waving a wand over the situation."[4]

Saunders' faith-inspired commitment to dying people pushed her forcefully toward founding a hospice based on her concepts. She became an activist, energetically raising money for the new project, and in the process raising the consciousness of the medical establishment. Saunders' initial idea

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Wesley J. Smith is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism and a consultant to the Patients Rights Council. In May 2004, Smith was named one of the nation's premier thinkers in bioengineering by the *National Journal* because of his work in bioethics. In 2008, the Human Life Foundation named him a Great Defender of Life.

was for St. Christopher's Hospice to be a "sequestered religious community solely concerned with caring for the dying." But the idea soon expanded from a strict religious vision into a broader secular application.

By the early 1970s, Saunders launched the modern hospice movement, beginning in the United Kingdom with her founding of St. Christopher's; soon, the new approach to caring for the dying expanded to the United States and much of the West. The movement grew exponentially, and for a time hospice was covered widely in the media.

Hospice Services

Before the emergence of the modern hospice movement, dying had become institutionalized, with most deaths occurring in sterile hospital rooms rather than in one's own bed. It was almost as if people died hidden away in dark corners. Too many dying people became isolated, adding to the difficulty of their circumstances.

Thanks to hospice, that kind of backward thinking abated as patients increasingly benefited from the multidisciplinary approach championed by Saunders. People came to realize that hospice isn't about dying but about living to the fullest extent possible during one's final weeks and months. The "multidisciplinary" care provided by a hospice facility or in the home includes:

- Physician supervision: Hospice must be prescribed by a physician. Once the patient is admitted to the program, the hospice medical director becomes the anchor, establishing a plan of care and supervising its implementation. When hospice began, these doctors were often retired from other specialties. But as the hospice movement thrived, providing this care became a certified medical specialty.[5]
- Nursing Services: The person in most direct contact with the patient and family is the hospice nurse, who visits the patient regularly and makes adjustments as needed in medications or the provision of other interventions. This nurse specializes in alleviating symptoms and coordinates care under the supervision of the medical director.
- Social Services: Hospice care also includes non-medical interventions from, for example, social workers who can advise about benefits and chaplains who can provide spiritual support to the patient and family. As originally established by Saunders, it also included suicide prevention interventions if needed.
- Home Care Aides: Caring for a dying patient can be grueling. So, the hospice will provide home care aides for such compassionate services as bathing, rubbing cream on dry skin, and checking sanitary issues.
- Volunteers: Members of the community can help in this important endeavor

> by becoming hospice volunteers, who help with a variety of different tasks, depending on each individual circumstance. When I was a volunteer in the late 1990s, I might clean house, spend hours conversing with the patient, provide transportation to and from doctors, and the like. Volunteers can also be the eyes and ears of the multidisciplinary team, since patients and families may be more candid about their circumstances with a lay person than with professionals.

Hospice care has become so ubiquitous that most readers probably have some experience of the beneficent services it offers. Both my parents died while in hospice care, and their experiences—as I will relate briefly below—were nothing but exemplary.

Hospice Under Threat

But now the hospice movement has run into serious trouble. These days, after I make a speech or when I appear on talk radio, it has become common for people to tell me horror stories of poor-performing hospices. Some even believe that hospices are more concerned with patients dying sooner rather than with providing the level of care that Saunders pioneered and championed. Some have even come to think that hospice represents an "abandon hope, all ye who enter here" approach to care, when it should offer just the opposite. Saunders would be appalled.

And I am not just hearing anecdotes from patients and their families. My friend Ira Byock, the great palliative care doctor and author of *Dying Well*,[6] warned in a supremely important 2022 essay that "hospice is gravely ill."[7] He identified several systematic deficiencies that he believes undermine the crucial succor that hospice is designed to offer.

Primarily, Byock worried that the increase in for-profit hospices too often does not result in the best and most humane care for dying people. He wrote:

> Today's publicly traded and private equity-owned hospice companies have a competing priority: delivering a financial return on their shareholders' investments . . . . Their aggressive tactics for recruiting patients, the higher salaries they pay, and their bare bones "high efficiency" clinical practices influence the business environment for all hospice providers.[8]

In other words, Byock believes that the proper application of hospice philosophy has been undercut by an atmosphere of intense focus on the bottom line rather than on the individual needs of patients and families.

Byock also warned about fraud and abuse seeping into the industry, for which he insisted there must be institutional "zero tolerance." In addition, he lamented that the integration of palliative care within the American health system had stalled, despite the sector demonstrating that quality care for seriously

ill and dying people is both feasible and affordable.[9]

Byock wasn't alone in expressing concern. After his essay was published, an exposé in the *New Yorker* reported that for-profit hospices had come to represent 70 percent of the field in 2019, with many companies owned by non-medical professionals with little expertise in caring for patients. Some are even owned by private equity firms:

> Under the daily-payment structure, a small hospice that bills for just twenty patients at the basic rate can take in more than a million dollars a year. A large hospice billing for thousands of patients can take in hundreds of millions. Those federal payments are distributed in what is essentially an honor system. Although the government occasionally requests more information from billers, it generally trusts that providers will submit accurate claims for payment—a model that critics deride as "pay and chase."

That consolidation and lack of accountability adversely impact care:

> For-profit hospices have been found to have higher rates of no-shows and substantiated complaints than their nonprofit counterparts, and to disproportionately discharge patients alive when they approach Medicare's reimbursement limit.[10]

Did Byock's essay and the *New Yorker* exposé bring about needed reform? Apparently not. The next year, Byock again prodded the industry that he once led. His second essay noted that the first reaction by institutional leaders to the earlier expressed concerns was defensive rather than proactively engaged:

> As a founding member of both AAHPM and NHPCO, I'm a reluctant public critic. However, patient safety concerns demand public scrutiny. Rather than responding to this public health crisis, the hospice industry is managing this as a public relations crisis. Until national hospice associations and their for-profit provider members acknowledge their part in tolerating shoddy business and clinical practices, their lobbying efforts can be seen primarily as efforts to preserve the status quo.[11]

I last spoke with Byock about his concerns on my *Humanize* podcast in 2025. I asked him if he had seen any improvement since his 2023 essay and whether the industry had established, for example, an accreditation system to allow consumers to separate the hospice wheat from the chaff. Alas, no. He told me:

> All of these years, the industry has never stood up and done that . . . . The public needs to be able to separate not only the good from the bad but the excellent from the mediocre . . . . What we have today are markets that aren't working because the criteria for excellence have been obscured. The public doesn't know. Instead, competition happens through corporate deals and bargains and discounts and affiliations that leave out competition based on quality that would help drive the healthcare industry in general and certainly my own field of hospice and palliative care toward demanding excellence.[12]

Since then, Byock has continued his push for reform. In June of 2025, he authored an extensive white paper in *Palliative Medicine Reports*,[13] noting

that among 4500 hospices, nearly 20 percent had one or more serious deficiencies and over 300 were "poor performers." In that essay, he offered a specific plan for reform, including the following four remedials:

- Publish clinical and programmatic standards. Standards provide the basis for meaningful evaluation of quality and accountability in hospice and palliative care. Without operational specificity—including minimum staffing ratios, training hours, and response times—existing published guidelines fall short of what this strategy requires.
- Make meaningful data readily available to the public. Data and measurement allow assessment of performance against published standards. Accessible, reliable, and user-friendly public-facing data enable patients, referring providers, and payers to make informed choices.
- Drive competition based on *quality.* Reorienting market success to align with measured quality of services and patient-family experience is essential. For-profit and nonprofit providers alike must compete by delivering demonstrably excellent care.
- Promote the authentic hospice experience: The field is distinguished by intentionally fostering well-being for the people it serves. In embracing this distinctive identity, hospice and palliative care can establish itself as an essential service for people with serious illness.

To which I would add: Allow people who enter hospice to also receive curative or life-extending treatment. Do that, studies have shown, and less money will be spent on end-of-life care even as more people enter hospice to receive its many benefits.[14]

The Threat to Hospice Posed by Assisted Suicide

There is another threat to the movement that receives too little attention. For the past several decades, euthanasia/assisted-suicide ideologues have worked overtime to conflate hospice, palliative care, and the medical alleviation of pain and other distressing symptoms of serious illness with intentionally ending the life of the patient. They have strived—too often successfully—to redefine homicide or the prescription of poison as "medical treatment" they euphemistically call MAID (medical aid in dying). The subversion of Saunders' philosophy posed by the legalization and normalization of assisted suicide cannot be overstated.

Helping to kill a dying patient runs directly counter to Saunders' understanding that suicide prevention, when needed, is crucial to fulfilling a hospice's call to value the lives and *equal* intrinsic dignity of each patient until the moment of natural death. Indeed, when I was trained as a hospice volunteer, my instructor pounded into my head the importance of reporting to the

hospice team any suicide threats or yearnings my patients might express so they could provide the patient with proper interventions.

But assisted-suicide advocates are determined to transform hospice into "hemlock" (as one advocate once put it), a facilitator of suicide rather than a preventer of self-killing. They believe that access to lethal prescriptions should be considered merely another menu item available for dying patients (and ultimately others) to control the time and manner of their deaths. Alas, today some suicidal hospice patients (in states where assisted suicide is legal) are facilitated in hastening their deaths rather than receiving prevention.

This conflation has been catastrophic. Advocacy for—and the increasing legalization of—assisted suicide has supplanted hospice as the apple of the media's eye. Partly this is because the media has become so besotted with "aid in dying" propaganda that there is little room left to tell good hospice stories. But I also blame institutional hospice organizations, which pretend that assisted suicide isn't a mortal threat to the movement's core philosophy. As a consequence of what can fairly be called institutional cowardice—aided and abetted by philosophical confusion—in most cases all we hear from hospice organizations about facilitated death is the proverbial sound of silence. Alas, some—though certainly not all—hospices even cooperate in helping patients kill themselves.[15]

Conclusion

As I write this essay, I reflect upon the death of my father in 1984. Dad fought the good fight against colon cancer for about two years until the day he was sitting on a hospital bed contemplating a bile drainage bag that doctors had inserted to prevent jaundice. Dad looked at the bag taped to his inner thigh and sighed deeply as his shoulders sagged. He looked up at me with an expression I had never seen before. That was it, I knew. Dad had made a momentous decision: His fight to stay alive was over.

But that was far from the end of the story. Just because dad was dying did not mean his life was over. We shifted emphasis from cure and/or life prolongation to comfort, dignity, and peace. That meant hospice, which then was still a relatively novel concept.

Dad benefited tremendously from hospice care. His last several months were peacefully pain free. He spent hours sitting on a bench in the backyard of the home in which I was raised contemplating life and surveying his beloved cactus garden. He was cared for well and compassionately by my mother and by dedicated hospice professionals, eventually slipping away peacefully in the Wadsworth Veterans Hospital hospice unit.

Fast forward to 2016. My mother was dying from Alzheimer's disease and its ancillary effects. My wife and I took her into our home and were supported in

caring for her by dedicated compassionate hospice professionals. I will never forget one of the nurses, who was from Africa, calling my mother "Miss Leona" in a cheerful voice as he examined her. Mom was thrilled with the attention. When she passed, the hospice nurse came to my home at 3:00 a.m. to certify the death so that we could begin making mom's final arrangements.

My family is not alone. The good that hospice, properly administered, has brought to the world cannot be quantified. The pain it has prevented cannot be measured. If we are to continue to value people who are dying and offer them the best of care, the hospice sector needs to defend itself from the threats posed by the assisted suicide movement and an overly money-driven attitude that Byock and others now warn has supplanted the original focus of hospice in some programs.

We had better hop to it. Treating "total pain" takes time, patience, love, and an unalterable commitment to the inherent value of each patient's life. More precisely, hospice supports *life with dignity* for its patients. Many of us and those we love will one day require these services. That makes hospice a noble cause and a moral necessity worth defending!

NOTES

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Pro Chance

Leanne Hart

This September marked my 28th Gotcha Day. Normally it is a time for cake, family dinners, and retelling the story of how, when I was 18 months old, I joined my family through adoption. But this year felt different. My husband and I are living as digital nomads on the East Coast, far from my parents and the house I grew up in.

Pausing, I breathed deep until my chest tightened and then exhaled with this thought: *I am here for a reason. God's reason.* And behind that, another reason: my birth mother's choice to give me life.

She left me in a basket by a hospital in southern China. In a country governed by the One Child Policy, her decision was quiet, unseen, and uncelebrated—but it was everything. Without it, there would be no me, no story, no life to tell.

My "Good Story"

Before I ever had a "good story" (as an adoptee who heard my account once described it), I had an orphanage story. I spent my first year and a half in an orphanage in southern China where the ratio was one nanny for fifteen babies. The women did the best they could, but an orphan learns quickly in that setting that you are on your own. Attention is scarce. Comfort is rationed. If you want to be held, you fight for it and wait your turn. That shaped me more than I realized: My independence, my drive, and my dedication were born out of necessity. People think adoption is just about the moment you join a family, but the truth is, every country, every orphanage, every policy leaves its fingerprints on us long before that. My circumstances were neither purely good nor purely bad, they just were. And they continue to make me who I am, as I am, with my family.

After adoption, I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago with loving Catholic parents and a younger sister, also adopted from China. My parents gave me the kind of home I assumed everyone had: faithful, steady, open-minded. They never treated me as different for not being biologically related.

We say often: Neither they nor I are lucky. We both won. God united us

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Leanne Hart writes from her laptop while traveling the United States as a digital nomad with her husband and their dog. She is currently working from the Eastern Seaboard, while she runs her business.

across the world and made us family.

One of my favorite quotes sums it up: "I loved you before I ever saw you, before I held you, before I knew your name. I loved you from the other side of the world, and I knew we were meant to be a family." The words, from an unknown author, speak deeply to my experience.

My parents' faith became mine. My dad had converted after meeting my mom. Together they showed me that faith was not just a tradition but a framework for life. Sunday Mass, lectoring, altar serving, choir, all gave me roots. And more importantly, they modeled that the ultimate goal is to get each other to heaven. That grounding shaped me far more than I realized.

So why do I feel like an outsider?

A few years ago, I was surprised to learn that in the adoptee culture, a "good story" can make you an outcast. Many adoptees expect the narrative of pain and abandonment. And to be fair, loss is real and valid. But because my story is one of gratitude, resilience, and faith, I was told in so many words, "You have a 'good' adoption story, Leanne, and not all of us have that."

This hurt so deeply that I could not believe what I had just heard. Not because I dismissed the pain of those with darker stories, but because mine did not fit their mold. For me, adoption was not perfection or tragedy, it was a possibility to experience life. And sometimes the possibility itself is miraculous.

The Temporary Belonging

I often think of my life in four "buckets": Chinese; adoptee; Catholic; and business owner. Each category gives me roots, but none of them feels like I can fully embrace it.

Chinese: I love honoring my heritage. For my wedding rehearsal dinner, I wore a traditional red qipao to honor my ancestors. Teachers once praised my "good English," perhaps ignorant that I was raised in the Chicago suburbs. Yet when I visit Chicago Chinatown, I'm "too Western" to be seen as fully Chinese.

Adoptee: I embrace my identity without letting it define me entirely. In 2017, I founded and led an adoptee social group in the Chicagoland and Midwest area to foster belonging and connection. After three and a half years, I stepped away because members of the leadership team were unwilling to commit to the mission of serving adoptees without regard to politics, religion, or other viewpoints. The adoptee culture can be overdone, such as the time when a friend's parents flaunted us like exotic animals to strangers in grocery store checkout lines, calling us "Chinese sisters." I've lived my whole life balancing gratitude with the frustration of being objectified. Uber drivers pressing, "But where are you *really* from?"

Catholic: My faith grounds me and I do not know where I would be without it. In first grade, my classmates voted for me to carry the banner in the May Crowning procession for our Mother Mary, because they saw me as the "most God-like." That moment still guides me. But even in Catholic circles, cultural blind spots run deep. In Catholic circles I once met a Caucasian man and his Chinese wife who ran a nonprofit orphanage in China. *Finally, people who are Catholic, Chinese, and adoptee-conscious*, I hoped. But then I noticed that his wife never spoke unless spoken to, while the man bragged about drinking with all the Chinese businessmen and making deals while his wife worked at the orphanage. Overall, meeting a traditional Catholic who appeared to have a "white knight" complex did not sit well with me.

Business Owner: I'm very thankful to have had the opportunity to become a founder at my age. I have joined Catholic professional groups and secular networking groups, led teams, and met with driven professionals all over the world. Yet too often I am first seen as different, intriguing people more than receiving their respect. I want to be seen as more than a cool story, a young woman, or the girl with great taste in fashion; I want to be seen as an equal.

Who am I, then? All of these, and yet none of them fully embraces me. Each of these categories is a piece of me, and I am grateful that each has contributed to making me who I am, but it is hard not to feel "accepted" by each group. I learned I'm allowed to embrace my identities without letting them define me entirely.

The Mustard Seed

One of the sharpest divides I've felt is between pro-life and pro-choice adoptees.

Pro-choice adoptees often frame the argument this way: *If you don't defend every other minority identity, then you're against us.* The minority identities we're pressured to embrace are many: Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ Pride, anti-religion, the list goes on. The demand for conformity is relentless. And along the way, there's an assumption that we support a woman's "right" to abortion to prevent more "bad" adoption stories.

I have noticed that some individuals want me to remove my personal values to amplify other voices—this is social justice in their eyes. I am all for everyone having their own opinion, but I have been forced out for not conforming to someone else's beliefs. I believe there is an appropriate time and space to be heard and seen, but it does not require belittling others if they do not match your belief system.

And pro-life adoptees? We are invisible. Our voices don't trend on social media. We're not "loud." We're not invited to panels. But our silence doesn't

mean we don't exist.

After my husband and I graduated from university and got married, we began praying the rosary and other devotions outside Planned Parenthood each Lenten season, and then it started to become a habit, so it carried into the summer. Last summer, I mustered the courage to break my silence by crossing the invisible line to the women volunteers in pink vests at Planned Parenthood. I listened to their stories first and acknowledged their reasoning. Then, with tears forming beneath my sunglasses, I shared mine: *"I'm adopted. I'm alive because my mother chose life in a country where that wasn't guaranteed. That's why I'm here."*

I knew I wouldn't change their minds. But I wanted them to see me as an adoptee, pro-life advocate, another woman, and more importantly a human being. I was not angry, not screaming, not holding vulgar signage, just my rosary beads clutched in one hand. I wanted to plant the seed.

"Community"

I was told the definition of community is a place to feel safe, welcome, open to learn, and free to explore new ideas. And then reality hit. It hit even harder in middle school and still challenges me as a business owner. That is the paradox of my life: My very existence is proof of a choice for life, which I am grateful for, yet I still feel alienated from these communities, some more than others.

- To adoptees, I do not have a story that is tragic enough. I am a traitor to minority solidarity, and I disenfranchise women from having a "safe abortion."
- To Catholics, I am lucky to be "saved" from my circumstances, yet being treated as less than equal feels degrading.
- To Chinese people, I am too Western.
- To business owners, I am not taken seriously as *a young, accomplished Catholic, Chinese woman.*

I am exhausted. Running a creative firm for over six years has given me chances to share my story, but also constant reminders that God is the only one sustaining me when I feel unseen.

I'm not ashamed of my story, but I need to constantly remind myself that God is behind me, supporting me every step of the way.

"Belonging"

Not every story must be extreme to be true. My adoption is not a tragedy in my eyes; it's a gift. My voice as a pro-life adoptee matters, even if it doesn't *trend*, even if it doesn't fit others' narratives.

Susan Cain, renowned author and lecturer on the power of quiet, has said that silence can sometimes be louder than constant noise. I've found that to be true. Being quiet, listening first, then speaking with conviction is stronger than you know. That's how I live and continue to speak when the time is right.

As of August 28, 2024, China has now closed international adoption. For many adoptees, it's bittersweet news. For me, it's a reminder of how rare and unrepeatable my story is. I was given not just life, but the chance at a life with God pairing me with loving parents who also wished for a family.

I may never fully "belong" comfortably in one group, but I'm learning that belonging can be overrated. What matters to me now is bearing witness to the dignity of life, to the complexity of adoption, and to my Catholic faith that holds me steady when nothing else does.

I am learning to be at peace with not belonging anywhere fully. At the end of the day, everything on earth is temporary, and my eternal belonging lies ahead.

Supporting People with Developmental Disabilities

William Van Ornum

The pro-life movement has rightly focused on protecting life before birth and has saved countless people in the process. The next essential step is to advocate for the dignity and quality of life of those same individuals after birth. Unfortunately, our advocacy for them in word and deed is less than it should be.

Prolifers are called to advocate for all human life, and among the most vulnerable to neglect, mistreatment, and disrespect are people with disabilities. How many families are affected by these conditions? According to the Institute for Exceptional Care, 16 million Americans currently live with "intellectual or developmental disabilities, representing 3 to 5 percent of the total U.S. population."[1] The community of those with developmental disabilities is a large demographic that needs our attention.

In this article, I'll explore how a clearer understanding can inform specific pro-life responses of support throughout every stage of life for individuals with developmental disabilities—from the womb, to educational opportunities growing up, to future possibilities of work and independent living.

Definitions and Labels

First, let's define developmental disabilities. Labeling people can lead to bias and prejudice, but carefully looking at characteristics of medical conditions (including developmental disabilities) can lead to greater understanding, empathy, and compassion. I offer the following descriptions of developmental disabilities with the awareness that knowledge about these is necessary if we are to make reasonable and helpful pro-life recommendations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) characterizes developmental disabilities as: "a group of conditions due to impairment in physical, learning, and behavioral areas. These conditions may impact day-to-day functioning and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. Most developmental disabilities occur before a baby is born, but some can happen after birth because of injury, infection, or other factors."[2]

William Van Ornum, a retired professor at Marist College, is on the Board of Directors of Abilities First, an agency serving people with developmental disabilities in the Mid-Hudson Valley.

Developmental disabilities include intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Klinefelter's syndrome, cerebral palsy, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome, epilepsy (seizure disorder), and autism. The programming needs of someone with a mild level of a developmental disability may cost much less than those of people with a higher level of disability. Frequently legislators and others do not realize how much the needs of those in the latter category will cost an individual and a family, especially in view of how we emphasize strengths and the similarities between disabled and non-disabled people.

Historical Abuse and Maltreatment

At the beginning of the 20th century eugenicists touted the desirability of eliminating undesirable traits from the gene pool. Now today in the early decades of the 21st century, as the CRISPR era of genetic manipulation unfolds, twisted medical science continues to try to physically change or eliminate people with intellectual disabilities, hoping to design "a better human race." Not only is eugenics frightening, but it goes beyond science itself.

Early eugenicists believed that criminal traits and what was then called "mental retardation" were correlated. A person who was deemed *mentally retarded* was therefore a likely criminal. Intelligence tests developed early in the 20th century were used to identify those with intellectual disabilities, and people within this group were often forcibly sterilized; persons with IQs of 69 and below faced losing their fertility. Some people with IQs above 69 were misdiagnosed—others with lower IQs who displayed capacity to have marriages and children may have been sterilized.

The State of California led the U.S. in eugenic sterilization, forcibly sterilizing over 20,000 people with disabilities and others deemed "unfit" or "feeble-minded" between 1909 and 1979.[3] In belated recognition of this injustice, the state launched a reparations program in 2022 to compensate survivors.[4]

Legislation Protecting Preborn Babies with Disabilities

In 2003 the 110th Congress passed the Prenatally and Postnatally Conditions Awareness Act (PL 110-374). This act provided that 1) the Director of the National Institute for Health (NIH) begin overseeing certain activities related to Down syndrome and other conditions; 2) the National Dissemination Center for Children and Disabilities be expanded; 3) national and local peer support programs be initiated; 4) a national registry of families willing to adopt newborns with such conditions be created; and 5) educational programs be initiated for health care providers who provide, interpret, or inform parents of the results of prenatal tests for such conditions. Clearly this was

important legislation with great pro-life potential.[5]

Pro-life advocates lauded the bill's potential to prevent eugenic selection of Down syndrome and other conditions. Sadly, the bill's provision requiring compliance from health care workers was afterwards removed. As of January 2025, twenty-three states had laws requiring a detailed explanation of the developmental disabilities covered by the legislation.

How did this work out in practice? In "Parents of Children with Down Syndrome Reflect on Postnatal Diagnoses, 2003-2022," a survey revealed maternal dissatisfaction with the same criteria studied in 2003—the provider conveyed the diagnosis with pity, negative aspects of Down syndrome were emphasized, and not enough explanation was provided. This legislation had not improved the kind of feedback parents received when a special needs child was born.[6]

Lack of Special Education in Private Schools

Prior to 1970, school systems lacked systematic special education procedures, and children with developmental and intellectual abilities were not guaranteed quality education. An important event spurring change was Geraldo Rivera's 1972 television exposé, "Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace."[7] This facility in New York State held between 3,000 and 4,000 developmentally disabled residents; once admitted, they usually remained there for life.

Sneaking into Willowbrook with a film crew, Rivera recorded numerous instances of abuse and neglect. With nothing to do, many people rocked or performed other self-stimulating behaviors. They sat naked on the floor, amid urine and feces. According to Rivera, the smell was so bad that he couldn't describe it.

Rivera's television program produced a public uproar that prompted New York State to legislate the Willowbrook Decree, ordering remedial actions and acknowledging the residents' constitutional right to protection from harm. Afterward, many large institutions closed, and people were placed in small residences where more supervision and more customized services were available.

Nationally, special education for children under age 21 was reorganized under Public Law 94-142, ensuring all children across the country a free, public, least restrictive placement as close to their home as possible. In schools, customized services might include a consulting special education teacher, a resource room, a small self-contained classroom, day treatment, or even residential treatment. Using a principle of inclusion, schools attempted to enroll as many children as possible with their peers, except where severe behavior problems or conditions requiring extensive support made this impossible.[8]

Over the years, many parents of children in private schools, including Catholics with children in the parochial school system, realized that their school did not provide special education services and explored ways to remedy this. One solution was for the local public school district to fund and send a special education teacher to consult in a private school classroom; sometimes a resource room was created. Because of Public Law 94-142, payment for these services came from the state through the local school district rather than from the private school.

As a society, we must continue to work to improve the offerings to families affected by developmental disabilities in the realm of private education, especially for those who want to provide faith-based education that also meets their children's intellectual needs.

Workshops: Tailoring Work Opportunities to People with Developmental Disabilities

My son William Van Ornum is a 40-year-old man with Down syndrome. He once spent his weekdays in a sheltered workshop among peers with developmental disabilities. He absolutely loved his workshop. Housed in a former warehouse, it generated a hum of activity and conversation each day. About two hundred people worked on tasks such as assembling packages, getting items ready for shipping, and completing simple factory tasks. The work involved repetitive actions, something that was calming for many of the participants. It gave them something to attend to and a sense of purpose—real work, real dignity, and real satisfaction with a socialization bonus. William talked with and had fun with his friends each day.

Workshop participants like William were paid modest wages, typically under three dollars an hour—enough to provide them with a sense of financial contribution and spending money. In addition, revenue from the assembly work could be used for the operating expenses of the program. The system emphasized community inclusion and viewed the workshop as a segregated setting, but this workshop was a community unto itself. Sometimes my friends would come along with me when I picked up William at the end of the day just to enjoy the positive environment.

Unfortunately, it's not hard to imagine how some might misunderstand these workshops and become preoccupied with how they could be abused. In 2013, New York State stopped allowing new workshops to be opened, and the workshop program ended in 2021. In 2024, New York State Senator James Skoufis and Assemblyman Philip J. Steck carried a bill in the state legislature that would end sub-minimum pay workshops. As of 2024, 16 states have banned sub-minimum wage programs for disabled workers like William.

"Wages and other opportunities should reflect the growing awareness of

what those of diverse experiences and abilities can bring to the workplace," Skoufis said. "The federal law that allowed the practice of sub-minimum wage was passed by Congress in 1938, and I think it is fair to say that our understanding has progressed since then."

While probably well-intentioned, these policy changes produced unintended consequences with serious effects on individuals with disabilities and their families. Many former workers have had trouble finding outside employment; those living at home have had nothing to do during the day, leading parents to be at risk for needing to retire early, limit their work hours, or seek help from relatives. For those who have found minimum-wage employment, there can be conflict with their Medicaid and Social Security benefits and health insurance. Medicaid recipients and those receiving Supplemental Security Income cannot have more than $2,000 to their name.[9] Further, the kinds of jobs available often lack permanency, so even if workers can find other health insurance, they risk losing it if they lose their job and can't find another.

My son was lucky. He was also eligible for a day-habilitation program, which is for people who have greater needs for supervision than the workshop alone could provide.[10] He continues to be in a program, but he misses his workshop.

I believe the public and most lawmakers were unaware of the facts of this situation. It would appear they didn't take into account what the people participating thought about the workshops or talk with any families. Doing so would have put a human face on these people for whom the workshops provided better quality of life, a sense of dignity, and self-respect.

No Right to Live with Your Family

In the United States, government agencies for the developmentally disabled have done a decent job of systemizing client rights. As I write, I have in front of me a list of 38 rights that consumers with developmental disabilities possess in New York State. Independence and self-direction drive all of these. However, gravely lacking is the right to live with one's natural family, a preferential option for many people with disabilities, but an option for which there is no significant funding source.

An operational definition of independence provided by government agencies, however, is to be living in a group home or similar placement. Beginning in high school, educators begin explaining the process of "independence" from one's family and moving into a place where such independence is possible. People with disabilities are not informed that what's actually happening is the exchange of one position of dependence for another.

Residential placement helps families in some ways and is probably the

default option for most families as their child progresses into adulthood. Participants in group homes live with their peers and develop friendships, participate in group activities, develop meaningful relationships with staff, and maintain relationships with their biological family. For parents, knowing that their child is in a permanent place allays such fears as who will take care of the child if the parents die. For many, this is a win-win situation, especially when the child sincerely desires a group home.

But if a child wants to continue living at home for a long period, at present there are limited recreation programs and opportunities for respite for family members. There are no programs where agency staff, working for and certified by the agency, can come into the home for significant hours of respite. It is impossible to obtain help from an agency or the state if a parent is sick and there is no one to provide caretaking. The state is spending millions of dollars on placement in group homes, but families lack proportional funding. Concern for the rights of families is a central part of the pro-life message. If they desire, developmentally disabled persons should have the right to live at home, with appropriate support.

Recommendations

The dignity and quality of life of developmentally disabled people falls under the direct purview of the pro-life movement. After counseling against abortion, pro-life advocates' work is not complete. There should be continuing offers of assistance for families who have chosen to raise and love their developmentally disabled child, lest prolifers merely talk the talk and not walk the walk. We know the pro-life commitment does not end at birth—so we must be willing to support and accompany these individuals and families throughout their lives. What follows are some recommendations I'd offer toward that end.

- First, consider media campaigns and live protests to make the public aware of the needs of developmentally disabled people. This approach has been very effective for other special interest groups.
- Second, write to local, state, and national legislators about laws and other issues concerning the developmentally disabled. For instance, keeping Public Law 110-374 and its imperfect results in mind, write to legislators and ask for updates and remedies.
- Third, keep up with families affected by disabilities in your community, expanding accompaniment from birth-only to "walking the walk" throughout life.
- Fourth, for those who practice a religious faith, encourage regular public prayer on this topic and full inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in church and parish activities.

We have reviewed the defining qualities of developmental disabilities as well as some areas where pro-life focus is needed: keeping the historical memory of eugenics alive; being aware of the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Act and the need for better implementation of its recommendations; bringing special education into private and parochial schools; helping the "system" support placement at home as much as it supports group homes; advocating for keeping open sheltered workshops where they have not been closed; and seeking greater support for those with disabilities who choose to live in their family homes. There are so many urgent concerns of the pro-life movement that developmentally disabled people have receded into the background. This is an inequity in the movement itself, and I think more focus on them would enrich all of us.

NOTES

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Catholic Social Teaching, Human Ecology, and the Future of the Pro-life Movement

Stephen P. White

Catholic social teaching provides a compelling and coherent account of the dignity of the human person. More than a collection of moral teachings pertaining to political, economic, and social life, Catholic social teaching provides a robust framework by which the defense of individual human lives—the unborn, the sick and disabled, the elderly, etc.—can be thoroughly integrated with broader social concerns, ranging from ecological questions, to questions about how we are shaped by our use of modern technology, to a defense of family, the rights of workers, and the dignity of human labor. In short, when properly understood, Catholic social teaching provides a framework for understanding the interconnectedness and proper ordering of the whole of human society. This makes it useful for better understanding and articulating the gamut of pro-life issues, even for those across the range of Christian churches, adherents of other religious traditions, and those not identifying with any religious faith.

Catholic social teaching is usually reckoned to begin with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*.[1] In that encyclical, Pope Leo XIII took up a careful examination of the economic, political, and social revolutions of his day. He was particularly interested in what he called "the worker question," identifying the nature of that crisis, expounding on its causes, and evaluating the various remedies on offer.[2]

In one sense, there was nothing new about the Catholic Church instructing her members regarding conduct within political or economic life. The first Christian teachings on these matters are readily found in the New Testament. Nor was there any shortage of theological reflection on such matters over the subsequent centuries. What was new was Leo's attempt to directly engage the teaching office of the Church in the particulars of a rapidly changing modern world, to bring the philosophical and theological riches of the Church's nearly two millennia to bear on the concrete and often novel challenges of contemporary life (while leaving prudential social political means of addressing these challenges to the lay citizens whose role it is to do so).

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Thus, in the words of Pope John Paul II, writing on the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Rerum novarum*, "The Pope's approach in publishing *Rerum novarum* gave the Church 'citizenship status' as it were, amid the changing realities of public life, and this standing would be more fully confirmed later on."[3] It was several decades after Leo XIII's death when Pope Pius XI began referring to Leo's teaching (and subsequent teaching from popes taking up similar themes through similar methods) as a unified and distinct body of social teachings.

In the 134 years since *Rerum novarum*, various popes have made contributions to Catholic social teaching on topics as widely varied as international relations and peace (*Pacem in terris*, John XXIII, 1963), the collapse of European Communism (*Centesimus annus*, John Paul II, 1991), the global financial crisis (*Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI, 2009), and care for the natural world (*Laudato si'*, Francis, 2015). Now, with the recent election of Leo XIV, it is widely assumed that the new pope will follow in the path of his 19th-century namesake, making his own contribution to the social doctrine of the Church with a forthcoming encyclical on the meaning and use of technology and, in particular, artificial intelligence. As he himself observed:

> There are different reasons [I chose to take the name Leo XIV], but mainly because Pope Leo XIII in his historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour.[4]

Given the wide variety of issues which come under the purview of Catholic social teaching, it can be tempting to view them as a sort of official Catholic "policy platform," a more or less coherent bundle of moral prohibitions and exhortations which have accrued over time. And debates about the proper application and understanding of Catholic social teaching often treat it in this way. The Church supports the rights of workers to be paid a just wage; she insists on a legitimate right to private property; she exercises a preferential option for the poor[5]; she opposes abortion and euthanasia; and so on. While it is true that the Catholic Church teaches all of these things—and does so with particular emphasis throughout her social teaching—to understand that social teaching as an amalgamation of "positions" on various "issues" is to risk missing the underlying coherence of the doctrine.

The Coherence of Catholic Social Teaching

The Church's understanding of the human person, and therefore her understanding of and defense of human life, neither begins nor ends with the person

as a mere individual. Catholic social teaching, before it is prescriptive, is descriptive of what it means for human beings to be social creatures, that is, creatures who come into being in the midst of, flourish in, and find their highest end in social relationships.

The dignity of the human person derives from both the origin of the human person and his or her final end: Human beings are made in the image of God and are also made for communion—with other human beings and ultimately with our Creator. For Catholics, the full dignity of the human person is ultimately revealed in the mystery of the Incarnation.[6]

The highest good of the human person, then, consists precisely in belonging to a communion of persons, that is, in sharing in the common good. In the sense of Christian theology, communion with the divine persons—the Holy Trinity—constitutes the highest good of human beings. But even in a natural sense, the greatest good of the human person cannot be conceived of properly except in reference to certain common goods (family, church, polity, etc.) by which the person is made whole and brought to perfection.

Understood in this way, the common good is not a collectivist principle in which the individual dissolves into the whole and the dignity of each person is thereby lost. Nor is the common good a utilitarian principle by which the maximum good for the maximum number of individuals is made paramount. Rather, the common good is precisely that principle by which individual persons are able to enjoy certain shared goods which cannot be attained except insofar as they are shared.

Family is one such good. So is the Church. So too, the political community. Each of these goods is fundamentally indivisible. Each strives for a particular common end or ends. Each provides some shared good or goods which could not be attained or enjoyed except insofar as they are shared. And each of these common goods—each of these societies—has corresponding rights and responsibilities according to the kind of thing it is.

This understanding of the common good not only makes sense of the excellence for which human persons are made, it provides a double defense of the dignity of human life—insisting on both the inestimable worth of every individual person while entwining the good of each person within the shared good of the entire community. A robust conception of the common good in no way diminishes the importance of the dignity of every human person; it is that dignity's surest foundation.

These two principles—the dignity of the human person and the common good—are augmented and complemented by two other principles: solidarity and subsidiarity.

Solidarity refers to both the shared sense of responsibility we feel for our

fellow human beings and to the virtue by which that sense of responsibility is put into practice. An individualistic view of the person or a view of society as a mere aggregate of autonomous individuals is incompatible with this principle. At the most basic level, solidarity recognizes and reinforces the reality that we are all more or less dependent upon others (we all begin life as utterly dependent) and so have a corresponding responsibility for others.

Subsidiarity is somewhat more difficult to understand. Sometimes treated as a principle of decentralization stipulating that things ought to be done at the lowest level of society, it is much more than that. Subsidiarity presupposes that different parts of society—such as the family, the Church, and the state, to stick with our earlier examples—differ not just in size, efficiency, or power but in purpose and ends. Accordingly, each social entity ought to recognize and respect the proper ends of each other part of society. They ought to mutually support one another when necessary, but always while respecting the proper role and autonomy of each other part. For example, following a natural disaster, the state might take extraordinary measures to provide assistance and security in affected communities. But the interventions—police presence, curfew, road closures, public aid stations, etc.—ought to be limited so as not to disrupt (or usurp) the ordinary social function of local institutions or families any longer than necessary.

These four principles make up what we might call the "fundamental principles" or "permanent principles" of Catholic social teaching.[7] They provide a framework for thinking about the human person in all the complexity and richness of our social life. Importantly, compared to a more individualistic, negative conception of human rights and freedoms—the right to be left alone, the right not to be harmed, the right not to be killed—these principles allow for a positive vision of what it means to be human and to live in society. They allow for a vision of what is best for the human person rather than merely a defense (as necessary as such a defense may be) against what is worst.

Human Ecology

In his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus annus*, Pope John Paul II observed that, just as various animal species require certain material, environmental conditions to survive, and just as these species each contribute in some way to the overall balance of the natural world, so too do human beings require particular social and moral conditions if they are to flourish. The pope worried that "too little effort is made to *safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic 'human ecology.*'" He continued, "Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the

natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed."[8]

Moreover, the natural and moral structure with which man is endowed is not extraneous to the rest of the created order, but integral to it, as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*: "The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development."[9] Here, one can begin to see just how expansive the scope of Catholic social teaching can be, extending even to humanity's exercise of dominion and stewardship over the created order.[10]

We ought to make one final point on human ecology. The social implications of humanity's interaction with creation (itself a kind of common good) extend to humanity's capacity for the manipulation and use of the material world through technology. Our use of technology not only has the potential to generate harmful effects (think of the destructive power of nuclear weapons or the problem of industrial pollution) but also shapes the way we understand ourselves and the order of creation to which we belong. In short, the way we use technology can cause us to lose sight of the dignity of the human person.

Pope Francis took direct aim at these problems in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'*, praising the advances which modern technology has made possible but also offering a warning: "Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used."[11]

Pope Francis went on,

> When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities—to offer just a few examples—it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; *everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble*, for "instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature."[12] (Emphasis added.)

This can be read as a straightforward warning about the consequences which attend a neglect of human dignity as we find it in the poor, the unborn, and the disabled. But the argument works both ways. Our indifference to nature—and especially to "the message contained within the structures of nature itself"—erodes our ability to recognize the dignity of our fellow human beings.

The point is not that, say, littering and abortion are morally equivalent. Rather, our indifference to and misuse of the material gifts of this world (through environmental degradation, misallocation of material goods, or

abuse of technology) invariably turns us back upon ourselves. Afterall, we too are bodily beings. At some point, in treating the material world as so much meaningless raw material for our manipulation and mastery, we learn (and teach) the same lesson about human beings, too. In our temptation to use people for our own purposes without regard for their own good or human dignity, we risk becoming mere materialists, in practice if not in principle. And this practical materialism is profoundly corrosive of human dignity.

"It can be said," Pope Francis writes, "that many problems of today's world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society."[13] This "technocratic paradigm," as Pope Francis called it, distorts our view of both the world around us and ourselves, teaching us to see one another and ourselves as so much material stuff, subject to manipulation by our technological mastery.

What This Means for the Pro-life Movement

What does all of this mean for the pro-life movement? What does this mean for the defense of vulnerable human life in the womb, or at the end of life?

Like any other movement, the pro-life movement must make strategic choices about what issues to prioritize and tactical choices about the most prudent way to achieve those objectives. But these choices ought to be informed by an understanding of how various issues are related and integrated. Catholic social teaching can provide a framework broad enough to do this while also affording the flexibility to adapt seamlessly to new challenges as they arise.

Rooted as it is in a comprehensive view of the human person and the common good, Catholic social teaching can provide a framework for critically assessing a whole host of pressing issues—from the development and use of new biotechnologies, to ecological questions, to the rise of artificial intelligence—integrating these concerns with a rock-solid defense of human life and opposition to abortion and euthanasia.

All of which brings us to something very like the approach described variously as a "consistent ethic of life," the "whole life ethic," or the "seamless garment" approach to life issues, many of which are derived directly from Catholic social teaching or even simply describe that teaching. Direct attacks on innocent human life—such as abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia—deserve priority attention, especially when these evils are conducted at industrial scale. This defense of life against direct threats is made stronger, not weaker, by a consistent defense of the human person in every circumstance.

For example, Pope John Paul II insisted in his 1995 encyclical in defense

of human life, *Evangelium vitae*: "Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good."[14]

A complete assessment of these various ethical approaches, the nuances and differences between them, is for another time and place. For our purposes it must be said that the great strength of these approaches is precisely in their moral consistency. Their greatest weakness in application is a tendency (or, at least a vulnerability) to imagine that since all offenses against the human person are morally related, they are thereby morally equivalent. Prudence, to say nothing of common sense, ought to be sufficient to show such moral equivalence is unsustainable—as though we cannot morally distinguish a slap to the face from a stab to the heart. We ought to value and emulate the consistency of these approaches even while rejecting false moral equivalence.

In fact, the kind of moral equivalence which fails to properly prioritize direct attacks on human life not only leaves the most vulnerable at risk, but also undermines the very consistency of witness it purports to promote. As the Catholic bishops of the United States pointed out in 1998:

> Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care . . . *But being "right" in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life.* Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the "rightness" of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community.[15] (Emphasis in original.)

Catholic social teaching, indeed moral theology generally, does not function with the precision of an algorithm, producing precise moral outputs for any given ethical inputs. Even among Catholic bishops, there have been historical disagreements about the application of Catholic social teaching to various circumstances. Prudence and sound judgment are always necessary in common life, and Catholic social teaching provides no exemption from this iron law.

Insofar as Catholic social teaching provides a realistic account of the human person in all its social dimensions, it can be a valuable resource for anyone, Catholic or otherwise, interested in mounting the most robust defense of the human person in every aspect of life.

Particularly in a post-*Dobbs* world, with new challenges to human dignity growing under various guises—from advancing euthanasia to the rise of artificial intelligence—the pro-life movement can look to Catholic social teaching for a way to frame these challenges that is comprehensive, durable, flexible, and consistent. The defense of human life and human dignity is only

made stronger when understood within the whole authentic ecology of the human person and society. Catholic social teaching provides nothing less.

NOTES

1. An encyclical is a letter circulated by a pope, usually (though not always) addressed to bishops, containing instruction in some aspect of the faith. By convention, encyclicals are usually known by the opening words of the official Latin text.
2. In brief, the cause of the crisis was a series of revolutions in politics (especially the French Revolution and the liberal revolutions of 1848), in economics (the rise of capital and the prevalence of wage labor displacing land-based wealth and agrarian economies), and the corresponding social upheaval, all made possible by new ideas and, especially, the new technologies of the industrial age. Among the inadequate remedies Pope Leo critiqued were: a doubling down on a laissez-faire approach to economics which had helped cause the inhumane conditions of workers in the first place, and socialism, which Leo foresaw would be worse than the problems it proposed to correct.
3. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, "On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum novarum*" (1991), 5.
4. Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to College of Cardinals, 10 May 2025. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250510-collegio-cardinalizio.html
5. In its simplest form, the preferential option for the poor reflects both a basic solicitude for the poor, as well as a sense of justice by which those most in material need are given priority when it comes to the distribution of material goods, just as a sick child would receive preference in the distribution of medicine.
6. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (1965), 22.
7. For a most excellent treatment of these principles and their coherence, see: Hittinger, Russell, "The Coherence of the Four Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine: An Interpretation," in *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together*, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Acta 14, Vatican City 2008. Available at: www.pass.va/content/dam/scienzesociali/pdf/acta14/acta14-hittinger.pdf
8. *Centesimus annus*, 38.
9. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, "On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth," (2009), 51.
10. See Genesis 1:28.
11. Francis, *Laudato si*', "On Care for Our Common Home," (2015), 104.
12. *Laudato si*', 117. Pope Francis here cites *Centesimus annus*, 37.
13. *Laudato si*', 107.
14. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, "On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life" (1995), 87.
15. "Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics," A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, 1998. https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/living-the-gospel-of-life

The Debate Over Whether Life Matters

Alexandra DeSanctis

It has become common in the three years since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* v. *Wade* for prolifers to describe the *Dobbs* decision as a milestone in a longer journey, and in that same time frame it has become clear that we need a better roadmap.

The pro-life movement spent decades of work and energy striving toward the goal of ending *Roe*, a goal so all-absorbing that it was difficult to plan for or even imagine what might come next. There was always a general sense that the next step in the pro-life game plan would involve legislation of the sort that was impossible thanks to *Roe*—gestational-age restrictions on abortion, parental-consent laws, and safety standards for abortion clinics, to name a few examples.

There was also a sense that a post-*Roe* country would require even more support for pregnant mothers than prolifers were already accustomed to providing. Bolstering the thousands of pregnancy-resource centers across the country would be a top priority. We would need to continue ministries such as sidewalk counseling and community support for families in need. A growing number of prolifers began advocating pro-family policy or regulatory and legal changes making it easier to marry and to welcome children.

As clear and commendable as these goals might be, however, three years in a post-*Roe* world have shown us that building a pro-life America is a far more complicated task than these strategies account for. Establishing a legal and political framework for protecting unborn children is essential, to be sure, and support for families—pregnant women in particular—will always be a crucial element of the pro-life movement's work.

But focusing on these goals cannot continue to replace grappling with and responding to the deeper cultural issues fueling abortion in America. Prolifers are fond of saying that our ultimate goal is to make abortion both illegal and unthinkable. The first part of the phrase is straightforward enough. But to understand what it might mean for abortion to one day be "unthinkable," we must better understand what makes abortion "thinkable" now.

Simply put, our ultimate goal as prolifers is to build a nation where our fellow Americans recognize that abortion is a grave evil, one that should never

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be regarded as an acceptable solution. In the same way that today we look back on the horror of slavery and wonder how such an evil was possible in our country, will American society one day look back on legal, widespread abortion and wonder how we could have allowed this atrocity? Our present work should be aimed at making that day a reality.

The ultimate goal of the pro-life movement is to establish a national consensus that abortion is a grave violation of the dignity of unborn children *and* that our entire society deserves better than abortion. We desire a world where women know abortion is too harmful to themselves and their children to even contemplate, where men view abortion as an evil that they must do everything in their power to protect women and children from. In short, our work will not be finished until we have a society that believes abortion harms all of us.

At the root of our debates over abortion is the view that while abortion may be an evil, it's one we can't do without. We shouldn't fall into the trap of believing that our primary disagreement centers on *what* or *who* is in the mother's womb: Is he a human being? Is he a person? Does he have rights? Do his rights supersede those of his mother? These top-level questions are smokescreens concealing the true dispute. Some of our fellow citizens—perhaps more of them than we'd care to admit—believe that killing innocent human beings is an acceptable trade-off for preserving our present social order.

Supporters of abortion believe that killing unborn children is acceptable if doing so seems to solve other problems—namely, the problems of adults. They believe that a host of supposed goods, foremost of which is a right to sexual autonomy, supersede the law written on the human heart instructing us that we must not kill innocents. We need look no further than the growing debate over euthanasia to see a similar belief in action. Far too many Americans believe that killing inconvenient, unproductive, or unwanted human beings can be an acceptable solution.

In this context, it is essential to grapple with abortion as, first and foremost, a cultural problem—and therefore a problem that requires a cultural response, one that addresses the problem at its very roots. Recall that when *Roe* was overturned and dozens of states passed laws to protect unborn children and increase support for families, the number of abortions in the U.S. nevertheless went *up*. Turning the tide against abortion evidently will require a great deal more than changes in law or policy. Abortion is embedded in our society. It is a symptom of a deep cultural sickness. If we want to end abortion, we have to understand the causes of that sickness, and we have to work to heal it.

Consider an analogy. I have suffered from migraines for most of my life. Readers familiar with the topic will be well aware of how difficult migraines are to diagnose and treat. Until recently, all of the doctors I'd seen had shared

the view that it is essentially impossible to understand the causes of migraine because the disease is too complicated, the triggers too unique to each patient. They are quick to sidestep questions about root causes on their way to the far easier project of pain management.

Recently, I encountered a migraine expert who takes a different approach, which she explains this way: "A migraine is like a fire alarm. It's good to help patients manage the pain of migraines. But simply treating the pain without looking for the cause is like taking the battery out of the fire alarm and thinking you've put out the fire."

It's like taking the battery out of the fire alarm and thinking you've put out the fire. This strikes me as a helpful analogy for understanding how we ought to approach the task of ending abortion. Our current strategies for reducing the abortion rate are like managing the pain of migraine. It is *good* to protect unborn children via law and policy. It is *good* to build pregnancy-resource centers and offer sidewalk counseling. It is *good* to support policies that bolster marriage and family life. But these projects are more like turning off the fire alarm than they are like putting out the fire. In other words, they don't get to the root of *why* women continue seeking abortion on such a large scale. They don't get to the root of why Americans across the country continue voting to enshrine radical pro-abortion laws. They don't help us understand and heal the cultural sickness that leads to abortion.

In what follows, I'll offer three broader thoughts for how we might come to see abortion not as a detached phenomenon but as a symptom of this deeper cultural disease, something embedded in the American psyche. Seeking this more complex understanding will enable us to think clearly about how to craft a sophisticated pro-life strategy that responds more fully to the present moment.

First, we have to understand abortion as part of a deeper network of problems created by a unique alchemy in American thought and public life. Since our earliest days as a nation—and even before that, in the adventurous, independent spirit of the colonists who settled here—we have placed a great deal of value on individualism and self-determination. But in previous centuries, those values were tempered by a shared moral understanding. In a 1798 letter, John Adams wrote, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." In other words, our government was designed to secure the rights of men and women to exercise their freedom, but freedom understood as being in accordance with morality, consistent with human nature and nature's laws.

In his 19th-century observations of America, Alexis de Tocqueville predicted that the American emphasis on individualism, taken to its extreme,

would eventually produce disconnected, isolated citizens. He understood that America's social and civic institutions, our widespread Christian piety and shared morality, and our Constitution would be the bulwarks of our country's flourishing, and to lose these would be disastrous to our shared project.

Over the past century, for a host of reasons, our fundamental love of liberty has done just that: become unmoored from the religious and moral values that once shaped our shared culture and our conception of right and wrong. As our country began to grow more secular, it also experienced the series of changes that we call the Sexual Revolution, a worldview that preached total sexual autonomy and explicitly aimed to dismantle marriage and family. A series of legal and technological changes slowly made this worldview part of everyday life: the legalization of no-fault divorce, the invention of the contraceptive pill, Supreme Court rulings such as *Griswold* and *Roe,* and consequent shifts in behavior, social mores, and public opinion. Over time, sexual autonomy became a key plank of the American conception of personal liberty.

As we lost our shared morality, Americans began to replace natural law and Christian morality with shallower principles, like the idea of consent or the harm principle, as the primary means of governing our sexual behavior. Slowly, most Americans began to believe that consenting adults should be able to act with complete license, as long as they don't harm anyone else in the process. Though they might not realize it, this is perhaps the most deeply held moral view of most Americans. We hear its echoes in common phrases such as "Live and let live" or "I can't tell other people what's right for them."

We might pause to consider why this morality doesn't protect the unborn. Does the unborn child consent to be killed? Doesn't abortion harm him? That such questions fall on deaf ears is more evidence that the Sexual Revolution has deep roots, subtly shaping how Americans conceptualize freedom. We now believe that every consenting adult deserves absolute sexual autonomy and should have access to sex with no commitment, that this access is a fundamental right. Whether or not the unborn child experiences harm isn't relevant, because we've accepted abortion as a necessary evil in order to preserve this status quo. In a debate at the University of Notre Dame a few years ago, feminist writer Jill Filipovic illustrated this mindset:

> Sometimes abortion is an act of trying to keep one's life on its same path. If I had gotten pregnant in my twenties, there is no amount of money you could have paid me to carry that pregnancy to term. There was nothing you could've offered me. If I had gotten pregnant in my twenties, I wouldn't have the career that I have. I wouldn't have my husband. I would never have met him. I wouldn't have a life that I think is beautiful and incredible and that I value a tremendous amount. If I had gotten pregnant, it would've taken my life in a completely different direction that I would not have wanted it to go in. I am tremendously grateful that I have had the ability to prevent

> pregnancy where needed and that I would've had the ability to end a pregnancy that I know would've been the wrong thing for me.

Whether they realize it or not, most Americans have imbibed this way of thinking. Acceptance of premarital sex and cohabitation has taught us that marriage is merely an optional window dressing for preexisting sexual relationships. Divorce has taught us there is no need to promise lifelong commitment even if we do choose to marry. Contraception and abortion have taught us that sex need not include the possibility of children, nor should we accept the responsibilities of parenthood even if we've already conceived a child.

Our society now rejects some of the most basic tenets once held in common: that sex has meaning and belongs in the context of lifelong commitment, that faithful and fruitful marriage between a man and a woman is good for us and for society, that mothers and fathers owe their children stability and care—and, importantly, that society and government can require us to respect these realities.

Second, we must consider how this deeper philosophy leads Americans to think about abortion as a political and legal matter. In light of these cultural shifts, we can more easily understand why the end of *Roe* didn't lead to a decrease in the abortion rate, even though it allowed for more pro-life laws. Our commitment to individualism, paired with a drop-off in religious belief and the rise of the Sexual Revolution worldview, has led Americans to adopt an incoherent set of beliefs about abortion.

Readers will know from experience that most people say one of a few things when asked about abortion. First, many say, "I wouldn't choose abortion myself" or "I wouldn't want my girlfriend or my wife to have an abortion"—but then they add, "But I can't tell anyone else that it's wrong for them." Second, when really pressed, many say, "I wouldn't want to have an abortion" or even "I don't think it's right"—but then they add, "But if I were in a tight spot, or if my girlfriend or my daughter or my friend were in a tight spot, I want abortion to be available."

We might summarize it this way: "Abortion for thee but not for me, and abortion for me if push comes to shove." This helps make sense of the contradictions in public-opinion polling on abortion. Many Americans describe themselves as pro-life but still say that abortion should remain legal. In other words, the number of Americans who consider themselves "pro-life" is far higher than the number who say abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. This is also why young Americans are more likely to identify as pro-life than older Americans but are nevertheless also more likely to say that they'd drive their friend to an abortion clinic.

Americans tend to be uncomfortable with abortion, but we still want

loopholes. We are afraid to "tell others what to do," and we're afraid to be "trapped" in parenthood ourselves. The idea of abortion as a necessary evil to safeguard adult priorities—to keep one's life on course, as Filipovic might put it—is a powerful one.

We needn't look far to see that this shallow morality applies only when it can be used to justify and protect uncommitted sex. Few people will defend drunk driving on the grounds that "we can't tell others what's right for them." We don't feel ambivalent about condemning convicted murderers or rapists. Virtually no one believes it's okay for a man to shoot his dog in the backyard because he's gotten sick of caring for it. But when it comes to unborn children, Americans fear we have no business telling others abortion is wrong, not least because we suspect we'd like to have the same escape hatch available to us or our loved ones. We know in our hearts that it's wrong, but we suspect it's necessary to protect our way of life.

The unique alchemy produced by our fundamental need for liberty, paired with the fallout of the Sexual Revolution, has shaped a society in which we believe we are owed sex with no consequences, with maximal self-determination—and abortion is the unpleasant price tag for all that freedom. We have come to believe, in short, that we must be allowed to opt out of the responsibilities that come with sex, even if doing so requires killing another human being.

This helps illuminate why, since *Dobbs,* over and over again, Americans have headed to the ballot box to preserve legal abortion, including in states we might think of as pro-life. Nearly 20 times in the past three years, states have considered abortion-related ballot measures, and in nearly every case, a majority of voters opposed pro-life measures or embraced pro-abortion ones.

Pro-life groups have been quick to blame these losses on having been outspent by the pro-abortion lobby or overwhelmed by media bias. While these factors certainly make a difference, we simply must be willing to dig deeper. The primary reason for these results is that most Americans have embraced an unspoken creed: "Abortion for thee, because your sexual behavior isn't my business. And abortion for me, if push comes to shove, because I deserve to control my own future." The pro-life movement will only be treading water until we are courageous enough to acknowledge and address these deeper roots of our political problems.

Finally, we must embrace the reality that making abortion "unthinkable" will require not just arguing *against* abortion but also offering a *positive* vision about the goodness of human life and the way we ought to live. Since *Dobbs,* prolifers have been fond of saying that our ultimate goal is to build a pro-life culture. But relatively little manpower has gone into considering

what this really means and how it might be accomplished. If abortion is a symptom of deeper sickness, we can't merely decry it as evil. We must offer a positive, attractive worldview that can heal the cultural disease of which abortion is but one symptom.

At the deepest level, our society believes abortion is acceptable because we've come to believe that life isn't good. In his 2024 book *Family Unfriendly*, Tim Carney quotes from a number of his interviews with Americans about why they've chosen not to have children. In one conversation, a woman shared a sentiment that appears several times throughout the book's interviews: "In general, do I think people are good? No, I don't. I think we're the cancer of the Earth."

Far too many Americans believe that the universe exists by accident, that human existence is directionless and therefore meaningless save for whatever meaning we might create for ourselves. Thanks to the disintegration of the family brought about by the Sexual Revolution, we have generations of people bereft of that belonging, direction, and purpose that we all need, left to believe that life has no meaning other than whatever meaning we can construct for ourselves. To such a mindset, hedonism becomes quite appealing. If all we have is here and now, we'd better look out for ourselves and enjoy ourselves as much as possible. We can see the people around us living in the existential sadness that comes with believing that the entire world is about *me*, that its meaning is entirely manufactured by *me*, and that my happiness is directly proportionate to how often I get what I think I want.

It should come as no surprise that such a society has embraced abortion and won't let go. If human beings have no ultimate destiny beyond life on earth, there is little reason to consent to being called out of ourselves to care for the vulnerable. Commitment and responsibility require self-sacrifice, belief in a higher good than my own self-interest.

Even in the wake of *Dobbs*, striving to reduce the abortion rate through law and community support remains an uphill battle. But we have still harder work to do. Pro-life Americans must learn to speak to the deep longing in every human heart to believe that we are loved and that life is worth living. We have to begin to see the abortion problem, and therefore the pro-life project, as embedded in a deeper debate over whether human life matters, whether we were created out of love by a good and loving God and destined for a life beyond this one. In a post-*Roe* America, this is what each of us is called to do—not just to find ways to end abortion but also to help those around us come to believe that every life, unborn or otherwise, is a gift.

Modern Antinatalism:

Against Life, Against Humanity

Jason Morgan

There are more than eight billion people in our world. It would seem, based on the overwhelming evidence, that any notion that life is hateful and that no more human beings ought to be born has been thoroughly rejected. Births are obviously not a rare event. Human beings, on average, don't find being alive so burdensome that they wouldn't wish the same on anyone else, including those yet to be born.

And yet, despite the sheer number of people on the planet, philosophies against birth, against life, against the sheer fact of human existence, have long been a planetary phenomenon. The raw material for this way of thinking comes directly from life itself. Each of us has probably reflected at some point that to be born is to be condemned to suffer, because suffering (including the pain of giving birth to children) is the lot of humankind. From papercuts to pancreatic cancer, from headaches to toothaches, and from the sadness of loss to the pain of separation, to be a person is to realize, day in and day out, that perfection and bliss are not features of human existence. Add a little navel-gazing to humanity's perennial griping about the burdens that the living must bear, and, voilà, you have anti-procreationist philosophies almost à la carte. Pretty much anyone with a backache and some free time will eventually hit on the idea that the pageant of human suffering could be avoided if only people would stop reproducing.

And so things have continued age to age, each new generation of humans breaking anew on the rocks of life and rediscovering the philosophy of woe. In Sophocles' (ca. 497/496-406/405 BC) tragedy *Oedipus at Colonus,* the play's eponymous anti-hero cries out that he was "born to misery, as born I was." The Chorus does not give Oedipus false hope on this score: "Not to be born is, beyond all estimation, best; but when a man has seen the light of day, this is next best by far, that with utmost speed he should go back from where he came," they proclaim. This was all already probably a cliché in Sophocles' day. Search where you will in history, you will almost always find someone who has thought himself into a sour corner concerning the misfortune of his having been born. For instance, in the tenth and eleventh centuries a poet named Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān, better known as al-Ma'arrī (973-

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1057) was complaining about his lot (he was blinded by smallpox at a young age and did not get along well with his literary patrons). He is often compared to the Biblical figure of Job, who may be the gold standard worldwide when it comes to wishing, at least in fits of frustration, that one had never been born.

But although many in every culture and century have said that human life is hard and that being born is a tragedy a swift death can undo, there is something new in the philosophy of anti-existence. The twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of what is better called "antinatalism." Antinatalism is perhaps best defined by philosopher Thaddeus Metz, who describes it as "the view that procreation is invariably wrong to some degree and is often all things considered impermissible." Writing in 2012, Metz continues: "The variant of anti-natalism that has interested philosophers in the past 15 years or so includes a claim about why [procreation] is morally problematic, namely, that potential procreators owe a duty to the individual who would have been created not to create her, as opposed to already existent people who would be wronged by her creation." This goes far beyond Oedipus' whining. What many antinatalists are saying is that it is not just inconvenient to be born or better to put oneself out of one's misery, but that it is morally wrong to give life to another person—that human existence, period, is morally indefensible.

In 2006, a South African philosopher named David Benatar published a systematic, well-argued presentation of the antinatalist position in *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence*. Benatar's main argument, summed up in the title, rests on what he calls the "asymmetry" between pleasure and pain. Simply put, the person who has never existed will have missed out on whatever pleasures and pains he or she would have experienced in his or her life. This is not an even-steven equation, Benatar wants us to understand. Being born and thus experiencing pain (as all sentient creatures do) outweighs any ameliorating effect of also experiencing pleasure. Not being born, and forgoing pain, outweighs forgoing whatever pleasures one might also have known, had one existed. In other words, pleasure and pain do not hang equally in the balance when one considers whether someone should or should not exist. Pain always outweighs pleasure, and therefore the balance is in favor of not existing. This is the "asymmetry" part of Benatar's thinking. "There is a crucial difference," Benatar writes, "between harms (such as pains) and benefits (such as pleasures) which entails that existence has no advantage over, but does have disadvantages relative to, non-existence."

Japanese philosopher Masahiro Morioka distinguishes antinatalism from anti-procreationism, which he sees as being more strictly against human beings' giving birth to children. This view, as Morioka reports, is most succinctly transmitted in a 2006 book by a Belgian author named Théophile de Giraud,

L'Art de guillotiner les procréateurs: Manifeste anti-nataliste. In making this distinction, Giraud lays out in detail a line of argument that other contemporary students of anti-life philosophies have also argued, maintaining that much of early Christian writing can be read as advocating against the bringing of children into the world. According to him, anti-procreationism is not just a foreign or pagan obsession, but something that infiltrated Christendom, at least in the early years of the Church. Giraud enlists in his argument the nineteenth-century thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), whom he describes as "convinced that Christianity is radically incompatible with procreation." In a translation from volume five of Kierkegaard's journals from 1854-1855, Giraud quotes Kierkegaard as declaring that "It was obvious in the eyes of Christ that the Christian should not get married."

In addition to Job's example cited earlier, Giraud conscripts seeming allies from both the Old and New Testaments, including Jeremiah, Ecclesiastes, and Christ himself pausing on the way to his crucifixion to advise the weeping women, "The days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'" (see Luke 3:28-31). Giraud goes on to reference such proponents of virginity and celibacy as the Church Fathers St. Jerome (ca. 342/347-420), St. John Chrysostom (347-408), and St. Augustine (354-450), agreeing with St. Augustine's wish that everyone would "abstain from all intercourse" so that "the city of God would be filled much more speedily, and the end of the world would be hastened."

Is it true that Western civilization and even Christianity are riddled with anti-life thinking? At first glance it would certainly seem so. If we jump centuries ahead from St. Augustine's time, we find German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who was profoundly influenced by a Buddhist anthropology of suffering and release. Like Kierkegaard and Giraud, Schopenhauer sees the early Christians as facing squarely the brutal facts of human existence. Researcher Christopher Janaway writes that Schopenhauer

> analyses Clement of Alexandria's [(ca. 150-ca. 215)] discussion of sexual abstinence and rebuts his criticism of earlier views that are considered heretical—Gnostics, Marcionites, and others. Clement 'accuses the Marcionites of finding fault with Creation . . . since Marcion teaches that nature is bad and made from bad materials . . . ; and so we should not populate the world but instead refrain from marrying.' Clement's grounds are that this shows 'gross ingratitude, enmity, and rage against the one who made the world' [. . .]. But, for Schopenhauer, . . . it is these earlier ascetic positions that are *genuinely* Christian. Likewise in modern times, Protestantism is aberrant, for Schopenhauer, because in eliminating asceticism it has 'already abandoned the innermost kernel of Christianity' and turned into a 'comfortable' and 'shallow' rationalism, which, he boldly states, 'is not Christianity' [. . .].

Even in what he sees as the twilight of Christendom, Schopenhauer embraced a kind of Christian-themed anti-procreationism, or maybe even a proto-antinatalism, although these, being rooted in the Bible and the early Church, were necessarily not nihilistic rejections of human life as having no meaning.

Things changed after Schopenhauer, who influenced a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German writing anonymously under the pen names Kurnig and Quartus. "Mankind will never achieve the blissful life once dreamed of by the Greeks," Kurnig wrote in 1903.

> Rather, the most important thing will remain to be: getting through with as little pain and suffering as possible. Thus we are to procreate as little as possible in order to keep as small as possible, and to continually diminish, the number of sufferers. [. . .] Mankind [must be prepared] for an exodus from existence, as imagined by the saints in the religious sphere.

In the same publication Kurnig writes, "With increasing intelligence, mankind comes to realise that, all in all, suffering far outweighs pleasure, that it must stop procreation and must do so as soon as possible. Thus: NEO-NIHILISM."

This "neo-nihilism" comes through in big, booming chords in much of nineteenth century literature and philosophy, sometimes with defiant dithyrambs to life-force in the face of what some thinkers saw as the emptiness of human existence. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) took, in many ways, an opposite view to Schopenhauer, seeing life not as a burden but as an almost riotous bounty, although set within a meaningless and disenchanted universe in which values would have to be created by human willpower in the place of defunct revealed religion and its Author.

The various strains of nihilism espoused by Schopenhauer, Kurnig/Quartus, and Nietzsche seem almost uplifting compared with what was to follow in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, Argentinian philosopher Julio Cabrera published work in 1989 on "negative ethics," an "ethics of borderlines," as Cabrera puts it, which operates from such premises as that "the positive value of human life is neither obvious nor evident and should be proved by arguments" (which Cabrera finds unconvincing) and that humans should never procreate, as doing so puts others "in the structural discomfort of terminality via unavoidable manipulation." What Cabrera means by the latter phrase is that everything and everyone in the universe is bound for destruction ("terminal") and this, being unavoidable, is "structural," so that bringing new life into such a predicament—"manipulat[ing]" babies into existing—is to produce unwarranted and indefensible "discomfort," an unethical thing to do. Cabrera's structural, meta-ethical critique of the very fact of human existence is several steps beyond the gloomy anti-procreationism of the nine-

teenth-century Germans and Dane. What we find in Cabrera's negative ethics is a prelude to Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been*.

Benatar, unlike earlier anti-procreationists, has very little to say about Christianity, or about religion in general. However, it is important to return to the religious angle of anti-procreationism, and to fill in the gap in Christendom between the radical early years of Jesus of Nazareth's movement, including the way in which His followers prepared for His Second Coming (up to several centuries following His Resurrection), and the "death of God" fallout which Nietzsche and many other modern thinkers noticed and often welcomed. When we jump ahead from the early Church to Arthur Schopenhauer, what are we missing in the story of anti-procreationism?

The rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire paralleled the multifaceted unraveling of Roman rule. Early Christians who called for keeping new human beings out of our vale of tears were informed not just by the promises of salvation which Christianity offered, but also by the social chaos all around them. As Christianity took hold and took root, though, this chaos largely abated. A new vision of society emerged. The long centuries of settled Christendom were marked, especially during the Middle Ages, by the social kingship of Christ, to use a much later phrasing. Heaven had not been dragged down to earth, but there was, for many, an understanding of the universe as being inside a Catholic Mass. The proper disposition of the world and of man within it was one of peace. Within this peace flowered community, belonging, the joining together of many men and women into one—one cosmic whole regularly referred to as the Body of Christ. The Gospel message that most of us have heard in Mass is not the antinatalist one, not the one in which Jesus is portrayed as having railed against the horrors of being born. Rather, the Gospel message most Christians know is one of sacrifice and radical love. Jesus' death on the Cross was both of these. His Passion was the example for all to follow forever.

Imagine, to put it another way, if Jesus had never existed. "Oh, happy fault," Christians have sung, celebrating the fall of Adam that precipitated—disaster calling forth grace—the birth, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer. This metaphysical linking of one man's life and death to, in time, untold billions of others was the heart of Christendom. It also echoed in a communitarianism that typified the Christian countries. "Better never to have been" makes no sense at all when everyone is part of a family, a village, a cosmic order. As the turmoil of falling Rome gave way to the relative peace of Christian Europe, men and women became knit together in social and spiritual ways that placed strong limits on whatever anti-procreationist theorizing some down-in-the-mouth philosopher might have espoused. One

could not be against humans, because each human life, by Christian definition, had meaning *sub specie aeternitatis*. In a Christian world, one's life is not one's possession to dispose of as one pleases. Likewise, other lives are not one's playthings, to be called forth or culled according to local circumstances. Each life was necessarily tied to everyone else's, including those who had gone before us. In the economy of grace, all lives matter, interconnectedly and infinitely so, for all eternity.

By contrast, and emerging long after the end of Christendom, Benatar's premise—and that of most modern antinatalist and anti-procreationist writing—is individualism, the idea that the existence or non-existence of any one person has no substantial bearing on the lives of others. If all we are is individuals, and if the standard applied is pleasure and pain—and if, as Benatar puts it, pleasure and pain are asymmetrical, pain being a far worse "bad" than pleasure is a good "good"—then it follows that non-existence is the only good option. Benatar states flatly that "nobody is disadvantaged by not coming into existence," by which he means that if someone does not exist, then he or she is not there to suffer the consequences of not existing. But this perspective is (unwarrantedly I think) limited to the individual who does or does not, theoretically, come into being. However, each life, whether welcomed or not, changes every other life to some degree. There are no individuals in the sense of fully independent human beings whose lives neither affect anyone else's nor are affected by those of others. We are bound to one another, beholden to one another. The absent leave holes in our world. A baby deemed better never to have been does not simply not exist. He or she is an ache in his or her mother's heart, a pang of grief and remorse in his or her father's soul. Benatar dedicates his book to his parents and his brothers. This is not ironic or contradictory. It is just the rest of the story, the complement to the thought that flits through everyone's head sometimes that it would better if we had never seen the light of day. However, as Benatar readily acknowledges, if everyone were to follow this logic, then the human race would inevitably choose not to have been, or, as one scholarly critic of Benatar's put it, to "return whence we came." But we know better. We know that not having been is not better for anyone. Suicide notes are testimonials to the fallacy of individualism.

In a section on the consequences of steadily reducing the human population, Benatar takes into account the costs to existing people if not enough new people are born. If Adam and Eve were the only people ever to exist, Benatar postulates, and if Adam had died, widowing Eve, then Eve, the only human alive, would experience a "reduced [. . .] quality of life" because the population had "fallen beneath some threshold—in this case the threshold

necessary for company. Had [Eve] had children she would at least have had some human company after Adam's death." In this way, Benatar does differentiate between an individual qua individual and an individual "*sub specie humanitatis*." "A life devoted to the service of humanity [. . .] can be meaningful, *sub specie humanitatis*, even if, from the perspective of the universe, it is not," Benatar writes. "Other lives, though, such as that of the man who devotes his life to counting the number of blades of grass on different lawns, would lack meaning *sub specie humanitatis*." But Benatar concludes that both kinds of lives are "meaningless [. . .] from the perspective of the universe."

Human lives may or may not be "meaningless [. . .] from the perspective of the universe." But the universe is not at issue here. Human lives are. And human lives most certainly are not "meaningless" to other humans. Recently I have been following the story of a young woman named Grace Schara, who died in a hospital bed in Appleton, Wisconsin, in October 2021. Grace's parents later sued the hospital, arguing that Grace, who had Down syndrome, deserved to live but was not given the medical care necessary to allow her to continue doing so. Grace's life was not an isolated event the ending of which affected no one. Would it have been better if Grace Schara had never existed? The answer is emphatically, "No."

One article about the trial following Grace's passing included a photo of a banner with Grace's picture on it, held aloft by her bereaved father, Scott, and emblazoned in part with the words, "His light shined through her. Light overcomes darkness. John 1:5." Scott explains that out of the tragedy of his daughter's passing some good is coming into the world, since God has called him and others to share uncomfortable truths about how hospitals in the United States treat patients with disabilities. "Grace's death has not been in vain," Scott says. "She has woken up tens of thousands of people through her death. It is awesome to be part of this process." If Grace had never been, her father would probably have lived a very different life. Whether that life would have had more or less pleasure, more or less pain, is almost certainly irrelevant to Scott Schara. What he wants, what Grace's family want, is to have Grace back in their lives. Grace touched thousands, possibly millions, both because of her living and because of her suffering and dying. The computation, for every human life, is not in *what* is lost or gained, but in *who* is lost or gained. The human person is always in community, and the meaning of a life is never reducible to a Kantian individualism.

Grace would have been aborted by many couples in the United States today for whom "better never to have been" means "You are a burden to me, and to yourself, and to everyone." However, that is a noxious lie. And it is one best countered by an embrace of all human persons, without distinction.

The antidote to antinatalism and anti-procreationism is the same as that to contraception mentalities, namely, love, especially as articulated by the late Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) in his meditations on what it means to be a human being. "The longing for true happiness for another person, a sincere devotion to that person's good, puts the priceless imprint of altruism on love," the pontiff wrote. "But none of this will happen," he warned, "if the love between a man and a woman is dominated by an ambition to possess. [. . .] *Love develops on the basis of the totally committed and fully responsible attitude of a person to a person*." Pope John Paul II is speaking here of the differences between love and eroticism, between sensual pleasure and devotion to another human being, but his words apply equally to antinatalism. "The world of existences is the world of objects," the late pope writes,

> amongst them we distinguish between persons and things. *A person differs from a thing in structure and in degree of perfection*. To the structure of the person belongs an 'interior,' in which we find the elements of spiritual life, and it is this that compels us to acknowledge the spiritual nature of the human soul, and the peculiar perfectibility of the human person. This determines the value of the person. A person must not be put on the same level as a thing.

Benatar, and Thaddeus Metz, situate some arguments for antinatalism in humans' lack of "cosmic meaning." But the cosmos, the physical universe, is not where our meaning lies. If that tree, or that rock, or that planet's moon had never existed, well, nobody would have noticed, and nobody would have cared. Both *sub specie aeternitatis* and *sub specie humanitatis*, whether this or that thing did or did not exist is essentially meaningless. People, however, are different. People don't just exist or not exist. Our relations with others are rooted in, premised upon, the unrepeatable interiority and futurity of others. The non-being of others is not a zero-sum equation. People who should be there but who, for whatever reason, were deemed better never to have been born are not ciphers but black holes, gravity fields into which fall the might-have-beens of countless other lives in perpetuity. The logic of "pro-choice" is that it makes no difference which choice we make, but every moment of our human experience screams out the contrary—that the other is our everything, that I must have you so that we can exist together.

If only more of us had listened to the teachings of Pope John Paul II. Antinatalism has become not just a minor sub-field of philosophy and theology but a common topic in scholarly and popular writing today. If anything, antinatalism is the tenor of our age. The prejudice against the mere existence of other people is, ironically, the shared ground of our lives together. The year 2020 was declared the year of the "COVID baby bust." But this dearth of babies was not attributable solely to the novel coronavirus. As researcher

Jenna Healey reminds us, "childfree activists Ellen Peck and Shirley Radl founded the National Organization for Non-Parents (NON), the first organization dedicated to defending the rights of the 'childless by choice,'" more than fifty years ago, in 1972.

Long before that (see for example the writings of novelist Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), the specter of preferable non-existence often peeked into Western civilization. In an essay, Thaddeus Metz, a frequent philosophical sparring partner of David Benatar, references Paul Ehrlich's 1968 book *The Population Bomb*. Contemporary discourse is also awash in transhumanist thinking, with many viewing technology as a way to escape the human race's fate of suffering. "My destiny / Is clear to me / Alternative / Reality," writes a techno-antinatalist going by the pen name of "No One's Job." Antinatalism is increasingly a topic of research and concern elsewhere, too, such as in Russia. The People's Republic of China recently concluded a decades-long nightmarish experiment in draconian restrictions on human fertility. Back in America, and attempting, apparently, to outdo the PRC's One Child Policy with a No Child Policy of its own, Planned Parenthood is antinatalism mechanized, systematized, and perpetuated by endless taxpayer dollars. Academic journals are also home to much antinatalist writing, such as Paddy McQueen's 2019 essay "A Defence of Voluntary Sterilisation," in which McQueen recommends "challeng[ing] pronatalist discourses that portray a child-free life as necessarily less fulfilling than parenthood."

There is even a literary genre that might best be categorized as antinatalist. Take, for instance, *Tractatus Logico-Suicidalis*, a heartbreaking book written by Swiss writer Hermann Burger (1942-1989). The English translation bears the subtitle "On Killing Oneself," and that is precisely the book's theme. *Tractatus Logico-Suicidalis* is the aphoristic diary of a man who argues against his own existence, often sarcastically and sardonically. "I and I alone am master of this highest of all sufferings: death, killing, and being killed," Burger writes. "Me, not some malignant tumor." To which he adds, as an afterthought: "I am the most malignant tumor of all." In *Tractatus* Burger makes frequent mention of Emil Mihal (E.M.) Cioran (1911-1995), another diarist of self-doom whose notable works include *The Trouble with Being Born*. Cioran's 1973 volume is virtually an ode to both self-eradication and, paradoxically, individualism. "The right to suppress everyone that bothers us," Cioran writes, "should rank first in the constitution of the ideal State." Even Cioran, though, cannot help but let slip the mask of aloofness from time to time. "She meant absolutely nothing to me," he writes. "Realizing, suddenly, after so many years, that whatever happens I shall never see her again, I nearly collapsed. We understand what death is only by suddenly remember-

ing the face of someone who has been a matter of indifference to us."

Antinatalism is a modern phenomenon, then. One might even call it our most pervasive modern plague. But the antinatalism that has confronted us lately in the United States is worse than an infectious disease. It is a celebration of death itself. In many ways this is not new, as antinatalism in America has often carried dark racialist and eugenicist connotations, many of which remain at least partially in view today. The rising popularity of the term "reproductive negligence," however, indicating a tort claim against parents for the wrong of having been brought involuntarily into the world, reveals the spreading influence of antinatalist ideologies that go beyond even the anti-human horrors of our past.

Readers may remember the May 17, 2025, bombing of a fertility clinic in Palm Springs, California. This kind of murderous nihilism—applied antinatalism, one might call it, or perhaps "honest antinatalism" is better—lies along the demonic frontier of American antinatalism in our time.

The California terror attack was the work of one Guy Edward Bartkus (1999-2025), who committed suicide in the blast while also injuring four other people and endangering many more. Puzzled as to why someone would blow up a fertility clinic, I began researching the Palm Springs bombing and learned that Bartkus subscribed to an idea known as "efilism," from "life" spelled backwards, an ideology dreamed up by a man named Gary Mosher. Bartkus was not the only person to resort to harming others in pursuit of Mosher's twisted efilism ideology. In April 2025, the *Long Beach Post* reports, "27-year-old Sophie Tinney was found shot to death in her bed in Pierce County, Washington. Tinney's boyfriend, Lars Eugene Nelson, 29, was charged with second-degree murder. 'The victim may have convinced the defendant to shoot her in the head while she was sleeping,' Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Dalton Smith told the Pierce County Superior Court. Bartkus appears to have been close friends with Tinney. [. . .] A Tumblr account linked to Tinney described the account owner as an efilist."

Other media outlets are also becoming aware of how nefarious efilism is. *The New Republic*, for instance, reported in May 2025 on the "dark, nihilistic philosophy behind the IVF clinic bombing" in Palm Springs. *The New Republic* also noted that the "manifesto" Bartkus left behind before carrying out his terrorist bombing referenced Adam Lanza, "the 20-year-old Sandy Hook shooter who [. . .] espoused a bleak, antinatalist worldview. [. . .] 'I think that you should say, "I'm so sorry for your loss," whenever you hear that someone is pregnant,'" *The New Republic* quotes Lanza as having written. Bartkus agreed with these views. Robert Westman, the Minneapolis man

who carried out a hateful attack on children at Annunciation Catholic School in August 2025, referenced Lanza in his own manifesto, and was also "linked to online dark extremist groups fixated on nihilism," among which were satanic networks and "No Lives Matter."

These movements, and the anti-human ideologies that underlie them, are spreading rapidly in the United States. In December 2024, *The New York Times* carried a story about a Virginia man named Brad Spafford, on whose Norfolk-area farm the FBI found "the largest cache of 'finished explosive devices'" ever discovered in the history of the Bureau. Investigators also found pipe bombs "stuffed in a backpack that bore a patch shaped like a hand grenade and a logo reading '#NoLivesMatter.'" A March 2025 article in *Wired* describes No Lives Matter as a "splinter group" of "the network of young sadists, misanthropes, child predators, and extortionists known as Com and 764," whose members' works include "online extortion[, . . .] crimes related to child sexual abuse material[, . .] knifings, killings, firebombings, drive-by shootings, school shootings, and murder-for-hire plots in North America and Europe." No Lives Matter, *Wired* continues, quoting the group's manifesto, "'idolizes death' and 'seeks the purification of all mankind through endless attacks.'" No Lives Matter's affiliates, Com and 764, are satanist groups so pervasive in America that federal authorities "have come across related cases [i.e., related to Com and 764] in every field office in the US." Peter Savodnik of *The Free Press* wrote that the kinds of people who, like Minneapolis gunman Robert Westman, go on rampages out of a "conviction that life is meaningless; that words like truth, justice and God are empty slogans; that everything must be razed" are so common now that in 2025 "the FBI introduced a new category of criminal: the Nihilistic Violent Extremist, or NVE. [. . .] NVEs kill simply because they want to kill."

Benatar would of course disavow all of this. He does not call for violence and is in fact explicitly against it. In his work he stresses that humans often kill one another, citing this as one reason not to bring people into the world and risk suffering violent crimes. Most philosophy-department antinatalists seem to share Benatar's moral convictions. Indeed, being against suffering is what motivates this kind of highbrow antinatalism in the first place.

But there is a contradiction at the heart of antinatalism that undoes whatever ostensibly noble motives might lead one to believe that human life should not be. Opposing murder is certainly laudable, but it does not follow from "Thou shalt not kill" that "Thou shalt not give birth." It is true that humans do unspeakable things to one another. And yet, our inhumanity does not invalidate our interconnectedness. Murder does not erase our shared humanity. Rather, it is a futile attempt to deny it. Because of people like Robert Westman, Adam Lanza, and other anti-human terrorists who think that human

beings are better off not having existed, there are parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends who grieve for lost loved ones. Non-existence is not a calculation that can be made in a vacuum. Our lives are not our own. We live and die for the other. Human beings have always known that life is hard and that suffering is the lot of all who see the light of day. But almost all of us have chosen to live anyway. Not because we expect the pleasure that might await us to cancel out some of our pain. But because there are others whose certain pain, should we no longer exist, stays our hands and opens our hearts once more to the gift of life we have been given.

NOTES

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The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of

Peter Pavia

The setting was the East Village in the mid-1990s, and we were just two of the many writers you could have conked if you threw a rock in any direction. We had washed out of the arts and culture scene of the previous decade, and although we didn't know each other then, we were familiar with the personalities who had basked, for a time, in the underground celebrity of those heady days.

Writers made up my circle, young-ish men and a couple of women too, who chattered about titles and headlines between ordering drinks, which sure beat languishing at a desk trying to come up with something somebody might want to read. The big-boned loud talker accompanying me had nine unpublished manuscripts, I had one and was halfway through another, yet we were convinced the pot of gold would be ours as soon as a few conflicts got resolved in our favor. Prizes. Awards. We'd live like mini-Hemingways—expatriates, bullfights, all of that. Insisting I get a preview of his current bestseller in progress, he pressed upon me a hundred or so pages stuffed in one of those old inter-office mail envelopes with the holes in it.

Back home, I had a look. There wasn't much of a plot in what he'd written: a memoir masquerading as a novel whose drugged-out main character, too wounded by this world to carry on, eventually takes a dive from a high floor of some hotel. What came across wasn't sensitivity but self-indulgence; my friend, who had known this tortured soul, cared more about his story than any reader ever would or could. I knew a number of those guys, none of them worth writing a book about. They're dead, too.

In those waning days of the 20th century, I was dating a lovely girl. Overcoming an initial indifference to my many charms, or maybe a reluctance to take me seriously, she finally accepted the bartender who thought he was a writer, and we married in 1999. There's a picture of Mr. Nine Unpublished Manuscripts and me at the reception, wearing the finest suits we could afford, basking in a mutual glow, relishing the prime of life. The snapshot lives among my treasures.

Between weddings—mine and not long afterwards his—my friend cranked out more sentences. Another manuscript found its way to my desk. This novel

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was different, signaling the advancement of a literary consciousness and a recognition of the author's own strengths. But it did bear a startling similarity to a now-famous book by a then-esoteric author we both admired, and I assumed any serious publisher would dismiss it on those grounds.

Au contraire. He sold the book for what seemed to me a princely sum. A movie deal for even more money followed, and when he gave me the news, lights blinked at the edges of my peripheral vision. There was a buzzing in my ears. I was so sick with envy I came close to passing out.

No one's success diminishes me. Nor does another's failure enrich me. I know that, and I knew it then. I tried to be happy for my friend, and to manufacture some gratitude for all that I had, which, big picture, was and is more than most people ever have here on earth. "Dude," he said, sensing my ambivalence, "I felt like we were standing side by side, and I got struck by lightning."

Months passed. I sweated out a crime novel on a Royal typewriter, 300 coffee-ringed, tear-stained pages that soon commanded pride of place—under the vacuum cleaner in a closet. And then I got a call from somebody who said, "I heard you wrote a book I should read."

Thus was born what I've come to appreciate as My Little Crime Story That Could, which ended up selling about ten thousand copies. Not bad. Soon after I struck a deal for a true-crime-as-history account of a murky chapter in the American story. When I was working on it and people asked what I was up to, I would proclaim I was "taking history back from the Left." Something of a love letter to the men of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, the book was panned by a progressive trade publication. To be fair, I picked this fight; they brought it to me.

My friend by that point was riding, if not high, then mid-altitude on the West Coast. He congratulated me, and provided a thoughtful blurb for the book, but warned, "Whatever they do for you"—meaning the publisher—"it isn't going to be enough." He was right. I solicited marketing help from a boyhood schoolmate who was running a boutique PR firm, and got it, free of charge. A reading he arranged scored a "community calendar" hit on local TV news, and I was interviewed during a drive-time radio program. I made a handful of in-bookstore appearances, one in Miami, where the book is set, for a polite audience of 50 souls.

Meanwhile my friend brought out a second novel, which by my lights drew a specious equivalence between two brothers, one chanting slogans and carrying signs objecting to the combat missions that the other, an army colonel, was prosecuting in Iraq. Naturally, *The New York Times* loved it, but very few people bought the book, and even fewer read it.

You get one bite at the apple in the writing racket, maybe two. Agents (however good they are), editors, publishers—they're always going to revert to the sales generated by your last bargain-bin tome, and my friend's most recent numbers, *Times* review notwithstanding, left a great deal to be desired. So did mine.

I devoted the better part of the following decade to writing and rewriting a gangster operetta—actually, just another crime novel—which I pulled from submission after receiving notes like this one:

> Thank you so much for the opportunity to consider [Pavia's latest opus] . . . clearly the work of a great talent, a novel that really hits the ground running. The dialogue is filled with effortless wit, and I can see what you mean about Pavia pushing the envelope of genre. A very solid read from a talented writer.
>
> *Unfortunately*, [emphasis mine] I was unable to quite shake the feeling that with its 1980s setting and almost photo-realistic grittiness, [this book] lacks the strongly commercial quality that would be necessary in breaking Pavia out of the mass market track into trade paper or hardcover publication.
>
> We're big fans of Pavia's work here—he's out there doing innovative things—and I'd be happy to take a look at any future work from him moving forward.

In other words, chum, better luck next time. Hey, at least the submission received a response. The current crop of ink floggers "ghost" you; that is, your months, your *years* of work are met with stoney silence. At least this cat afforded me the dignity of a rejection.

Fortune's wheel continued to spin. Hollywood's golden horizon eluded my friend, and he moved back to New York with his wife. I was a proud father by then, and while the siren song of literary riches beckoned us still, they might have to wait. Realities like groceries and rent pressed in on our visions.

He parlayed an erratic and annoying social justice bent—that sounds mean, I concede, he earned his credentials—into a low-level professorship at one of New York City's institutions of higher learning while I, in his words, "street corner poet-patriot" that I am, lowered a shoulder into my default career as a bartender. He chose the better part by a long shot. His teaching contributed to a New York State pension, while my labor found me rubbing drunken spittle off eyeglasses that weren't doing much to help me see. By this time, my hearing was shot, too.

Another guy we knew in the '90s, a refugee from Lit World and loyal pal to us both, had landed a gig editing a woolly but well-funded online magazine. He accepted my pitches and posted my copy without touching it. I wondered if he even read the pieces I submitted. I collected direct deposits that pushed the upper reaches of their stingy pay scale and was grateful to receive them.

While my literary ambitions migrated online, my now-professor friend was mounting a retrograde mission to the East Village with a pack of nostalgists misty over the way things used to be. This gang staged multi-media happenings featuring, say, a film projected behind a speaker recounting tales of woe or temporary triumph while a saxophone blurted an off-key note here or there. I was invited more than once but never went. Maybe I had to work.

Under the influence of the multi-media shtick, my friend's writing morphed into poetry, which wasn't exactly terrible; it just didn't read—to me anyway—as connected to anything real. And here were the signs, not the first ones, that he was slipping away. I sent him a copy of that unpublished gangster novel, which, yes, I had by then retrieved from under the vacuum cleaner and reworked one more time. I didn't expect him to read the whole thing; what he did was rewrite the first several paragraphs according to his current poetics. The result was . . . not uninteresting, but it was insane.

It's hard to say what pushed him over the edge. His marriage had been rocky for I don't know how long—I mean, the wife who blessed him with three children had a boyfriend and it was plain to everyone except him that it was over between them. But how do you tell a guy that? He lived in exile in the Land of Longing, convinced that he was one word, one gesture away from being taken back into her heart. Was it the busted marriage that turned him to drugs, or did his sneaky drugging bust the marriage? I wasn't asking him many questions, and I wasn't getting straight answers when I did, so every once in a while, I'd just drop in to see what condition his condition was in. The visits didn't inspire confidence.

His pot smoking had become habitual. I don't know if he was treating it like the stuff on offer at Sara Roosevelt Park in the 1980s—there's a nostalgic Lower East Side nod for you—but marijuana for a while now has had a psychoactive potency that is wreaking havoc on intact minds, let alone on one as fragile as my friend's was by then.

With his history of drug use dead-set against him, he lapsed back to using heroin, the bête noire of artists like Charlie Parker, a longtime addict who, ravaged by drugs, died at age 34, and Nelson Algren (my friend loved Algren), whose fascination with addiction gave birth to the oil stained-realism of the once-shocking novel *The Man with the Golden Arm*. One problem: The dope on the streets in the 2020s wasn't heroin; it was fentanyl, cut with other poisons and inert substances that did nothing to lighten its lethality. My man overdosed twice, once flopping to the floor and turning blue in front of one of his classes.

You won't be surprised to hear that I didn't learn of this from him. He talked about his children with me, and about baseball games that were played long

before either of us were born, and about books I was never going to read. During one call, he recruited me to co-sign on his daydream of starting a literary magazine, spending several minutes, as my would-be editor in chief, outlining my assignment. And after he had talked himself out, he said, "Actually, dude? You know what? You can write whatever you want. You approach everything professionally." Hearing that was humbling. There would be no magazine, and I never tapped out a single word for him, but still.

Contact by then had devolved into telephone reports of late-night panic attacks and psychotic breaks, of detoxes and rehabs, mental wards and, inevitably, experiments with psychotropic medications that weren't making him better. He refused to suffer my opinions on any of these subjects, and good for him. He wanted to expound on his recovery, telling me he had unearthed this "sponsor," or discovered meetings that would, in the end, be mile markers on his road to Wellville.

My patience thinned, and although I'll take any opportunity to chuff about how I never turn my back on anybody, and I don't, he was relegated to my Third Phone Call list. Let the first two go by. Return the third. And I restricted the topics of conversation to kids—his kids, my kid—and baseball.

I did happen to notice him at an oversubscribed dinner where we both knew many of the invited and—you do develop a despondent feel for these things—I was sure this would be the last time I saw him. I had arrived late and sat alone, spying on him as, after his fashion, he worked the room. I may have nodded in his direction, but we didn't exchange any words.

The call came from a man I rarely speak with and, naturally, I knew what it was about. I closed my eyes and listened. I was with my daughter on a subway platform, waiting for the 7 train to take us out to Citifield for a Mets game. Got that? His kids, my kid, baseball. It was as if he were tipping one of his stupid hats at me from the other side.

The official cause? He died in his sleep, which is like saying he died because his heart stopped beating. Maybe you've noticed that the cause of death is almost never revealed in obits these days, another quirk of contemporary life. But what's the difference? It's not as if the facts were going to alter that finality. (Like Vinnie tells Jimmy over the phone in *Goodfellas*, "He's gone. And we couldn't do nothing about it.") I wasn't angry with my departed friend, not for long anyway. I was mourning where this life had taken him, grieving for him, and sad for myself because I wouldn't be seeing him anymore.

No funeral was held. Instead, somebody staged a memorial at a forlorn chapel in the Bronx. I couldn't bring myself to join the bereaved, and to my everlasting shame, watched a video transmission instead. I should have been

there. A presumable man of the cloth presided, and I appreciated his prayers, but then came the "celebration of life," and let me just say this: Not all of us are public speakers, nor are we intended to be. Suggestion: Should you find yourself at such an occasion and feel compelled to uncork a eulogy, please make it brief.

A final anecdote: Around the time of the last birthday I would celebrate before my friend left this world, he called and told me it was imperative that he see me. I was like, yeah, okay, alright. We hadn't said hello before he was unveiling a sweatshirt emblazoned with the shield of the Rochester Americans, a hockey team hailing from my hometown. I haven't lived there in over 40 years but anything Rochester made him think of me. ("Did you know Stan Musial played there in 1941?") He spotted this rag somewhere—the gift does have a garish allure—and he made up his mind that I had to have it. Rochester. Hardscrabble, working class, *striving*. He revered those qualities. It's how he saw the hollowed-out city, and how he saw himself. It's how he saw me. He *admired* me. I would go so far as to say he loved me. I treated him as an embarrassment and a bit of a nuisance, and while he was at all times an advocate and an ally, I harbored him in my darkest heart as a rival. I was wrong, and I'm sorry.

* * * * *

I lifted my title from the last line of the 1941 movie *The Maltese Falcon*, which in turn purloined it from Shakespeare's *Tempest*. The phrase doesn't appear in the Dashiell Hammett novel on which the film is based. Hammett, a hard-boiled boozehound with a thing for lefty playwrights, would've known his classic literature well enough to recognize the source, and so would John Huston, who adapted the material and directed the film.

At the story's end, murder and betrayal, deceit and the convolutions of the plot throw the cast of shady characters into the office of private investigator Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart in a star-making role), who might be the best of this amoral lot, but not by much. The "priceless" figurine of the title is within reach of all the principals. The stuff of dreams is at hand, standing in for luxury and limitless sexual license—and expatriatism and bullfights—but for one brutal reality: The bird is a fake, a lacquered manque of no provenance, a fraud, a fugazi, a nothing. It's worthless. Does an authentic Falcon even exist, or is it a myth, itself the mere stuff of dreams? We never find out.

I'll pass my 65th birthday before you read this, provided a girder from a high-rise under construction doesn't break loose and land on my head, or a more mundane occurrence like a cardio infarction doesn't prompt my last goodbye.

Am I being dramatic? Sure. It's in my blood. But I'm not being morbid.

I'm being realistic. I'll be a bona fide senior citizen, and although I try not to worry or wonder too much about that which I do not know, if I were hitting this milestone and not ruminating over a few things that might've been, there'd be something wrong with me.

Throughout my essaying here, and maybe this is what lit the fire underneath me, I've been coping with a medical issue—I'll leave it there—that's landed me up in the hospital six, maybe eight times, I've lost track, over a two-month period. Medication, scans, ultra-sounds, various treatments. The crisis has eased for the moment, but I'm not done. More technicians; more ice-cold jelly and probes; more appointments to schedule. Another "procedure" looms.

Pretzeled by pain during one of my emergency room pitstops, with great beads of sweat gathered on my brow and a draft chilling my exposed ass, I pulled away the curtain of my bay and whimpered: "Can somebody please help me? Please?"

A nurse did come along with a blast of morphine that neutralized my anguish, against the better medical judgment, as she put it, of the attending physician. The doctor wasn't questioning my need; she was concerned about the opiate's effect on my kidneys. So, let me express my heartfelt thanks to the caregivers of Shock Corridor . . . but do you know what was the last thing on my mind while I was there? The very last thing? Making it as a writer.

In memory of our Senior Editor

William Murchison

February 3, 1942 - October 8, 2025

William Murchison, senior editor of the Human Life Review
and Great Defender of Life, 2009.

"Jim McFadden identified, to my mind, and increasingly this has been borne in upon me in all the decades since then—he identified the great civilizational question of our time: What is life, who is it for, who made it? The answer our society equivocates about, refuses to confront, specifically and intentionally, because it's afraid it might get an answer it doesn't like."

Children of Men: Read the Book!

William Murchison

A couple of months ago, several Murchisons rented the DVD of *Children of Men*, the then-new Alfonso Cuarón movie. At home, in front of our own television set, we watched soberly. I may have watched more soberly, not to say more skeptically, than the others. That would be because I was literally following Hollywood's breezy injunction from the '50s: "You've read the book. Now see the movie."

I'd indeed read the book when it was published in 1993. I'd liked it a lot, for reasons I will note shortly. By contrast, I disliked the movie considerably. Not because it played fast and loose with the excellent P. D. James plot. Remember Samuel Goldwyn's *Wuthering Heights,* which cut the Bronte novel squarely in half, finishing with a ghostly and wholly invented reunion of the suffering lovers? Good book; good movie, for all their differences. What about the screenwriters who economically pruned two of Scarlett O'Hara's children? You have contrasting functions to serve when it comes to books and movies. We all know this. We let it go. We forgive—now and then with undue generosity.

The problem with *Children of Men* was a missed opportunity to say more or less what the James book—*The Children of Men*—had said with special eloquence and excitement about, well, the centrality of babies in human affairs. Let us toughen that a bit: the pure, absolute indispensability of babies in an age more and more given to clapping hands over eyes as the birth function loses priority to the imputed joys of aloneness and aloofness.

Ex malo bonum, I am wont to say concerning the movie: dark, dingy, weird, more concerned with explosions and Problems of the Moment, such as immigration and, inferentially, the Iraq war, than with the childless future P. D. James had imagined and invited us to contemplate. Out of bad may come good if a defective movie stirs customers to see what the book was all about, as could prove the case here, you never know. Do questions get more absorbing than how would life look—would it be life at all, and how would we live it—were the blessing of new birth to be taken from us, suddenly, mysteriously?

William Murchison, the *Human Life Review*'s longtime senior editor and 2009 Great Defender of Life, died in Dallas on Oct. 8. Obituary at https://obits.dallasnews.com/ "*Children of Men*: Read the Book!" was first published in our Spring 2007 issue, one of over 100 articles he wrote for us beginning in 1992.

I cannot without fear of censure kick Cuarón around the room; I have discovered that quite a few viewers of his product like or at least respect its cinematic qualities—my wife among them. A graduate of Indiana University's esteemed theater department, she recollected for me Goethe's criteria for theatrical merit. First, what was the author trying to do? Then, did he do it? Finally, was the thing worth doing? This she occasionally (as well as good-humoredly) does when I am looking narrowly down my narrow nose at artistic ventures post-dating Samuel Johnson. Or John Wayne. I had to admit that Sr. Cuarón did what he set out to do—render a joyless judgment on the near-term future of humanity in the environmental, political, and cultural realms. My question, nevertheless: Why this book as take off point? Why appropriate such a fine work and muffle its alarm bell? Before him Cuarón had a richly imagined tale concerning the sudden, the unlooked-for, the catastrophic failure of procreation. All at once, no more human babies. None anywhere. In 1993, P. D. James was vaguely understood to be religious—an active communicant of the Church of England— but the present tale hardly fitted common understandings of her as a sophisticated spinner of detective tales. She would write later that alone among her novels *The Children of Men* failed to earn back its advance, "a depressing and somewhat demeaning thought."

It was anything but an addition to her bookshelf of Adam Dalgliesh stories, with the poet-policeman digging for truth and certainty amid a heap of moral ambiguities and disturbing evidences of human failing. James's project, in the Dalgleish-less *The Children of Men,* was certainly arresting. No births, no babies for a quarter of a century, starting in 1996. She had read in the *Sunday Times* a book "dealing with the dramatic and so far unexplained fall in the fertility rate of Western man." She wondered: What if the human race were "struck by a universal infertility"? She saw a gradual falling away of hope and expectation; the replacement of adventure by ruin; a world steadily running downhill, crumbling to the touch, "all hope and ambition lost for ever," the meaning of life itself quite gone.

In such a world, women wheel dolls around in buggies and bring cats to church for baptism. On another societal fringe, the elderly and basically defunct are subjected by the state to the cruel and bizarre Quietus—mass death by deliberate drowning as bands serenade the victims with songs of the World War II era.

Meanwhile, in the womb of one young woman, unborn life unexpectedly returns. And dramatic consequences flow torrentially.

What, then, did Cuarón, the Mexican director best known for his handling of the Spanish-language flick *Y tu mama tambien*, and of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*—what did Cuarón do with the copious material

at hand? What he mainly did (besides axing "The" from James's title) was apply himself to the creation of a 21st-century nightmare concerning pollution, dictatorship, bombings, prison camps (think Abu Ghraib), and the oppression of immigrants (think—I guess—Tom Tancredo). Oh, yes, and the lack of new babies. How the world got this way the audience isn't sure. Environmental factors may have played their part. It's a pretty awful world, we recognize quickly enough.

So, Herr Goethe, what was the artist trying to do? In the present case, he was trying to show us the consequences of political and environmental trends he saw as already afoot. The movie starts in 2027 with an urban bombing, al Qaeda-style. Boom! Smoke pours from a nearby door. Turmoil ensues. And continues. The movie concludes with nearly all the main characters recharacterized from the novel—dead. (James isn't known for delicacy in the dispatch of victims, but her books hardly qualify as literary slaughter houses, à la Cormac McCarthy. Cuarón, by contrast, seems bent on getting rid of pretty much everyone.)

In an advertising feature published in *The New York Times*, the director spread out the reasons for his treatment of the material. "I wanted to convey what's happening in the world," he said, "from the perspective of great minds who specialize in the fields of environment, population, and economics, as well as philosophers and critics of society. They offer a diagnosis about the reality we're living in. The picture is not a happy one; but, OK, now we know the reality, we know where we're standing, what can we do."

So in Goethe's terms, yes—the artist draws us a picture of dystopia, bidding us look on in horror. That's easy enough. In place of James's down-at-the-heels yet nevertheless civilized Oxford, we look perpetually at gray brown desolation. Do we wonder what it all has to do with children, or the absence thereof? Only (for my money) when Clare-Hope Ashitey (as Kee, a character not in the book) becomes mysteriously pregnant and her anti-government associates convey her, at immense cost to themselves, to the keeping of a shadowy, never-explained entity called the Human Project, whose base is some kind of Greenpeace-looking ship. Far as I can tell anyway.

Children of Men won early accolades and a lot of buzz. At the Venice Film Festival, a blogger reported, "The crowds were all in shock. There were many people crying." Surely, reported someone else, who had evidently been in a different mood when the lights went down, this was "one of the best action movies we have seen lately." Another blogger expressed satisfaction that "the religious overtones" of the book had been "played down." (Omitted would be more like it. Unless I misremember, religion is represented in the movie by the exclamation, "Jesus Christ!")

Still another commentator mentioned the triumph of "hope over hopelessness." That would be right, I think. From a worn-out world, the new mother (who in the movie is black rather than white, as in the novel: for reasons likely calibrated by Cuarón to fit the exhaustion of European civilization) is raised from desperation to fulfillment. She's got something no one else has—a baby! With babies, well, you know . . . .

That's it, perhaps. We don't know, at least not in the way we once did: "we" meaning humanity. We have to raise our eyes a bit—look at the stakes in a way not entirely obvious amidst the haze of pollution and the hail of bullets (as we old newspapermen used to say). We move from movie to book, if properly invited to do so, as I believe we have been by the intrusion of this well-acted but depressing movie. We start to think—maybe—what's this thing all about anyway? This life thing, this vision of the sterility to come, maybe. What could there be to the preposterous notion of a time when a woman can't get pregnant, hard as she may try, deeply as she may yearn? Oh, the idea has its inviting side. Who wants condoms, now that risk has disappeared from the equation? Come on—take, get, grab, satisfy, appease. It was never so good in Haight-Ashbury or Greenwich Village. And it's all free—provided by "free," you imply, as P. D. James surely does, the cool disregard of purpose and meaning in the sexual act. Only a few lines into *The Children of Men*, purpose recedes. I don't mean artistic, Goethean purpose. I mean human purpose. The narrator, Dr. Theo Faron, of Oxford University, 50 years old, relates:

> We have had twenty-five years [to recover the reproductive function] and we no longer even expect to succeed. Like a lecherous stud suddenly stricken with impotence, we are humiliated at the very heart of our faith in ourselves. For all our knowledge, our intelligence, our power, we can no longer do what the animals do without thought. No wonder we both worship and resent them.
>
> [I]n our hearts few of us believe that the cry of a newborn child will ever be heard again on our planet. Our interest in sex is waning. Romantic and idealized love has taken over from crude carnal satisfaction despite the efforts of the Warden of England [Theo's cousin, Xan Lippiatt], through the national porn shops, to stimulate our flagging appetites. Our ageing bodies are pummeled, stretched, stroked, caressed, anointed, scented. We are manicured and pedicured, measured and weighed. Golf is now the national game.

It started . . . how? "Pornography and sexual violence on film, on television, in books, in life, had increased and became more explicit but less and less in the West we made love and bred children. It seemed at the time a welcome development in a world grossly polluted by over-population. . . . As I remember it, no one suggested that the fertility of the human race was

dramatically changing. Overnight, it seemed, the human race had lost its power to breed."

Fantasy. Fantasy with a purpose, as it happens. The purpose of recovery from an age without purpose—aside from that of breaking par occasionally. We allow the good writer these excesses of imagination. It is all part of the story-telling craft. In latter times Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor have functioned to the same purpose—the grotesque-ification (if one may invent a word) of folly and selfishness so that very old impulses and convictions may seem normal and their opposites outrageous.

Ex malo bonum. Alfonso Cuarón leads us to P. D. James's hearth. At least I think he does. I hope so. We need to be precisely there, in order to examine urgent matters. On arrival, thanks to previous encounters with the author and her terrain, we expect saturnine detectives with aches and desires, stepping over pools of blood. We find instead self-immolation going on: the twilight of gods all godded-out, national porn shops or no national porn shops or pummellings, stretchings, and strokings. Until the end, that is, when behind fibers of charcoal gray, a faint glow of light may be seen. Cold, beaten down, run over and smeared as though by a freight car, life exhibits . . . life. What was the artist, the original one, trying to do? Something different than her imitator has done. Something far better, I think we might in fairness say.

It was ingenious on P. D. James's part—she with all those "religious" notions—to see a way of connecting new life and new hope: a novelistic way, with plot and characters. She would chase the point to its logical conclusion. If birth ceased, what would happen? What would the world look like? Modern life obscured these points. A million or so abortions per year might take place in the United States alone, but there were many more births, so you didn't really notice. Baptisms continued—no cats allowed. A pram could be counted on to contain a baby instead of a doll. No deer (as in the movie) roamed deserted classrooms. But something else went on: a new principle had taken root. It was that, while prams with babies were fine (for those who liked them), there was no societal reason to prefer such to prams in which non-human cargoes rode.

The achievement of P. D. James, in *The Children of Men,* was to take our societal noses—those we were willing to entrust to her—and rub them abruptly in dystopian mud. To their logical conclusion she drew and dragged matters. What if babies no longer came to women who desired them: as distinguished from those who didn't want them to begin with? What then? What would life be like? It might be dystopically violent in the way suggested by Alfonso Cuarón. Or its main characteristic might be vacancy, emptiness; not just the emptiness of school buildings and obstetrical wards, but of hearts

and souls. May not a society perish in a stupor as well as explode in flames, with tires screeching and machine guns chattering?

As we know, there's more money in explosions than in stupor. Enter Cuarón. And yet, forgive me—I don't wish to castigate a talented director, least of all a director who *sort of* sees the stakes in the game. I think we might call the story large enough to warrant multiple approaches—James's, Cuarón's, another's some day. The story framework is James's. The story is our own. Which is why we need it told to us, in the way mommies and daddies make up stories about their children, for telling to their children. If you think you've been told often enough what life means, evidently you haven't been. You need the artistic pin prick. You need *The Children of Men,* or something like it.

In a "fragment of autobiography"—her subtitle for the 1999 memoir *Time to Be in Earnest,* James noted that "the novel was not intended to be a Christian fable but that, in fact, was what I wrote." No wonder, perhaps, the wonderment. Sales were small by comparison with those for the Dalgleish novels. I recall *The Children of Men* opening at or near the top of *The New York Times* fiction best-seller list, teetering there a week or two, then plunging once readers generally learned what it was all about, which wasn't Adam Dalgliesh (except in some spiritual sense). "But it has produced more correspondence," she would note, "particularly in theological circles, than any other novel I have written."

"Particularly in theological circles"? The hint here might seem off-key like Rosie O'Donnell weighing speaking invitations from her Republican fan clubs. In fact, P. D. James comes nearer than practically any living novelist one can think of—certainly nearer than any *successful* living novelist comes—to the gripping depiction of good and evil, truth and falsehood, sin and repentance, lived in the shadow of the Cross.

Writes Ralph Wood, in *First Things:* "Absent the love of God, James implies, human love also withers. Absent human love grounded in divine charity, marriages are difficult to sustain. Absent marital and thus parental love, children are orphaned in the ultimate, no less than the immediate, sense. Indeed, orphanhood is the moral and spiritual condition of many of James' murderers."

In *Children of Men,* the movie, there is just the sniff of recognition of life itself as the best hope for relief from the world's traumas. In *The Children of Men* is the explicit recognition that life *is* life. And that a higher power controls, directs, orders its ways and means. The new birth that bids to bring a dead world to life again is no "virgin birth." On the other hand—I will be cryptic, having no wish to spoil things for anyone inspired to pluck the book from a library shelf—an Anglican priest, frozen out by his progressive church but faithful to "the old Bible, the old prayer book," figures centrally

in the narrative of redemption. His name is Luke. But enough of that.

I am not here to take a stand on behalf of *The Children of Men as* "Greatest Novel of the Twentieth Century"—a work of imperishable grandeur; a must read. It doesn't come close. Nor could P. D. James have expected that it would. She would have been glad, perhaps, had it sold. You cut a bit of slack all the same for a late 20th century novel, the competition for excellence in that department being so thin. In the whole department of Ideas the competition is thin, the quest for narcissistic pleasure needing no intellectual justification or defense. Just "do it!" Jerry Rubin instructed disciples amid great renown and acclaim, some three decades ago. So some did. Then many more, not asking why. Life, for these, came to seem a possession, usable on one's own terms, with no sense of purpose and hope as a self-generating commodity.

Roe v. *Wade* spread the spirit far and near. Did that mournful decision do what the authors intended? Expressly. Was it done well? Even ardent defenders point more proudly to its purpose than to the legal and constitutional technique involved.

Was it worth doing? Give the imagination a jolt or two. Think of baby carriages bearing dolls, and of empty school rooms; think of a world expiring of emptiness. Now and then the imagination can show us more of reality than can the finest, costliest camera lens.

"After the birth of our first child, she just mushroomed."

FROM THE WEBSITE

Human Life Foundation Co-Sponsors DC Pro-Life Alternatives Conference

John Grondelski

"Leading with Love," a conference on pregnancy crisis centers and concrete assistance to new mothers—especially those in crisis pregnancies—took place October 8 at The Catholic University of America, Washington. The conference was jointly sponsored by the Human Life Foundation and the University's Center for Law and the Human Person.

Jennie Bradley Lichter, former University General Counsel and now President of the March for Life, delivered the wide ranging keynote address, "Reasons for Hope," exploring the pro-life landscape post-*Dobbs*. She stressed that the pro-life struggle did not end with the reversal of *Roe* but only assumed a different shape: with the removal of a claimed federal Constitutional right to abortion, pro-life efforts had to shift back not just to the local level politically but to the individual level—to concrete women facing abortion decisions—personally. Lichter discussed one response: Catholic University's Guadalupe Project (named after Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is traditionally depicted pregnant) to support mothers in the university community.

The Guadalupe Project is not limited to women with "crisis pregnancies" (though it is set up to help them) but celebrates the gift of life all new mothers and fathers share. The Project ensures that mothers at CUA have the resources they need to thrive, regardless of their personal circumstances. They range from expanded parental leave for university employees to diapers for young mothers on campus to resources for women who find themselves pregnant and single. The now three-year-old Project is designed to incarnate a real and practical culture of life at CUA.

Quoting a Lozier Institute study, Lichter noted that six out of ten women who resort to abortion say they would not have done so if they believed they had practical support during their pregnancies. Extrapolating from the Guadalupe Project, she paid tribute to the work done by crisis pregnancy centers across America, while also noting their travails since *Dobbs*. Initially targets of criminal violence, including arson, opposition has now shifted to politically driven efforts, especially by law enforcement in primarily Democratic-dominated states, to force crisis pregnancy centers to make abortion referrals or be sued for false advertising and similar consumer fraud charges. Despite legal intimidation, however, crisis pregnancy centers offer resources—pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, medical care—at volumes pro-abortionists like

Planned Parenthood could only dream of, as well as resources like adoption assistance and shelter for abused pregnant women they simply do not. Characterizing crisis pregnancy centers as the concrete "arms and legs" of the pro-life movement, Lichter concluded with the abiding relevance of the movement's "heart," the March for Life held annually each January in Washington. The March renews prolifers' commitments to the cause, rejuvenating their dedication to struggles now largely dispersed in state capitals and local communities. Lichter also revealed the 2026 March's theme—"the gift of life"—insisting that, despite the tragedy of *Roe*, the March has endured over half a century because of its positive, life-affirming, civil rights message.

The afternoon conference centered on a panel discussing faith-based pro-life ministries. Led by *National Review*'s Kathryn Jean Lopez, panelists included: Kat Talalas of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Amy Ford of the "Embrace Grace" movement; Chris Bell of Good Counsel Homes; and Sr. Maria Frassati of the Sisters of Life.

Talalas and Ford described church/parish-based pro-life ministries that offer concrete and practical support to pregnant women. Ford, author of *Help Her to Be Brave*, designed the "Embrace Grace" program, a local church-based program to help women in problem pregnancies to obtain tangible support to keep their babies or put them up for adoption. Although it originated in a Protestant context, "Embrace Grace" offers a practical parish-based program useable in Catholic and Orthodox churches. Talalas described "Walking with Moms in Need" (https://www.walkingwithmoms.com/), a step-by-step program for Catholic parishes wanting to launch such a parish-based pro-life ministry to identify what local resources are available and where gaps may exist. The practical nature of the program, designed to pinpoint the local support available or missing for mothers in need, also seems adaptable to ecumenical use. Bell described the four "Good Counsel" homes in operation in New Jersey and New York—a generally

Mr. Grondelski with Maria McFadden Maffucci and Amy Ford

hostile political environment to pro-life causes—and how they assist mothers in distress there. Sr. Frassati discussed the pro-life work of the Sisters for Life, focusing on how often women simply need someone to listen to and accompany them at that juncture in life. The panelists also discussed problems they face in helping women to consider adoption, noting the significant amounts of mis- and disinformation around that topic and the cultural issues (e.g., "am I being a bad parent in giving up my baby?") that still impede a robust culture that supports adoption. They also touched on the "safe haven" efforts across America to afford women seeking a way to surrender their child anonymously a safe way to do so.

—John M. Grondelski was former associate dean of the School of Theology, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey.

photo credit: Mary Rose Somarriba

Sew What

Diane Moriarty

Fifteen years ago, someone in the United States would wear a garment seven to ten times before getting rid of it Now it's worn only two or three times. Roughly 11.3 million tons of discarded clothing winds up in U.S. landfills annually; about 60 percent of it made of synthetic materials such as polyester, nylon, and acrylic, the mainstays of modern-day "fast fashion." Synthetic fibers do not biodegrade easily and can stay in landfills for hundreds of years. Microplastics—minuscule bits of plastic between 1 micron and 5 millimeters in size—are used to make these synthetic fibers. They pollute oceans, soil, drinking water, and food, and have been linked to infertility problems and other health issues.

So-called fashion influencers on social media are a driving force behind the whopping increase in clothing consumption and its subsequent disposal. Since their content is devoted to the latest fashions, they must constantly present their followers with new "looks." Prior to the 1950s there were two fashion seasons: Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter. Fast fashion companies have invented a mindboggling fifty-two "micro-seasons," so now you will be considered "out of trend" after only one week.

Because of our "throwaway" culture, influencers can easily get followers to jump on their super-consumer bandwagon. And, really, it's nothing new. The August 1955 issue of *Life* magazine ran an article titled "Throwaway Living," which has been cited as the first to use the term "throw-away society." Back then, this was considered a positive thing. It was believed that "disposable"

made life easier as well as economical for the homemaker. Americans started viewing being thrifty as "un-American." Go figure. In any case, here we are. What to do? Get retailers to give up a lucrative market? Dream on. Hope, as manufacturers of sturdy garments do, that Americans will return to the practice of taking good care of one's wardrobe and repairing when possible? Maybe . . . right after they take up churning butter. So, again, what to do? Well . . .

If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain.

Let's wear money. Not actual money, not stitching dollar bills together, or if you're Elon Musk, Benjamins, but what money is made from, which is not paper but rags. Called rag sheet, it's produced by turning cotton and linen fabric into a 25 percent linen and 75 percent cotton "paper" pulp. This is why dollars left in a pants pocket that goes through the washing machine don't dissolve. Unlike synthetic material, clothing made from the same stuff as money would be biodegradable. U.S. currency lasts for about six years before being taken out of circulation, easily outpacing a fast fashion "micro-season." So-called distressed jeans are made to look worn-out even though they are actually new. So, not only would clothing made from "money" fit the bill, pun intended, but it might give a whole new meaning to saying someone looks like Old Money. That's a joke.

What's not a joke is our culture's nonchalant attitude about being a throw-away society. Nor is the sartorial power of influencers. An influencer is someone who creates an engaging online presence using appealing content, such as provocative photos and videos. Although not celebrities in the traditional sense, they grow their online platforms through social media and then use their popularity to influence people's buying habits. Some vendors feel this is even more effective than movie star glamour because it uses direct audience interaction to establish appeal. Whereas a celebrity won't message you back online, influencers are approachable and so are more trusted; resulting in the ridiculous notion of 52 "micro-seasons" not being laughed right off the internet, thank you very much!

And then there are the unethical labor practices in under-regulated factories overseas that allow fast fashion to produce clothing so cheaply. In 2013 a deadly garment industry accident occurred in Bangladesh when structural building codes were not enforced and the Rana Plaza Factory collapsed. Eleven hundred people were killed, 2,500 more injured. In response, the Bangladesh Fire & Safety Accord was signed on May 15, 2013. Most North American retailers did not sign the accord because of liability worries, but on July 10, 2013, a group of major U.S. retailers, naming themselves the

Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, announced the Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative. It drew criticism from labor groups, who protested that it was less rigorous than the Accord and lacked legally binding assurances to pay for upgrades. Apparently the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City, which killed 146 workers, most of them young women and girls, was not top of mind.

In an International Law and Policy Brief, author Emma Ross writes: "Consumer demand for a larger quantity of clothing at a cheaper price point has pushed development of the fast fashion industry. This has led to the dangerous exploitation of the labor force who makes the fashion industry possible . . . In order to prevent further damage to garment workers it is necessary that legislation emulating the Bangladesh Fire & Safety Accord be put into place in every country. It is imperative to address and resolve the human rights violations occurring as a result of fast fashion."

Isn't our "throwaway" society in all its forms predicated on the perception of unlimited abundance at the expense of others? Throwaway Fashion: It's so cheap I can just buy more. Throwaway Marriage: There's Plenty of Fish in the Sea. Throwaway Pregnancy: I can always have another. Isn't it all cut from the same cloth?

—Diane Moriarty is a freelance writer living in Manhattan.

Seen But Not Heard

Tara Jernigan

I recently made a trip to Tabora, Tanzania, a place most people I know have probably never heard of let alone visited. Certainly, I would not have heard of it but for a connection with the Anglican bishop there, who had repeatedly invited me to visit his diocese. The trip itself was a couple of years in the making and getting there was not easy or fun. I spent about three full days in transit, one way or the other, not including a brief break in Europe to reset my body clock and just stop moving for a while. Nonetheless, Tanzania is beautiful, and the people are warm and hospitable. I wouldn't make my vacation there (though the Serengeti is quite the international attraction and lives up to the generations of safari hype), but my time with the Tanzanian people, off the tourist grid, was worth every bit of travel discomfort.

This was not so much a mission trip as the fruition of a partnership. I was there to get to know the clergy of the diocese, speak a word of encouragement, and celebrate their ministries and milestones with them. The last thing I would have expected at a clergy conference was the attention of a little guy

who had yet to reach his first birthday. However, Tanzania is a family-oriented country, and this was obvious everywhere—in visits to churches, at the clergy retreat to which the priests brought their spouses and young children, and all over the marketplaces and ministries we toured.

When Americans consider African children, we are likely tainted by images of 1980s celebrities singing "We are the world." Not all African babies are skinny with bloated bellies and covered with sores. One in particular, my little buddy for most of my trip, had chubby cheeks and a lively personality that would make him a made-for-television star in the United States. He was a curious little guy, a textbook 11-month-old, not quite walking but ready to get into everything. He especially loved my hat and my glasses. The hat immediately became his favorite toy. He wore it, dropped it, picked it up, fanned it around, put it back on my head, then took it back, over and over again. His smudgy fingerprints covered my glasses, even as I tried to keep them in place. In other words, he was the same as any other baby you would expect anywhere in the world.

After our first meeting, every time I saw my new little pal he would raise his hands in the universal language of toddlers, "Hey, lady, pick me up!" Throughout the week I was there, he found ways to attach himself to my hip whenever he could. I held his hand while he practiced a few steps and scooped him up when he was bored with life on the ground. I held him while his mother dashed to the restroom. We sang little songs in a language he does not understand, and we looked for animals in his language since we were about on the same level when it comes to Swahili.

Toddlers seem to speak a universal language. Blink and you'd miss the difference between this little guy and one in the States. Keep your eyes open, though, and you'd notice all sorts of details. My new pal was used to playing on the ground. He did not ride around in a stroller, and his mother carried only him on her back, no accompanying bag of toys and supplies. Babies, in this culture, do not need their own luggage. Look again while walking across the conference site, and you'd find moms just like his washing diapers and their family's clothing in a bucket, taking advantage of the source of water in the restroom. Even his fascination with my hat and glasses takes on new meaning when you realize that my American friend and I were the only women wearing hats to shield the sun, and only a handful of the male leaders had the luxury of glasses.

Everywhere we went, children were always present but never made a sound. Truly seen but not heard. They were wide-eyed to the world around them, and every moment was ripe for play, but I never heard a single child's voice. Whether a child's family was well off by Tanzanian standards, or desperately

poor, the children were eager, sweet, respectful of their elders—and silent. Despite all the time we ended up spending together, I cannot remember my little pal ever making so much as a chirp. Children older than him were shy, but once they saw we knew the language of a wave (with both hands in Tanzania) and the universal language of a goofy smile, they were eager to visit with us strangers. A few even learned to give a "high five," which they seemed to find funny.

Of course, we would say that all of these children were desperately poor. What is remarkable is that the children themselves were not aware of that. These children—quiet to the point of shy, wide-eyed and eager, part of a community that loved them and left them feeling so secure that even strangers from halfway around the world could be accommodated in their world within a few minutes—were being raised to be valued by the people who surrounded them. Their shy silence was in contrast to the self-assurance by which my new buddy became what we used to call my PHA (Permanent Hip Attachment) when my own children were young. He was indeed a confident little fellow, with no "stranger anxiety" at all. Other children, equally shy and quiet, were just as curious about the new people and confident in their parents' presence to share a smile or a little game.

Poverty and shyness are one thing, but these children also possessed the quiet confidence of knowing who their people are. They were surrounded by loving adults—mom, dad, auntie, neighbor, friend. They ventured out, step by step, from the comfort of their community into a new relationship with strangers, always knowing where their home base was. While some have more resources than others—my little pal will likely go to a good parochial school and have more opportunities in his country than will the little ones we met in the markets and churches—each has the gift of knowing that he is not his own, he belongs to a people and a community, he is raised up by someone and for something.

We should all be so blessed.

—Tara Jernigan, D.Min. is the Archdeacon of the Anglican Diocese of the Southwest. She teaches Biblical Greek and Diaconal Studies as an adjunct professor for Trinity School for Ministry and serves on the Board of Directors at Nashotah House Theological Seminary.

Looking Beyond Disability—to Joy!

Laura Echevarria

When our sons were diagnosed with autism, I knew life would change for my husband and me—but not in the ways most people imagine. Yes, there were challenges: sleepless nights, therapies, learning new ways to communicate, and adapting our world to theirs. But there were also moments of indescribable beauty—my older son's first spontaneous "Love you, Mommy"; the way my younger son would find joy in taking apart an old calculator so he could figure out "where the numbers come from." Their sister, who was four when my older son was born, and five when the younger one arrived, became her brothers' first therapist by playing with them in whatever way they could understand.

Today, our daughter is a deeply compassionate behavioral therapist working with children who have autism. Our younger son has overcome the majority of his challenges, while his older brother, who communicates well but on the level of a 5-year-old, is under the guardianship of my husband and me. Caring for him today is easy. He sleeps through the night (usually) and can make himself a meal if he's hungry (whether it's nutritious or not is a different story).

But as I watch the cultural conversation around assisted suicide shift toward acquiescence, I am alarmed—not only as a member of a society that increasingly values human worth in terms of convenience, productivity, and a perceived "quality of life," but as the mother of a child who doesn't make the grade according to those measures. In recent years, countries such as Canada and the Netherlands have expanded so-called medical assistance in dying (MAID) to include people with chronic illnesses, mental health challenges, and even disabilities. Other countries, as well as some states in the U.S., have passed or are actively working to pass assisted suicide legislation.

News stories describe individuals who sought assisted suicide not because their conditions were terminal, but because they felt like a burden. The language used to justify these deaths—"compassion," "autonomy," "dignity"—is chillingly familiar. It sounds like care, but what it does is gloss over fear and despair.

I can't help wondering: What message do we send to those facing pain or disabilities? And are people who can't advocate for themselves at risk?

I believe they are.When society labels certain lives as "not worth living," that message reaches everyone who struggles daily with a disability, depression, or chronic pain. It says, "Your suffering is a reason to die, not a reason for us to love you more." It says, "We will help you end your life rather than help you live it well."

Another red line is crossed—and we accept it.

When we regard assisted suicide as a solution rather than a tragedy, we

create a hierarchy of human value. The young and healthy are deemed "worth saving," while the disabled, the elderly, and those in need of long-term care become candidates for "merciful release." This is not compassion. It is abandonment dressed up in euphemism.

For parents like me, this debate is not theoretical. I have felt the pity that implies: "He will never have a normal life." And yet, my son's life is full—full of meaning, connection, and love. What he lacks in "normal," he makes up for in authenticity and joy.

My son's life reminds me that human dignity is not something earned through independence or intelligence. It is intrinsic. Every person—regardless of ability—has the same worth simply by being human. That truth should be the foundation of every law and every medical ethic.

Instead, we are seeing a dangerous drift. Advocates of assisted suicide insist it is about choice, but whose "choice" is it, really?

What we need is broader compassion—and support. We need policies that will expand respite care for families; make services more accessible; and offer counseling and community rather than perpetuate isolation.

And we need a culture that celebrates perseverance, not one that pathologizes it. When I look at my son, I see the face of resilience. I see what it means to live with courage and curiosity in a world that is not designed for you. I also see how vulnerable he and others like him are in a society that is forgetting how to look beyond disability. We must insist—again and again—that every life, no matter how complicated, is sacred and worth protecting.

—Laura Echevarria returned to National Right to Life and her role as the Director of Communications in June 2019. She originally served on the communications staff from 1994-2004 and as director of the organization's media outreach from 1997 to 2004. Laura lives with her husband and their three children, two of whom are on the autism spectrum.

APPENDIX A

[*This interview is reprinted, with permission, from* Verily *Magazine's Creativity Issue, Fall 2024.(verilymag.com)*]

Healing after Abortion

Mary Rose Somarriba & Kylee Jean Heap

These days, it's rare for a day to go by without the topic of abortion making U.S. headlines. For many men and women who have been touched by the issue, this can stir up mixed emotions. One group, Support After Abortion, is putting politics aside to serve those impacted.

Mary Rose Somarriba: I recently learned about your work at Support After Abortion. Tell me about your organization and what you do.

Kylee Jean Heap: Support After Abortion is a nonprofit dedicated to helping women and men impacted after abortion.

We do two things: First, when people who are struggling with their grief and emotions reach out to us for help, we connect them with healing options they prefer. That may be one-on-one, group, or independent; counseling or peer facilitator; virtual, in person, or self-guided; religious or secular; weekend, weekly, or self-paced; and so on. Second, we equip providers—peer leaders, counselors, therapists, and others. We offer curriculum, resources, and trainings to help them bring hope, healing, and restored well-being to those who are hurting.

We strive to inspire compassion for those struggling after abortion, promote collaboration among and with abortion healing providers, and build capacity for abortion healing.

MRS: How did you get into this work?

KJH: I first learned about Support After Abortion and its mission shortly after its launch in 2020. I was struck by its focus on addressing root causes of abortion and the critical insights gained from its research, particularly the need to provide people with healing resources that align with their needs and preferences—including virtual, clinical, and secular in addition to the more traditional in-person, lay facilitator, and religious options.

With a background in pharmaceutical research, where I co-authored over 50 peer-reviewed journal articles and presentations over 18 years, the organization's foundation in research-based, client-directed care really resonated with me. Support After Abortion's evidence-based approach to offering compassion, hope, and healing has been a natural and meaningful extension of my career.

MRS: There are tons of mental health resources for women post-birth, but not so much post-abortion. Can you tell us why you think that is?

KJH: Mental health resources for women after childbirth often focus on postpartum depression and anxiety, with therapy and support groups becoming more accessible. Studies show that about 20 percent of women and 25 percent of men

face these challenges.

In contrast, support for emotional struggles after abortion is less common, even though many experience similar issues like depression, anxiety, anger, and grief. Research from Support After Abortion found that 34 percent of women and 71 percent of men are affected, but only 18 percent know where to find help.

This gap is partly due to the political focus on abortion's legal aspects rather than the emotional impact on individuals. Unlike postpartum care, which is generally seen as a non-political issue, support for those struggling after abortion can be mired in political conflict. Some people avoid acknowledging these struggles, while others feel that those affected don't deserve support. At Support After Abortion, we provide compassionate, nonjudgmental care because emotional healing is a human need, not a political issue.

MRS: Hardly a week goes by without news on abortion access for different states. How do news feeds affect the women you talk with in your work?

KJH: Immediately after *Dobbs*, some clients contacted us because the decision was triggering for them, such as these clients:

> "I'm really triggered by the Supreme Court ruling . . . I have struggled with my emotions since my pill abortion last year. . . . I get triggered when I see pregnant women or when friends post their ultrasound pictures. My thoughts are overwhelming."

> "I had an abortion 50 years ago. This ruling is bringing up a massive amount of feelings and trauma, and I just want to talk to somebody."

Clients mention how *Dobbs* impacted them personally, particularly traveling to other states to have abortions, mail ordering medication abortions, and feeling an increased urgency to make a fast decision—which they are now regretting or struggling with—mainly due to gestational restrictions on access. Such as this client:

> I'm calling out of desperation. I had an abortion six months ago. I live in a state with a heartbeat bill, and I had little to no time to make a decision, and the guy was completely unsupportive. It's hard to move on with my life. There are days I can't get out of bed because of the baby. I used to be a workaholic, but since the abortion, I haven't been able to keep a steady job. When I envisioned my life, it wasn't this. My mom is pro-life, so I can't go to her. My friends were there with me, but they don't understand my feelings. I've been holding this in for so long, and you've opened a safe space for me. Thank you. You don't even understand how helpful this is to me.

Clients also talk about the pressure and impact they feel from polarized conversations about abortion, both within their own circles and nationally. This client summarizes well the type of thing we hear:

> This is not about politics. People are all out of shape because of the abortion law last year [*Dobbs* ruling]. But it's all about getting help for us and the people who need it.

MRS: I've noticed that you use the wording "people who have experienced abortion" instead of "post-abortive," can you explain why?

KJH: Great question! It's pretty common now not to use labeling language like

"alcoholic" or "addict" because it reduces people to just that one part of their story. Instead, it's best practice to say, "person who misuses alcohol" or "person with substance addiction." Likewise, when it comes to those who have experienced abortion, it's important to use person-centered language that acknowledges the person first, and doesn't label them by their experience, so we can offer them the respect, dignity, and compassion they deserve. One hospital social work team in a major metropolitan area changed their wording from "post-abortion" to "after-abortion" due to our Language Matters resource.

Two other person-centered reasons we use those terms are because first, it avoids stigmatizing people who have had more than one abortion. We use the plural "abortion(s)" or wording that could be singular or plural, such as "experienced abortion." And second, it acknowledges the lived experiences of the many women and men who did not feel as if they had a choice or were part of a decision, often because of their circumstances or pressure from other people. For them, the words "chose" and "decided" can have a triggering effect or a negative, judging connotation. There is also value in focusing on the experience, which includes many factors and more than one point in time, rather than the singular focus of an assumed choice or decision.

MRS: I've also noticed you mentioning men in many of your responses. Often people think only of women in abortion conversations. Are men really impacted?

KJH: You're so right that often men are not considered in abortion discussions, and their emotions and grief after abortion are often ignored or dismissed. Yet by age 45, one in four women will experience abortion and one in five men will experience abortion through a partner's termination. Our research shows that 34% of women and 71% of men report adverse changes after abortion, such as depression, anxiety, anger, isolation, etc. And four out of five men (83%) and two out of five (63%) women either looked for help or said they could have benefited from talking to someone. Yet only 18% had any idea of where to go for help.

Beyond data, what really brings truth to light are the words shared by men themselves–our clients, event attendees, support group participants, and others. For example, one male client told us, "I don't think people realize how [abortion] affects men also. I've been so depressed since the abortion. I cry out of nowhere because of it. I have a hard time getting out of bed or doing anything." Another said,"Even though I'm pro-choice, I was surprised I felt so much. I thought since I was okay with abortion I wouldn't be affected." One other man shared, "She wanted the baby. I didn't. But afterwards I went into a deep suicidal depression. No one told me the abortion would affect me like that. It was supposed to solve the problem."

We have found it's essential to support men as well as women, so they too have the opportunity to be heard and offered options for healing to restore their well-being. For this reason, we have created versions of our Keys to Hope and Healing and Unraveled Roots resources specifically geared to men. And this year, we launched our monthly Men's Healing Matters webinar led by men to equip providers to care for men.

MRS: Can you speak briefly to the pressures women experience when it comes to choosing abortion?

KJH: Abortion experiences often are influenced by pressure from partners, family, or personal circumstances—including financial stability, relationship issues, education and career concerns, caring for other children—adding layers of emotional complexity. These pressures can leave them grappling with feelings, such as grief, guilt, depression, and isolation, making the need for support even more critical afterward. We understand that abortion experiences can further complicate and/or lead to profound emotional struggles. We provide a compassionate and understanding space offering the support women and men need to process their feelings and begin their healing journeys.

MRS: From your work and research, what do you find helps women who have experienced abortion better tend to their mental health needs?

KJH: I've found that one of the most important ways to help women and men tend to their mental health needs after abortion is by ensuring they feel heard. It's vital to create spaces where they can share their stories without fear of judgment or shame. Speaking with compassion and using person-first language—whether on social media, in-person conversations, or in the news—makes a significant difference. It's about recognizing the individual, not defining them solely by their experience.

We also need to strive to make these conversations accessible in everyday settings, like around the dinner table, so that families can engage with empathy and a willingness to understand in order to create an environment that fosters healing.

One of the tools I've found particularly effective is our four-step conversation process that guides people to examine their biases, walk in compassion, ask if the person would like to share, and connect them to support. By acknowledging the complexity of each person's experience, offering space to be heard, listening and speaking with compassion, and responding with care, we can help them not to feel isolated and help them navigate their journey to restored well-being. Compassionate, respectful conversations are key to that healing process.

MRS: For those reading this who have experienced abortion, what would you like to say to them?

KJH: For anyone who has been impacted by abortion, I would like to say, I'm so sorry for what you're going through. If you want to talk about your experience, we're here to listen and support you. You are not alone, many people have struggled after abortion and found hope, healing, and peace. We would be honored to start this journey with you and connect you to the type of healing resource that would best fit your preferences and needs. Please, reach out. You matter. We are here for you.

Then I would want to offer information to connect with Support After Abortion for confidential, compassionate support at no cost to them.

After Abortion Line
Call or text: 844-289-HOPE (4673)
Email: help@supportafterabortion.com
Website Chat at www.supportafterabortion.com.
Private messaging on Instagram
@support_after_abortion and on Facebook @SupportAfterAbortion.

Words from women and men who have experienced abortion

My abortion was the biggest secret I ever carried. I never thought I would get out of the darkness that I was engulfed in. I felt completely alone and misunderstood. Then I found Support After Abortion. They connected me with a Keys to Hope and Healing group, and I saw light breaking through. My secret changed, my life changed.

It's like a cloud of guilt and depression follows me since my abortion two years ago. I'm also extremely angry because I was vulnerable and looking for guidance, but felt pressured to choose abortion. Nobody discussed other options with me. My friends and family who know are extremely pro-choice and don't want to hear anything different from their opinions. And those who don't know, aren't pro-choice, and they'll judge me and make me feel worse. My boyfriend and I argue about it a lot. He basically said I made the choice, and I have to stick with it now, even though when I told him I was pregnant, his first words were "when are you getting rid of it?" When we talked after the abortion, he said he felt bad, but thought it was what he was supposed to do.

I'm struggling. I've had so much to deal with—sexual abuse, being trafficked, addiction. My abortion still affects me, and it's gotten worse with time. I felt very alone then and now. I'm afraid people or society will judge me. I'm worried about eternity. At times I wish I could just die.

I'm suffering from depression and anxiety since the abortion three months ago. We made the decision together, but I am having a really hard time. I need help, someone to talk to.

I'm 16 and had an abortion last year. I didn't want the abortion, but my boyfriend and his family forced me. It's affected me everyday. I think about it a lot, regret follows me, and I feel so mad at my boyfriend all the time. But I feel like I can't leave him because I'm attached to him because of the baby. I don't have anyone to talk to about this.

It's been good to have someone to talk to. I have no one. I can't even tell my girlfriend what I'm thinking and feeling. Thank you for making me feel like I matter.

Almost ten years ago I got my girlfriend pregnant. She didn't want to keep it. Being a dad is what I always wanted. To this day it haunts me to the core. Because of it I sunk into a depression and lost who I was. I still have trouble being around babies or even accidentally walking down the baby aisle. I still would like a family of my own, but I need to get around this first. Please, help me.

I didn't want the abortion. I'm in my 30s and have always wanted children. But I felt like I had to. My parents are both pastors and told me the baby wasn't of God because it was through sin. They told me I'd just become a statistic if I had the baby because I'm not financially stable and the father isn't around. I keep crying. I'd like to talk to a counselor, but since abortion is illegal in my state, that worries me.

Life keeps getting worse since my abortion. I can't even get out of bed anymore, but also can't sleep, can't function. My life is ruined, and I'm completely shattered.

I don't know how to get past this. It's so heavy. I'm seeing a counselor, but it hasn't helped yet. I don't know how I thought I could bear this weight.

I'm pregnant again and could not consider abortion this time after going through the Keys to Hope and Healing abortion healing program. Thank you!

I feel guilt, regret, and extreme sadness after having an abortion. I feel so depressed, and I'm struggling massively to sleep, eat, or even think properly. It's getting worse. I am seriously struggling with my mental health.

I'm very emotional since my abortion. I live in a state where abortion is banned, so I traveled to another state. There were protestors, and I felt like a criminal. Helplines I called made me feel like I was making the right decision. I'm pretty liberal and pro-choice, but I never thought I would have to make the decision myself. And I couldn't have known how I would truly feel afterward. I feel shameful, guilty, and like I stole something from my other kids. My friends are all pro-choice like me, and don't understand my struggles.

Thank you for talking with me. It has made me feel less alone and given me hope. The group you connected me with was so caring. Being able to tell my story without judgment and hear others share was powerful. It helped me find my voice and identify the best coping skills for me.

Keys to Hope and Healing saved me. It helped me accept my emotions and that it's okay to be vulnerable and upset. Even now, years later, I know it's okay when something triggers a memory or I get sad. I can move on. I'm just so much healthier.

I have been so focused on healing from the aftermath of my abortion that I neglected the trauma that came before it—the abandonment I felt, the abuse I endured, and the dysfunction I grew up in. Unraveled Roots helped to put the pieces together as to why I even got to the point where I was facing the abortion decision in the first place. My trauma was so much deeper than I imagined."

I recently went through the group Support After Abortion referred me to. It brought so much healing. How grateful I am for you and your guidance during this early part of my healing.

APPENDIX B

[*Clarke D. Forsythe is senior counsel at Americans United for Life. The following article was originally published on September 22, 2025, by National Review Online. Copyright 2025 by National Review. Reprinted by permission.*]

The Wrong Tool for Protecting Women from Abortion

Clarke D. Forsythe

Proposals to prosecute women for abortion are a fringe notion that is rejected by the law in virtually every state. A West Virginia statute is typical: "This section shall not be construed to subject any pregnant female upon whom an abortion is performed or induced, or attempted to be performed or induced, to a criminal penalty for any violation of this section as a principal, accessory, accomplice, conspirator, or aider and abettor." (W. Va. Code Ann. Sec. 61-2-8(c)).

Nevertheless, legislative bills have been introduced in several states in recent years to penalize women for abortions. Last spring, *Stateline* cited eight states in which bills were introduced in 2025 to prosecute women for abortion.

There are numerous reasons why most national pro-life organizations and leaders disavow criminal penalties against women for abortion. One major reason is the recognition that a woman's culpability in seeking abortion is, at best, contestable, and is frequently clouded by complex factors.

In criminal law, culpability refers to an individual's legal responsibility for a criminal act or blameworthiness, taking into account their mental state. Casual claims that women who abort are committing "murder" fail to deal with the psychological and sociological context that surrounds many women's decisions.

The prevalence of coerced abortion is ignored or denied despite its long history. Ernest Hemingway's 1927 short story, *Hills Like White Elephants*, showed how subtle male coercion can be. Even the renowned "pro-choice" ethicist Daniel Callahan admitted this. As he wrote in 1990 for *Commonweal*, "If legal abortion has given women more choice, it has also given men more choice as well. They now have a potent new weapon in the old business of manipulating and abandoning women."

Yet over 50 years of marketing has misled many that the decision to undergo an abortion is purely autonomous. This conceals the profoundly coercive factors that influence it.

The modern prevalence of abusers and traffickers coercing women into abortion is well documented. Spousal and domestic abuse are defined broadly in the law today; coerced abortion is a species of domestic abuse.

In addition, there is an appalling lack of informed consent for abortion in America. Few women know about the unique risks of mifepristone and misoprostol, the two drugs in a chemical abortion. This problem was highlighted in a congressional hearing on September 4, when Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. testified, regarding the risks of chemical abortion (mifepristone), that

"we know that during the Biden administration they actually twisted the data to bury one of the safety signals."

Mifepristone is an anti-progestin, which acts against progesterone, present in many organs of a woman's body. Mifepristone is also an anti-glucocorticosteroid. This means it blocks the glucocorticoid receptor, suppressing a woman's immune system.

An analysis of insurance data published in recent months by the Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC), from 865,727 prescribed chemical abortions between 2017 and 2023, found that 94,605 women suffered serious adverse events from the procedure. That is, among that group, more than one out of ten women taking mifepristone experienced sepsis, infection, hemorrhage, or another serious adverse event within 45 days of taking the drug. That's 22 times greater than the rate reported by the FDA.

Nor is there sufficient understanding of the dozens of international medical studies that have found an increased risk of pre-term birth (and other increased risks) after surgical abortion.

Whatever the degree of responsibility for any particular abortion decision, the criminal law should not be used to penalize women.

This is not a new question. It has been debated for more than a century, and the result of that long debate is clear. Virtually all 50 states today have a clear legal policy against prosecuting women, due to judicial decisions or legislation or both. In the face of that unanimity, it makes no sense to attempt to counter it today, especially when there is no public support for prosecution.

There is no reliable evidence that prosecuting women would lead to the elimination of abortion, and there's no reason to think that starting now would make a difference. There would be no simple causal relationship. The lack of public support would touch off surrounding cultural and political consequences that no one could confidently predict.

The negative effect of prosecuting women on effective enforcement of abortion laws was clear by the 1930s and 1940s. And even if such bills get shot down quickly in legislatures, the mere idea gets boosted by eager media, which tar and feather effective pro-life policies aimed at reducing elective abortion.

Every prosecution of a woman would require a probing, detailed examination of her mens rea, her state of mind. The unique complexity of these factors is why advocates of prosecution should leave the judgment to God.

If the cause for life in America supported prosecution, it would almost certainly affect negatively the work of pregnancy resource centers (PRCs) and divide the movement. PRCs would almost certainly be seen as centers for the collection of evidence against women who decided to abort.

At the same time, numerous post-abortive women have given voice to their abortion experience. Some are now public speakers or organizational leaders. Prosecuting women would obviously discourage any woman from "testifying" to her abortion. Not only would she feel censure from a practice of prosecution; she might

expose herself to indictment.

The cause for life needs to be on the side of women, and their flourishing, because of the negative effect of elective abortion. And it cannot be on the side of women by promoting the prosecution of women for abortion. Advocates of prosecution need to decide whether they want to punish women or reduce elective abortion.

"Last chance for one of your pithy bon mots*."*

APPENDIX C

[*John Mize is CEO of Americans United for Life. The following originally appeared August 21, 2025, at National Review Online; reprinted with permission.*]

"Choice" Cannot Coexist with Abortion Coercion

John Mize

In a matter of minutes, anyone can order abortion drugs online and have them shipped to states with even the most stringent pro-life protections.

Take the case of Christopher Cooprider. Reportedly, after multiple attempts to pressure his girlfriend, Liana Davis, to "get rid of it," Cooprider took matters into his own hands—aided by the widespread, online accessibility of abortion drugs. He is accused of ordering the pills from Aid Access and slipping them into his girlfriend's hot chocolate, making her yet another victim of domestic violence resulting from deregulated chemical abortion.

Text messages between Cooprider and Davis surfaced as part of the complaint Davis has filed against her boyfriend, as well as Aid Access and its director, Rebecca Gomperts. These messages show a pattern of verbal and emotional abuse common among victims of abortion coercion, many of whom are eventually subjected to vile forced abortions.

Sadly, Liana Davis is only the most recent story. Since the Biden administration discarded the in-person dispensing requirement associated with the FDA approval of the abortion drug mifepristone, women have continued to come forward with stories of coercion and blatant abuse.

Data have consistently shown that nearly 70 percent of women describe some form of coercion as influential in their abortion. Often, this occurs as a form of domestic partner violence, but it can also result from relationships with other family members or even a medical provider. Allowing mail-order abortions prevents doctors from screening for coercion, but, of course, the abortion industry doesn't care as long as they make a profit.

Advanced provision prescribing feeds directly into their revenue streams. There has been an increasing trend in abortionists prescribing mifepristone and misoprostol before pregnancy. One recent study showed that approximately 15 percent of chemical abortion drugs were prescribed for "advanced provision" use.

Essentially, these drugs are being prescribed as a pregnancy "fail-safe," without regard for the potentially dangerous side effects and contraindications. Any drug requiring a "black box" warning should not be handed out without the close supervision of a trained health care professional.

But the abortion industry has shown an elaborate historical pattern of enabling coercion and abuse, willing to sacrifice women's "choice" on the altar of abortion access and increased profit. "Choice" cannot exist if coercion is allowed to prosper.

The pro-abortion Obama administration began the stealthy and calculated process of removing safeguards associated with the FDA approval of mifepristone, which was later fulfilled by his successor, Joe Biden. The Biden administration used the Covid-19 pandemic's "social distancing" to justify telehealth abortion, which twisted into the nefarious mail-order practices.

An additional consequence of deregulated and unfettered access to chemical abortion is the rampant proliferation of sexual trafficking. Traffickers who have historically taken their victims to brick-and-mortar abortion businesses can now purchase these drugs online without speaking with a live person, perpetuating the cycle of abuse without the threat of being reported by a discerning health care provider. Abuse, yet again, begets abuse.

Liana Davis's story comes on the heels of a new analysis that suggests chemical abortions result in nearly 22 times the adverse event rate as the FDA notes on their approval of mifepristone. These adverse events are not merely numbers—each event is the story of a woman who has suffered because politics has been placed over women's lives and scientific rigor.

The review the FDA is currently conducting in light of this new analysis is more important than ever. At a minimum, the FDA is obligated to restore the in-person dispensing requirements to prevent further domestic violence and abuse. Should they choose not to act, more women will continue to be abused or worse, and the FDA will be complicit in their harm.

Laws like those in Louisiana, Texas, and West Virginia that prevent abortion pill trafficking must continue to be passed across the country and defended in court. Abortion shield laws must be challenged and abolished to allow states to protect women and girls within their borders.

Devastation has occurred in the wake of the deregulation of abortion medication. America must act to prevent abuse and protect the vulnerable.

APPENDIX D

[*The following was posted on the Catholic News Agency's website on October 9th, 2025, and reprinted with permission (https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/). Tessa Gervasini is a CNA staff reporter*.]

Faith-Based Ministries Discuss how to Further Pro-Life Mission

Tessa Gervasini

Pro-life leaders from across the country gathered this week to discuss how faith-based ministries are helping to cultivate a society that promotes human dignity and how others can advance the cause.

The Leading with Love Conference at The Catholic University of America (CUA) in Washington, D.C., was sponsored by the Human Life Foundation and the Center for Law and the Human Person at The Catholic University of America's Columbus School of Law. It was aimed at "empowering Christians to cultivate a culture of life within their local communities."

Jennie Bradley Lichter, president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, spoke to attendees Oct. 8 about the power of faith-based ministries, including The Guadalupe Project. Lichter founded the initiative in 2022 to provide resources and encouragement to parents within the CUA community.

To cultivate this encouragement, we must figure out how we can "create more of a revolution of love," Lichter said. "Christ started this revolution of love, but it's now up to each one of us in our particular time and place."

"Caring for unborn babies and their mothers is one of the most urgent challenges of our time, Lichter said. "Six out of 10 women who have chosen abortion would have preferred to choose life if they had the emotional and financial support they felt necessary."

The Guadalupe Project's goal was to combat this by "[making] sure every woman on campus knows that resources exist and knows exactly how to find them," Lichter said. "It's meant to support all parents on campus, not just students, and not just mothers in unexpected or challenging circumstances."

"We wanted to foster a culture on campus where each life is celebrated, knowing that a positive, vibrant, and joyful culture of life is truly life-giving in so many ways," Lichter said.

The initiative "revamped all of the university's pregnancy resource materials for students" and created "a poster campaign, including one designed specifically for the men's dorms," Lichter said.

It also promoted the placement of stickers in every women's restroom stall on campus with a QR code leading to these pregnancy materials. The campus started allotting more maternity and paternity leave, designating maternity parking spots on campus, providing free diapers and wipes at the campus food pantry, holding maternity clothing drives, and "affirming the goodness of family life and that new

babies are a moment to celebrate," Lichter said.

The 2026 theme for the March for Life is "Life Is a Gift," Lichter said. The initiative helps carry that out, because "life is something to be celebrated."

She added: "[Life] is not a burden for which someone needs support, or not solely that. It is really a cause for celebration."

Faith-based communities can use The Guadalupe Project as "prototype," Lichter suggested. She shared that other universities have reached out to talk about the initiative as they were inspired to consider doing something similar.

"We need to make sure that pregnant women never reach the point of despair that drives them into the arms of the abortion clinics," Lichter said. "We need to meet that moment of loneliness, fear, or emptiness with encouragement and empowerment."

Hopes and suggestions for faith-based ministries

Other leaders from prominent pro-life ministries discussed what gives them hope for the future of the pro-life movement, including Kat Talalas of Walking with Moms in Need, Amy Ford of Embrace Grace, Christopher Bell of Good Counsel Homes, and Sister Maria Frassati of the Sisters of Life.

Talalas, who is the assistant director of pro-life communications for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said Walking with Moms in Need started five years ago but has already reached countless communities.

The parish-based initiative is "to the point where we don't even know a lot of the time what new diocese or parish is starting a Walking with Moms in Need, what new lives are being saved, [and] what new women are being accompanied," Talalas said. "It's taken on a life of its own. That's the work of the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit convicting hearts."

"God guides us, we have each other, and we're not alone. Just as we tell [mothers] that they're not alone, we're not alone in this movement. So what's giving me hope is seeing the Holy Spirit catch fire and individual people saying: 'I want to start talking with moms in need,' and women saying: 'I can do this,'" Talalas said.

Talalas said the work all begins with prayer. "It's sitting in the presence of the love of God, letting him love you, and seeing how the Holy Spirit convicts you … It begins with that individual conviction. If we're not following God's law, it doesn't matter what we're doing."

Ford, who leads Embrace Grace, which provides mothers support through local churches, said she has "noticed there's a lot of people that seem like they have more of an open heart about Christianity, about spirituality . . . especially with the younger generation."

She added: "I think that's something we can all have hope about."

To get involved, Ford said people need to carry out "the good works that God's called us to do." She posed the question: "What strengths and gifts did God put inside each of you that you can do?"

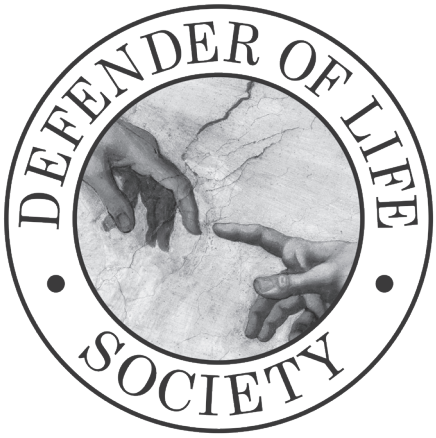
While Bell's ministry, Good Counsel, provides services including housing for homeless mothers and children and post-abortion healing services, he said every

person can help by simply praying. He specifically called on people to pray in front of an abortion center.

"If you have done it, do it again. If you've never done it, just go . . . You don't have to say anything. You didn't have to look up. You don't have to open your eyes. But your presence will mean the world," Bell said. "The babies who will die there that day will know that you loved them . . . That's the most important thing to do."

Sister Maria Frassati shared that "we could really grow in having more faith in what [God] is doing."

"The truth is that God is actually really working in so many ways," she said. "God is faithful, and that really gives me a lot of hope that nothing that you give is ever wasted. Even if you walk with a woman who's not receptive, there's really no gift that has been offered to him that he has not kept sacred and precious in his heart."



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The prevalence of coerced abortion is ignored or denied despite its long history. Ernest Hemingway's 1927 short story, *Hills Like White Elephants*, showed how subtle male coercion can be. Even the renowned "pro-choice" ethicist Daniel Callahan admitted this. As he wrote in 1990 for *Commonweal*, "If legal abortion has given women more choice, it has also given men more choice as well. They now have a potent new weapon in the old business of manipulating and abandoning women."

—Clarke Forsythe: "The Wrong Tool for Protecting Women from Abortion"