



◆ FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE ◆

Mary Rose Somarriba on
DIY ABORTION RETURNS: FROM BACK ALLEYS TO BATHROOMS

Christopher M. Reilly on
IS AI PRO-LIFE?

Nicholas Frankovich on
THE STRANGE BEDFELLOWS OF MODERN PRONATALISM

Jennie Bradley Lichter on
LEADING WITH LOVE

THE 22ND ANNUAL GREAT DEFENDER OF LIFE DINNER
Honoring Dr. Christina Francis and Anne Conlon

Ellen Wilson Fielding on
AS WESTERN CIVILIZATION LAY DYING

NEW: Life Stories presents
MY DAUGHTER EMMA

Leah Libresco Sargeant on
THE INNATE DEPENDENCE OF ALL HUMANITY

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An Interview with Professor Miguel Pastorino on Uruguay

Booknotes: Jason Morgan reviews

Human Embryo Adoption, Volume Two: Catholic Arguments for and Against
& The Zygote of Christ and The Mystery Of Man

Appendix: Kat Talalas speaks to Catholic World Report

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



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Editor in Chief
Maria McFadden Maffucci

Editors
Christopher M. Reilly
Mary Rose Somarriba

Senior Editor
Ellen Wilson Fielding

Managing Editor
Christina Angelopoulos

Contributors
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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We begin our 52nd year of publishing with timely and important articles from our two new editors, Mary Rose Somarriba and Christopher M. Reilly.

In “DIY Abortion Returns: From Back Alleys to Bathrooms,” Somarriba makes the chilling case that the easy availability of “medication abortion” has brought back the dangers of the back alley. “In a strange full-circle moment,” she writes, “the abortion lobby that once invoked the horrors of self-managed abortion and demanded doctor-directed procedures now promotes at-home abortion as a comparable solution.” The abortion “pill,” really two medications taken separately, is now the dominant method of abortion in the U.S. Women lose their unborn children alone, in their bathrooms, with excruciating pain, tremendous bleeding, and often (more than with surgical abortions) complications requiring emergency care. Many have not been examined by any medical professionals, and, in the case of an ectopic pregnancy, “their life-threatening condition will be left untreated and could lead to a ruptured fallopian tube.” Somarriba includes harrowing first-person accounts from several sources and points to other dangers of the pills, including coercion—recently exposed in several news accounts—where women are deceived into ingesting the drugs by those who want the child dead. What about any restrictions? The abortion lobby is not having it. As Somarriba writes, it is clear that now “The goal is abortion access, not women’s health.”

Debates about AI are prominent in the news and across academic disciplines. So, we ask, “Is AI Pro-Life?” Christopher Reilly, author of the recent book *AI and Sin*, gives us a resounding *No*. Although there are some positive uses for the technology, they pale in comparison to the dangers. AI, because of “its anthropomorphic delusion that nonhumans can have distinct human qualities—depreciates the aspects of human nature that truly make it exceptional.” And yet many are now enamored with this delusion, sometimes tragically; young people have taken their own lives because of a “relationship” with a chatbot. Regarding pro-life issues, the age of AI is the “logical conclusion of man’s pursuit of power over the world,” and “power is also the core value of the culture of death”—“power over our own bodies and any persons conceived in it,” in abortion, “power over nature” in the eugenic screening of embryos, and so on. In this fascinating essay, Reilly traces the roots of AI in our history and explains why we are so tempted to embrace it, at our own peril.

What about “pro-Natalism”—isn’t that pro-life? Not so fast, writes Nicholas Frankovich in “The Strange Bedfellows of Modern Pronatalism.” The movement, he writes, is “a precarious coalition of visionaries and pragmatists.” While pragmatists, like Catholic economist Catherine Pakaluk, believe having children increases personal happiness and improves society, she calls the overall movement an “unholy alliance.” Frankovich explains that the visionaries involve two camps: religious traditionalists and techno-futurists, and enmeshed in both are some leaders with disturbing agendas, such as promoting eugenics, in-vitro fertilization and, as Frankovich writes “comic-book fantasies about dominance and hypermasculinity, the flip side of some

dark emotions about women.” This is an eye-opening read, and an important call to keep a critical eye on a movement that at first blush may seem completely benign.

We couldn’t ask for a more shining example of *authentic* pro-birth *and* pro-women leadership than what you will read next: Jennie Bradley Lichter’s address, “Leading with Love.” Last October, the Human Life Foundation joined with the Center for Law and the Human Person at the Catholic University of America to hold an ecumenical conference of pregnancy resource center leaders. We were thrilled to have Lichter, president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, deliver the keynote address on the university campus. It’s a masterful combination of spiritual exhortation, intellectual refreshment, first-hand experience of pregnancy resource centers, and surrounding it all, the conviction that “Love is the best way to draw people in”—especially love for the moms so that they feel “comfortable approaching a pregnancy resource center or other organization.”

Our special section highlights another great event: our 22nd Annual Great Defender of Life Dinner. On November 7, we honored Dr. Christina Francis, CEO of the American Association of Pro-life OBGYNs (AAPLOG)—whose article, “It’s Time for a New Path Forward in Medicine” led our summer issue. We also hosted a fond salute to our retiring longtime editor (of 30 years!), Anne Conlon, who was lauded by Helen Alvaré, a Great Defender of Life herself. The evening was one of fellowship and joy, as you will see in the photos included. (You can also see the video online, at www.humanlifereview.com).

In her sobering article, “As Western Civilization Lay Dying,” senior editor Ellen Wilson Fielding writes about our “our civilization’s increasingly suicidal course.” She deftly sums it up: Our “many-faceted death urge manifests itself in orgies of literal death, including abortion, euthanasia and mass murders; in avoidance of life, such as the retreat from marriage and formation of families; and in escape from reality like transgenderism, social media, pornography, and the seemingly endless prolongation of adolescence.” Although the pursuit of human betterment has yielded many great benefits—advances in medicine, comfort, convenience—“many of us have lost our way” because all improvements in the human condition “leave unaddressed the real problem, the real human challenge in this and every age—how to discern our human purpose and attempt to fulfill it. What do humans *mean*? Why *are* we?”

But it’s not all doom and gloom, there are always signs of hope, illuminated by Fielding in her poignant prose. And because we need to stress the hope as well, we bring you a new feature, “Life Stories.” Every day, women choose to bring their babies to life, and their stories need to be heard. What better places to find them than the wonderful pregnancy resource centers we support? You may not know that our educational endeavors are just one part of the HLF’s mission; since the beginning, we have also had a charitable aim, in offering grants to pregnancy resource centers around the country—organizations, like us, without major institutional support but dependent on the generosity of individuals. Our first story “My Daughter Emma” is from the Sisters of Life, the order founded by the late Cardinal John O’Connor specifically to foster a culture of life.

There is a subject that even those devoted to a culture of life find difficult: the adoption of frozen embryos. As Jason Morgan writes in “Booknotes,” even in the Catholic church, “there is no magisterial consensus on how these poor souls should be cared for, including how or even whether they should be freed from their frozen limbo.” Morgan reviews two books on the subject: the National Catholic Bioethics Center’s *Human Embryo Adoption, Volume Two: Catholic Arguments For and Against*, edited by Trent Horn and Kent Lasnoski, and *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man*, by Francis Etheredge and Elizabeth Rex. Morgan lays out the strong opinions on both sides of the debate—from “embryo adoption is illicit and unlikely ever to be sanctioned” by the Church (Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk) to adoption is act of “redemptive love” and “an adopting love goes beyond the injustice of a child conceived ‘maternally homeless’ without endorsing the method through which the injustice was perpetrated” (Francis Etheredge). A thorny question, to be sure, and one greatly clarified for us in this articulate essay.

Leah Libresco Sargeant’s *The Dignity of Dependence: A Feminist Manifesto* is a notable and important new book. We are pleased to reprint remarks Sargeant gave at a book-signing event last fall. She says she was “counseled against” using the word “feminist,” now a controversial word in pro-life and some religious circles. But she insists on using it, properly: feminism is “at its core about responding to women as women. . . . Not women as defective men, but distinctively women with our own needs.” Another “negative” word in our culture: Dependence. Yet she counters this: dependence is actually what makes us human beings. We are dependent, first on our Creator, and then on our fellow humans, and acknowledging this dependence frees us to live and thrive. “Women are the canary in the coal mines of a society that makes an idol of autonomy” because “women are exposed early to the ways that our mere existence makes us vulnerable to the need someone else can place on us.”

The false shame of being dependent is used to promote assisted suicide and euthanasia around the world. Sadly, in October, Uruguay became the first country in Latin America to legalize euthanasia. The HLR interviewed Professor Michael Pastorino, a professor of philosophy and bioethics at the Catholic University of Uruguay, about how the law came to be, what it involves, and what other countries in Latin American may be next.

Finally, our appendix is an interview from Catholic World Report with Kat Talalas, assistant Director for Pro-life Communications at the Catholic Bishops’ conference, about their pro-life initiative Walking with Moms in Need. It’s a framework, she says, “for a parish to evaluate how they are serving pregnant and parenting moms in need in the community, discovering what resources are available, and prayerfully deciding what they can do uniquely to bridge gaps in services.” We wrap up with the hopeful message that we can *all* promote a culture of life, by sharing the truth found in these pages, and the life-saving resources in our communities, with others.

MARIA MCFADDEN MAFFUCCI
EDITOR IN CHIEF

DIY Abortion Returns:

From Back Alleys to Bathrooms

Mary Rose Somarriba

For decades, the most potent image deployed in favor of legalized abortion has been the coat hanger. The message has always been blunt: If abortion is not provided by licensed physicians using sanitized instruments, women will resort to desperate and dangerous methods on their own. The image is deliberately visceral—an unwound wire hanger, a woman attempting to induce an abortion herself, risking hemorrhage or death. For many, this visual horror has been emotionally persuasive, serving as a justification for legal, surgical abortion as a lesser evil.

This never worked at persuading me; sanitized instruments and a medical license can't rid the procedure of its disgusting end result: dead baby parts. Where the self-administered hanger always stunned me for how it resembled a violent murder-suicide standoff—*if you don't give me what I want, I'll kill us both!*—to me, the abortion lobby's attempts to brand abortion as a legitimate medical procedure just made it sound more like a systematized effort to obscure the scale and nature of what is being done.

Still, by and large, the coat-hanger image worked, both on individual and societal levels. Men involved in abortion decisions have reported supporting abortion out of fear that their partners might pursue unsafe alternatives, and organizations such as Planned Parenthood have long relied on this emphasis on “safety” to attract supporters.¹ It is far more palatable to claim that one is preventing women from bleeding to death than to acknowledge participation in the routine killing of unborn children.

“We provided X number of safe abortions,” advocacy groups will declare,² as though the only alternative was less-safe abortions, not a well-supported woman and a living, breathing child, which true charity could actually provide.

When “Safe and Legal” Stops Meaning Medical

That long-standing narrative—that abortion is a *medical* decision, and as such is safest when performed under a doctor's supervision—has become increasingly strained in the era of the abortion pill. Actually it's two pills: mifepristone, which blocks the hormone progesterone, and misoprostol, which causes the uterus to contract and expel the growing human. According to

Mary Rose Somarriba is co-editor of the *Human Life Review* and editor-in-chief of *Verily* Magazine.

Planned Parenthood’s website, the second pill “causes cramping and bleeding to empty your uterus. It’s kind of like having a really heavy, crampy period, and the process is very similar to an early miscarriage.”³

This form of “medication abortion” has become the dominant method of abortion in the United States. The Guttmacher Institute reports that, in 2023, medication abortion accounted for 63 percent of clinician-provided abortions.⁴ Guttmacher notes that the drug can be provided by clinicians “other than physicians,” which they consider to be a positive development that expands access and availability. Never mind that such pills, often ordered online, require no in-person medical oversight or follow-up care. Women are encouraged to manage the process alone at home, even as evidence mounts that this approach carries substantial medical risks.

How Did We Get Here?

One might say abortion providers took the social distancing measures of the Covid pandemic and ran with them to expand ease of access to abortion pills. In 2020, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, with support from the ACLU, sued the FDA, saying its rules for abortion drugs put doctors and patients at risk.⁵ The FDA later rolled back those rules.

In 2021, the agency stopped enforcing its long-standing safety requirements for mifepristone so that patients no longer had to go to a clinic in person; they could meet with a provider online and have abortion pills mailed to them.⁶ This change led to some states enacting “shield laws”—measures that protect providers who prescribe or mail abortion drugs across state lines, even when those drugs are restricted elsewhere.⁷

And that’s how abortion—the procedure previous activists touted as an essential “healthcare decision between a woman and her doctor”—became anything but. Since these are powerful drugs being taken without medical supervision, it should not surprise anyone that things can go wrong. For example, without an ultrasound, if mail-order abortion pills are sent to a woman who has an ectopic pregnancy, her life-threatening condition will be left untreated and could lead to a ruptured fallopian tube.⁸

The End of Doctor-Directed Abortion

In April 2024, *The Washington Post* published a feature story titled “Alone in a Bathroom: The Fear and Uncertainty of a Post-Roe Medication Abortion,” sharing the story of Angel, who experienced pain “sharp enough that the 23-year-old said she struggled to stand.” *The Washington Post* reports, “While Angel would be fine by the next morning, she worried that something might be very wrong as she lay on the cold bathroom tile, her body racked

by some of the worst pain she could remember. When Angel’s fiancé came in to check on her, she was having diarrhea while vomiting into their popcorn bowl. ‘F---, she remembered yelling, over and over. ‘I feel like I need to push.’”⁹

If you look for them, stories like Angel’s can be found interspersed in round-ups of women’s experiences after taking the abortion pill. A woman named Cynthia told *TODAY* in 2023, “I wasn’t provided as much support as I would have liked, nor was I properly informed of the impact the abortion would have on my body.”¹⁰ A woman named Claire told *Vogue* in 2022, “It was honestly surreal. I kept cramping and got sicker, and I ended up throwing up a lot The abortion pill can be very painful, and I feel I wasn’t properly warned about how sick I could get.”¹¹ Another told *Vice* in 2020 that it was like giving birth: “I have a pretty high pain tolerance so I was just counting the seconds through [the contractions] until they would go away . . . I probably used the restroom about seven times in two hours [I] actually saw the embryo come out of me in the toilet. It scared me and I flushed it really quickly.”¹² Reviewing women’s different experiences, I’d often encounter stories where women called it the worst experience of their life.

The 2024 *Washington Post* piece summarized, “as more women in states with abortion bans choose to end their pregnancies on their own, without directly interacting with a medical professional, they are thrust into a largely ad hoc, unregulated system of online and grass-roots abortion pill distributors—an experience that, while deemed generally safe by medical experts, can be confusing, scary and, at times, deeply traumatic.”

It’s not often *The Washington Post* is caught echoing Abby Johnson, the Planned Parenthood employee turned pro-life activist, but compare the *Post* summary to what Johnson wrote in *Newsweek* in 2023:

These women aren’t told what they will experience or how much pain they may be in. They aren’t told they may feel like they are dying because of the pain and the loss of blood. They aren’t told that, if they are further along in pregnancy than they thought, they may see the “product of conception”—looking very much like a tiny baby—come out of their body.

Of her medication abortion many years prior, Johnson says, “It was a horrific experience I wouldn’t wish on anyone. The number of medication abortions is only going up and the mental health community does not seem equipped to deal with it—or even acknowledge there may be a problem. Most therapists and clinicians don’t ask about reproductive loss or have any idea how past abortions can severely affect the mental health of both women and men in the present.”¹³

From Anecdote to Evidence

These women's stories aren't unique. In April 2025, the Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC) published a report called "The Abortion Pill Harms Women: Insurance Data Reveals One in Ten Patients Experiences a Serious Adverse Event."¹⁴ The largest-known study of the abortion pill, it is based on analysis of data from an all-payer insurance claims database that includes 865,727 prescribed mifepristone abortions from 2017 to 2023.

The study found that 10.93 percent of women experience sepsis, infection, hemorrhaging, or another serious or life-threatening adverse event within 45 days following a mifepristone abortion—far exceeding the "less than 0.5 percent" figure reported in clinical trials on the drug's label. The EPPC concluded that "the FDA should immediately reinstate its earlier, stronger patient safety protocols to ensure physician responsibility for women who take mifepristone under their care, as well as mandate full reporting of its side effects."

The Guttmacher Institute criticized EPPC's "The Abortion Pill Harms Women" report, saying it "erroneously characterizes people seeking care at an emergency room or other health care setting during or after a medication abortion as a serious adverse event. However, an ER visit alone is not evidence of a complication." Guttmacher further accused groups like EPPC of taking "efforts to conflate normal patient behavior with medical emergencies."¹⁵

It's worth noting for a moment how Guttmacher's response resembles the side-effect-denying gaslighting that women have long said they experienced when talking to their doctors about birth-control side effects.¹⁶ If Guttmacher took a closer look at the data EPPC used in its "The Abortion Pill Harms Women" report, they might see that "normal patient behavior" after taking the abortion pill and "medical emergencies" are, for too many women, one and the same.

An EPPC fact sheet noted that the "The Abortion Pill Harms Women" study "excluded a majority of emergency room visits to avoid overstating risks" and that "the emergency room visits included in the report are only those related to the chemical abortion, based on the diagnosis and procedure codes in the insurance records, and are counted only if treatment for a serious complication related to the chemical abortion took place."¹⁷

In addition, of the high percentage of "other abortion-related complications" the EPPC report found, many involved surgical interventions such as dilation and curettage or operating-room procedures deemed severe or life-threatening—clearly not events women can manage alone in their homes.

This is not the first evidence pointing to higher emergency acuity (that is, requiring more urgent and involved medical response) following chemical

abortion. A peer-reviewed study published by the Charlotte Lozier Institute in 2024 revealed that “both the number and acuity of [Emergency Department] visits following pregnancy outcomes are increasing. ED visit acuity following chemical abortion is persistently and significantly higher than for surgical abortion or live birth.”¹⁸

What’s more, a study in England reported that of the 248,000 women who between 2019 and 2021 “self-managed their medical abortion at home,” more than 14,000 required “treatment in an NHS hospital for [retained product of conception], a complication arising directly from the expected failure of the medical abortion treatment.”¹⁹ In 2020, 1 in 17 women who acquired mail-order abortion pills later needed hospital treatment.²⁰

Perhaps this is why the World Health Organization considers a “safe abortion” to be one administered by a trained health worker, and categorizes abortions as “less safe” when performed “by an untrained person albeit using a safe method like misoprostol.”²¹

Regulatory Reckoning—or Regulatory Delay

After the EPPC report was released, in August 2025 a coalition of 22 state attorneys general called on Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to reinstate safeguards for the abortion pill, urging that, if the FDA cannot reinstate those safeguards, it should consider withdrawing mifepristone from the market until the FDA “completes its review and can decide on a course of action based on objective safety and efficacy criteria.”²² The FDA Commissioner Marty Makary and HHS secretary Kennedy responded in a September 2025 letter stating, “this Administration will ensure that women’s health is properly protected by thoroughly investigating the circumstances under which mifepristone can be safely dispensed.”²³

But reports suggest the FDA is delaying such an investigation until after the 2026 midterm elections. According to *Bloomberg* in December 2025, while Makary and Kennedy “have told lawmakers and state attorneys general for months that they are actively conducting a review of mifepristone,” no action is being taken. “Behind the scenes,” *Bloomberg* reports, “Makary has told agency officials to delay the safety review.”²⁴ In response, pro-life organizations such as Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America have called for Makary to be fired for slow-walking the report while the abortion drugs remain widely distributed.

This delay has led some lawmakers to take the lead in investigating the safety of the pills. In January 2026, the Senate held a hearing called “Protecting Women: Exposing the Dangers of Chemical Abortion Drugs,” revealing

a deep divide over the safety and regulation of medication abortion.²⁵ Republican members and their medical experts argued that the removal of in-person dispensing requirements has created a medically dangerous environment where women face risks of hemorrhaging, sepsis, and psychological trauma without adequate supervision. Further, they highlighted harrowing accounts of “reproductive coercion,” where the ease of obtaining pills through the mail allowed abusers or traffickers to surreptitiously drug women, arguing that the FDA must reinstate strict oversight and “Black Box” warnings to ensure genuine informed consent.

In contrast, Democratic members at the hearing, along with abortionist Nisha Verma whom they invited to testify, characterized the claims as politically motivated attacks on “settled science,” asserting that mifepristone is safer than common over-the-counter medications. Claiming that telehealth is a critical lifeline for women living in areas where medical access is limited or in states with total abortion bans, they positioned the abortion pill as a safe and private way to access essential healthcare. Further, they claimed that the EPPC-documented harms resulted from flawed, non-peer-reviewed studies intended to justify a national abortion ban, and insisted that any complications or desperation seen in patients was a direct result of restrictive state laws, which create fear and prevent women from seeking necessary follow-up care in their own communities.

EPPC president Ryan Anderson and EPPC’s director of data analysis Jamie Bryan Hall coauthored a response in *The Federalist*, noting that “the Democrats’ witness accused us of committing ‘substantial errors’ and lacking ‘transparency’ in our study when, in fact, *The Washington Post*’s ‘fact checker’ went back and forth with us for multiple rounds of questions and ultimately published a review of our study that awarded us no ‘Pinocchios.’” Further, they wrote, “we—along with a majority of the U.S. Senate and nearly half of the U.S. House of Representatives—recommended that they conduct their own study, and the leadership of HHS and the FDA agreed to do so. How could anyone reasonably oppose this?”²⁶

The Goal Is Abortion Access, Not Women’s Health

Pro-life activists have for decades emphasized how the abortion lobby appears to prioritize the active promotion of abortion over women’s health or even women’s free choices. With the Pandora’s box of mail-order abortion pills having been opened, the redirection away from women’s health toward uninhibited abortion access has never been clearer. The only difference is that now it’s voiced by abortion supporters in addition to proliferators.

“The irony of this post-*Dobbs* world,” former Planned Parenthood Global

employee Dee Redwine told NPR in 2025, “is that if it goes the way that I think it will [as] I saw in Latin America, in some ways abortion ironically will become more accessible, but less legal.”²⁷ Whether or not its harms are documented and lead to it becoming illegal, “there’s no putting that genie back in the bottle.”

This fatalistic attitude is echoed in the 2024 recommendations of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) on self-managed abortion (SMA), instructing OB/GYNs and other medical professionals to “apply a harm-reduction approach to reduce potential negative consequences associated with SMA,” since “complete elimination of that behavior is not a realistic goal.” ACOG added, “this approach aims to center patient autonomy by focusing on reducing potential negative consequences . . . instead of pretending that the behavior does not occur at all.”²⁸

In other words, the abortion lobby’s PR emphasis on promoting abortion as healthcare is no longer the goal. Women aren’t seeking abortion pills for medical reasons anyway; by and large, women who take abortion pills are doing so too early in pregnancy to even have complications to encounter. Perhaps that’s why not one of the personal accounts I’ve read cited a medical reason for pursuing abortion pills.

While the abortion lobby’s imprimatur on abortion pills is bad for women’s health, a silver lining of this detached health emphasis could be that now we can return the focus of healthcare to what it really is—promoting healthy human development.

More Dangers of the Pill

Beyond regulatory failures, the pill’s mail-order availability has enabled deeply troubling abuses. A minor is able to obtain abortion pills online with ease, as documented by Students for Life.²⁹ In a widely cited 2025 case, a boyfriend crushed the pill into a drink, forcing an abortion without the woman’s knowledge.³⁰ In a 2024 case, a doctor lost his license after force-feeding his girlfriend a crushed abortion pill.³¹ Another man was caught swapping an abortion pill with what his girlfriend thought was an antibiotic regimen.³² Still another held his girlfriend at gunpoint, demanding she take the pill.³³ Stories like these add legitimacy to findings from a 2023 survey by the Charlotte Lozier Institute, revealing that “close to 70 percent of the women who had abortions described them as coerced, pressured, or inconsistent with their own values and preferences.”³⁴ RIP “right to choose,” as today’s youth might say.

Meanwhile, unsupervised abortions raise additional ethical and environmental concerns. Human remains are flushed into sewer systems, treated as

disposable waste. Leaders from Students for Life of America are lobbying the Environmental Protection Agency to include the abortion drug ingredients among common water pollutants.³⁵ While the Guttmacher Institute claims the drug residue poses minimal environmental risk,³⁶ the contrast with existing regulations governing the disposal of human tissue is striking. In states such as Ohio, human remains classified as infectious waste must be disinfected before disposal—standards that at-home abortions simply bypass.³⁷

At the January Senate hearing, abortionist Dr. Nisha Verma and Democratic senators referred to this claim as a “conspiracy theory” and argued that focusing on wastewater was a “distraction.”³⁸ But as more and more women are encountering their aborted children in the flesh with DIY abortions, unlike surgical ones, I can’t help but wonder if the growing numbers of those gaining a greater knowledge of the realities of ending a human life through DIY abortion might one day contribute to a turning tide in public opinion on abortion at large.

The Safety Narrative Starts to Fray

Even now, despite the post-*Dobbs* increase in mail-order abortions, there’s evidence that public confidence in the abortion pill is eroding.

The nonpartisan healthcare think tank KFF reported that 40 percent of Americans say they are “not sure” about mifepristone’s safety, while another 18 percent view the pills as either “very unsafe” or “somewhat unsafe.” That marks a sharp rise in skepticism about the pills since 2023, when just 9 percent viewed them as unsafe, and 35 percent said they were unsure.³⁹

Meanwhile, abortion providers continue to market mail-order abortion as “private and safe,” while safeguards are stripped away, leaving women in such situations to manage hemorrhage, severe complications, and emotional distress alone at home.

The battle over the abortion pill is ultimately a battle over truth—about medical data, regulatory responsibility, and the real costs borne by women when abortion is reframed not as a serious medical event but as a consumer product to be self-administered.

In a strange full-circle moment, the abortion lobby that once invoked the horrors of self-managed abortion and demanded doctor-directed procedures now promotes at-home abortion as a comparable solution. It’s as if the hanger has simply been rebranded and distributed, leaving women to bear the burden on their own bodies, manage the aftermath in isolation, and seek medical intervention only when things go wrong.

Abortion advocates today often claim we are going backward in women’s health. On that point, they are right—though the regression is of their own

making. Those of us who oppose abortion see this shift not as progress gone awry, but as the logical conclusion of a practice that has long dehumanized both mother and child.

NOTES

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Is AI Pro-Life?

Christopher M. Reilly

I have posed the question of whether AI is pro-life to multiple people, and the responses are fascinating but scattered. Some hopped onto their computer or cell phone to query AI applications directly, as if AI models can provide authentic, personal testimony. This approach is similar to a creative experiment—described by Blake Schaper in a popular *Human Life Review Online* piece—in which a contrived “debate” about the protection of nascent human life was arranged between AI language models, with the pro-life side coming out as the winner.¹ Such queries may give us insight into the reasoning processes and biases of those models, but we are still left wondering about whether AI is more or less helpful for humanity, or whether its lack of humanity renders it dangerous.

Expanding on the definition of “pro-life,” many of us celebrate a technological revolution in productive capabilities and elevation of human ingenuity, while others express dismay at an encroaching regime of digital surveillance, labor disruption, decline in cognitive skills, and more. A friend told me that AI is most certainly not pro-life because it is, at its core, “anti-love.” I sympathize with that perspective, but it will take a lot of reflection to unpack it.

Will the spread of AI technology throughout our culture promote recognition of the right to life and the intrinsic dignity of human persons at all stages of life? As I see it, the answer is *no*, at least for the foreseeable future. It will take some fundamental shifts in cultural attitudes and ideologies before AI can become a net positive force for the defense of human life, and many such changes will be in spite of, rather than because of, the proliferation of AI.

This is not to say there aren’t practical uses of AI for the pro-life movement or positive effects on the welfare of various people, but those effects are mixed and, in many ways, unpredictable. On the positive side, some pro-life groups have already developed AI chatbots that enable self-motivated people to anonymously type in their questions and hold apparent conversations with the automated chatbots to deepen their understanding of pro-life arguments and information. We may see development of AI-driven platforms online that individualize the engagement, assistance, and support

Christopher M. Reilly, Th.D. writes and speaks about a Christian response to advanced technology, bioethics, moral theology, and philosophy. He is the author of the book *AI and Sin*.

of thousands of women in decision-making related to pregnancy and abortion. Accounting and administrative software that is enhanced with AI and accommodates directions or queries submitted in natural language could be a significant boost for small pregnancy centers that lack specialized staff and resources.

In the medical field, AI machine learning technology can greatly accelerate the identification and development of life-saving vaccines, some of which may have particular benefits for the youngest and oldest people who are otherwise most targeted by the culture of death. AI has proven to be highly useful in advancing and evaluating diagnostic scans, which could lead to ever more realistic and emotionally compelling images of unborn children, potential discoveries of eye-opening indications of early-stage brain and organ activities, and better diagnosis and medical treatment of the smallest of us.² Generative AI enhancement has enabled the discovery of conscious brain activity in patients thought to be comatose.³

On the other hand, however, many of the effects of AI technology are very concerning. Pro-abortion groups are developing and publicizing AI chatbots that guide women through a self-administered abortion. AI-enhanced, pre-implantation genetic testing of unborn children will propel increased use of such probabilistic estimates of inherited conditions to screen out and discard “unhealthy” human embryos during IVF procedures as well as amplify commercial efforts to sell eugenic hand-picking according to intellectual, athletic, and aesthetic traits.⁴ The accurate presentation of pro-life principles and arguments to the public is unlikely when accessing commonly used AI models, especially those that trend toward a socially liberal perspective.⁵ Further, the U.S. Congress held dramatic hearings in September 2025 to highlight the rise of suicides and self-harming by children exposed to interactions with AI chatbots, and AI-generated or manipulated images are fueling an explosion of digital pornography, including images of children.

I won't attempt to gauge the future balance between such good and bad uses of AI, as if such a predictive endeavor is even possible. Rather, my discouraging assessment of AI's pro-life tendencies reflects the profound ideological influences—ideas combined with personal interests and dispositions toward human life—that are intensified by the saturation of our culture with AI applications, terminology, analogies, and related changes in social activities. More than the mixed and evolving applications of AI for good or ill, such ideological influences will tend toward an amplification of the culture of death. In the face of this new threat, proliferators must prepare informed, savvy, and wise responses.

What—and Who—Is Human?

One increasingly prominent influence of AI is in the direction of anthropomorphism, a long word that simply means the tendency to perceive and interact with a non-human entity as if it were human. This phenomenon may be cute, even therapeutic, when a child cares for and converses with a teddy bear. On the other hand, the powerful desire to enjoy humanized relationships with our world and its artifacts can become quite intense and sometimes harmful when people are faced with deceptively human-sounding text, images, video, and more that are enabled by AI technology.

AI-powered chatbots, in particular, capture the imagination of people who wish to converse at length or receive advice in response to typed and verbal prompts. As far back as 1966, computer scientist Joseph Weizenbaum recognized that people were not only attracted to treating a rudimentary chatbot as if it were human, but they also persisted with the delusion even when reminded that it was not human, leading to a kind of voluntary cognitive dissonance.⁶ A recent survey indicates that 72 percent of U.S. teens use AI chatbots for companionship, half of them doing this daily.⁷ The user interfaces—the interactive and visual elements that shape the chatbot users' experiences—are designed to absorb the continued engagement of each person.⁸ Not only are such chatbots available at all times, seemingly attentive, constantly willing to offer advice, and apparently reflecting the combined “wisdom” of most of the internet (many will see that last item in an ironic frame), but they are also designed to be very agreeable, even pandering; the company OpenAI has admitted they resemble sycophants.⁹

Not many users seem to understand that the form of AI called a large language model (LLM), which animates a chatbot, primarily identifies statistical patterns in the text, grammar, and structure of a user's prompt or query. It then mathematically predicts the most probably appropriate output, generally with an emphasis on linguistic coherence of the response over accuracy. It doesn't “understand” the language or its meaning in any deep sense. In fact, although such AI models are well-trained on a massive trove of textual data, their responses to prompts from users have been shown to dramatically vary according to how the user phrases the prompt or question.¹⁰ Still, the human imagination takes over, leading experts such as Microsoft AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman to warn the public that only biological beings can be conscious. According to Suleyman, “seemingly-conscious AI” that isn't easily distinguishable from truly conscious beings can lead to a kind of “AI psychosis,” wherein chatbot users become convinced that something imaginary has become real.¹¹

If chatbots have elicited popular fascination, consider the impact of AI-governed humanoid robots that are being developed, as well as various home devices that will increasingly add visual and physical resemblances to interactions with people, including chatbot technology for verbal communications. In 2024, start-up companies reportedly invested \$1.6 billion into developing such robots, not including further efforts by Elon Musk’s Tesla.¹² Unitree Robotics’ new R1 humanoid model is already marketed at a relatively feasible price of \$6,000, and that will likely decline with competition.¹³ As an indication of the range of possibility for intimacy with such machines, a brothel has opened in Berlin that features life-like, automated sex dolls.¹⁴ A Chinese company named Kaiwa Technology claims that by 2026 it will be launching a prototype of a humanoid robot, complete with an artificial “biobag” womb to nurture a human fetus.¹⁵

The hyperbole around such AI advances is an integral part of the technology’s presentation and marketing. AI product development incurs tremendous costs that must be covered through the rapt attention and eager, curious adoption by paying consumers—even if they are perversely frightened by extreme (but galvanizing) predictions of an AI-induced apocalypse, and even if they’re not quite sure how the technology will benefit them.

Google’s co-founder Sergey Brin and Google DeepMind CEO Demis Hassabis have claimed that artificial general intelligence (AGI)—the vague concept that supposedly represents AI’s capability to broadly surpass human intelligence—will arrive by 2030.¹⁶ Ironically, Elon Musk, who is heavily invested in AI, has been repeating since 2014 the warning that human intelligence may be just a stepping stone for the advancement of AI machines that will eventually take over our world.¹⁷ OpenAI’s Chief Scientist Ilya Sutskever has for years teased the idea that AI is becoming conscious.¹⁸ Such hyperbole and speculation by AI industry leaders have a significant effect; despite little consensus by philosophers, psychologists, and scientists on what consciousness actually is, a YouGov survey in April 2025 indicates that over half of U.S. adults believe that AI systems will become, or already are, conscious.¹⁹

Misled by Modern Philosophy

Western cultures, and most of the world that is influenced by them, are philosophically and ideologically primed to accept AI-governed computer machines as real persons. Perhaps the most powerful continuing influence on this perception is René Descartes’ perspective on human nature, originally presented in the 17th century.²⁰ Such Cartesian philosophy suggests that human persons are a combination of two very different substances—a material

body and an immaterial mind—because the knowable laws of mechanics and physics govern the body, yet the specific nature of our separate minds is unknowable. Descartes came to this conclusion by first adopting a method of radical doubt, initially refusing to rely on his bodily senses but realizing that the one thing he knew for certain was that he could think. He claimed to discover that it is in the mind only, through rational thought and deduction, that a person can exhibit consciousness. As a mathematician and scientist, Descartes nevertheless argued in support of the mechanical and physical sciences by suggesting that our sense perceptions are in fact reliable, if only because we can trust in God's benevolence, which makes the physical world regular and knowable.

The specifics of Cartesian dualism are highly criticized and still debated, yet both our modern and now hyper-modern worlds have persisted in the strong tendency to think of human beings in terms of a dual nature. Even as evidence accumulates regarding the significant influence of bodily processes on mental powers and emotions, and even while neuroscientists delve deeper into the material workings of the human brain-body integration, there is still a powerful ideological current that portrays human beings as ghosts in machines, immaterial substances that represent the core of our identities and personalities and temporarily inhabit our physical bodies. Many Christians, focused on the afterlife, join other spiritually oriented people by speaking of the human soul as if it were only a temporary resident of a biological shell, often disparaging the body as a logical consequence. With such a perspective, it is not a great leap to imagine that machine intelligence or consciousness is—or can be—an equivalent ghostly presence inside a mechanical artifact.

The public's anthropomorphic response to AI chatbots is just one way that the line is frequently blurred between 1) a materialist notion that intelligence, language, concepts, and ideas are based in, or emerge from, the material structure of bodies and machines and 2) an idealist philosophy that perceives consciousness or intelligence as a separable property or even an elemental substance that comprises the person, whether that person is human, machine, animal, or even plant. Where did such confusion come from? An important cause is the assault by late medieval and early modern thinkers on the understanding of our world as intrinsically governed by purpose, specifically the Reason of God as expressed in and by His creation.

The philosophical approach of Aristotle, which was prominent for many centuries and taught that the essential end, or purpose, of every species of being is by definition the good of such beings,²¹ was discarded in favor of a perspective that saw only God's unpredictable will and power—but not His divine Reason—behind all created things.²² Each thing no longer appeared

to have a nature oriented to what is good for its essential character and ultimately toward the transcendent Good of God as the prime mover and creator of the world. The only practically relevant end of any thing was now seen as whatever intention was imposed on it from outside (the “efficient cause”).²³ In the modern—and now the hyper-modern—world, the predictable laws of nature and the capricious exercise of power now seem to rule the cosmos.

Combined with the impact of Cartesian dualism, consider how this perspective has affected the modern understanding of human nature: The human person no longer seems to have a purpose or goodness toward which they are naturally, essentially oriented—the mind or soul is, after all, seen as either a separate entity from the natural body or as merely “emerging” dependently out of bodily operations. Reason, which was once thought to be founded in part on natural knowledge (divinely endowed) and intuition of reality (both material and transcendent), and which was understood to be the key to understanding and prudently choosing actions toward the real good, has gradually been reduced to the capacity for mechanistic logic about facts perceived through our senses. It is a power that primarily facilitates instrumental control of our world, to get things or make them. There is no truth or final good of human nature to guide fluid identities, nor to ground morality and conscience, nor to prevent certain categories of people from becoming mere objects of others’ intentions.

The Anti-Human Ideologies of AI

Driven by “ghost in the machine” imagery as well as a dependence on mechanistic and material explanations of nature both in and outside of the human person, anthropomorphism in regard to AI and its associated systems, user interfaces, machines, and devices will be a real problem for those attempting to build a culture of life. There will be a strong emotional drive among the general populace to accept unwise and ultimately incoherent ideas and arguments that elevate the perceived nature of AI-governed artifacts to some level of ethical or legal personhood. This will cause confusion and a decline in relative respect for the unique dignity of human nature.

The rationale is: If machines or machine systems bear the characteristics of rationality, intelligence, and consciousness, then perhaps human beings are not so special after all. Never mind that the working definitions of such powers have been restricted and tailored so much that they hardly resemble the deep understandings of more than two millennia of theology, philosophy, and (later) psychology. Some philosophers, quietly or publicly experiencing shame at their human nature, already actively seek to level the ethical playing field by defining personhood (or favored indicators of personhood like

consciousness) to include many animals, plants, and now AI systems; what they lack in philosophical grounding is more than compensated by their rhetorical attractiveness to a willing and curious audience.

This anthropomorphic delusion—that nonhumans can have distinctly human qualities—depreciates the aspects of human nature that truly make it exceptional. We already see a reduction in the working definitions of intelligence, more focused on short lists of calculable outputs or specific functions (e.g., learning, logic, memory, and problem-solving) than on a comprehensive intelligence proper to human beings who have innate purpose. Contrast this with more traditional views of intelligence, such as that of Thomas Aquinas, in which intelligence is a combination of intuition and logical, conversational reasoning, and both powers are oriented to truth. Such truth is much more than facts and statistics, and its discernment most importantly includes judgment and understanding, which lead a person to the Good.

The Vatican's recent instructional note *Antiqua et Nova* puts it this way: “human intelligence becomes more clearly understood as a faculty that forms an integral part of how the whole person engages with reality. Authentic engagement requires embracing the full scope of one's being: spiritual, cognitive, embodied, and relational.”²⁴ Such real intelligence is profoundly sullied when the company Open AI almost cynically defines artificial general intelligence in its charter as “highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work.”²⁵

We have already seen what happens when the definition of a person is reduced to the possession of certain characteristics, each of which has been defined in a limited way. Unborn children—sometimes even born children—are portrayed as non-persons because they may not be at an adult level of development of consciousness, reason, or intelligence in the manner operationalized by pro-abortion philosophers and politicians alike. In our materialist culture, some scientists and physicians seek out physical indicators of brain activity and heart function as substitutes for understanding these traits as powers of an integrated soul. When we start relying on deficient definitions of the person, we pave the way for the poor treatment of those who arbitrarily do not qualify.

Further, the development of generative AI has given further impetus to the ideology of transhumanism, an array of plans for humanity to evolve toward significant physical and mental integration with super-calculative machines. Cartesian dualist tendencies encourage some transhumanist thinkers into believing that our minds can be separated from our bodies and uploaded like computer software to an AI system, even though that theory ironically (perhaps incoherently) requires the further belief that mental processes are composed fundamentally of electronic pulses or some other physical nature.

Transhumanism has a humanist origin, since it hopes to improve the lot of our species, but it is a nihilist humanism that denies an essential purpose to human nature and places its hopes in a materially altered future of primarily material and utilitarian benefits. While devotees of the transhumanist movement are concentrated in the tech sector, the ideological attraction of overcoming flawed human nature and mortality with our own technological innovations seems to exert a persistent hold on our cultural media. Consider, for example, the dramatic rise in interest in “deathbots”—chatbots that are trained on home videos, letters, emails, etc., of deceased persons so the chatbots can “speak” to the living and appear to resurrect the dead.²⁶

Ultimately, the culture’s embrace of AI is a turn away from a love for human nature and an orientation toward the spiritual emptiness of material comfort and power. Many treasure AI for its potential impact on productivity and efficiency without a clear idea what we will use all that newly available time for. Our neighbors eagerly dive into chatbots, virtual-reality games, and AI-generated videos and images through social media. The most impactful applications of AI—medical innovations and discoveries, algorithmic systems driving everything from employee hiring to insurance evaluations, robot armies supported by drone swarms, police surveillance through facial recognition, and so on—are well out of reach of the public’s influence. With the proliferation of AI, human persons are not celebrated as loving, inherently purposeful, and immeasurably dignified beings; we are invited to either sit back and watch, consume what is presented to us, immerse ourselves in distractions, or get back to work.

Power or Purpose

It is no coincidence that the Cartesian dualist illusion continues to hold such ideological significance in the age of AI. When Descartes was forming his philosophy, he was not naively or bravely starting from the most fundamental observations.²⁷ He had already decided that the aim of humanity was to “make ourselves masters and possessors of nature,” which has distinctly mechanical and mathematical qualities.²⁸ This view put him squarely in line with Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, who wrote: “Knowledge is for the sake of power . . . I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death.”²⁹ While explicitly undermining the notion of a naturally purposeful humanity, what these men really accomplished was to dogmatically replace faith in a divinely endowed purpose with the objective of power. This power over nature is easily transferred to power over persons. As Michael Maria Waldstein explains: “Persons are seen as parts of the great machine of nature, and

they are treated like all other parts of the machine; namely, as things to be harnessed for progress by technology.”³⁰ Waldstein wasn’t writing about AI, but he might as well have been.

Power is also the core value of the culture of death. With abortion, it is power over one’s body and any persons conceived in it. With eugenic screening of embryos, it is power over nature. With euthanasia, including deadly neglect of the elderly, it is power over the relative valuation of life. In physician-assisted suicide, it is power over one’s own existence.

The age of AI is the logical conclusion of centuries of man’s pursuit of power over our world. AI may very well help propel the scientific experiments that will maximize such control and its instrumental benefits, including saving lives. Yet its proliferation may also accelerate power for its own sake, leaving us ironically powerless to engage the very heart of our own human nature—our purposeful, embodied yet spiritual, relational and loving, divinely given experience of the Good, Beautiful, and True. There’s another word for that experience, and it is “life.” An authentic culture of life will have a very different vision for the role and integration of AI in human activities than the one that is being presented to us. The pro-life response is not to reject this technology in all instances but to boldly limit its harmful applications while assertively and loudly reaffirming the unique, incomparable, *purposeful* dignity of the human person whenever our neighbors and society appear confused and anxious. That is where, in the face of dehumanizing influences, our culture can find hope for healing.

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Be Fruitful and Engineer: The Strange Bedfellows of Modern Pronatalism

Nicholas Frankovich

You should have children and more of them, say the pronatalists, a precarious coalition of visionaries and pragmatists. Some tech-industry titans promote and help fund pronatalist research and initiatives. Their efforts warrant scrutiny because they have power to steer the pronatalism lobby in directions the titans prefer.

To comprehend their place in pronatalism, we must zoom out and scan the varied terrain of pronatalist enterprise. Catherine Pakaluk, an economist at the Catholic University of America, supports some version of the cause but distances herself from the movement, which she calls “an unholy alliance.” Write her in for Team Pragmatist. She thinks that having children can increase personal happiness—and that having them could be made easier through legal and policy reforms and a shift in societal attitudes.

She shares in a broad consensus joined by policymakers and political leaders in scores of nations, including Japan, Australia, and much of the European Union. Their governments implement pronatalist policies out of national economic self-interest, which aligns with personal self-interest insofar as the policies are supports, not prods, and take the form of generous provisions for daycare, parental leave, and other services and benefits that ease the burden of childrearing for those who choose to have kids. For those who haven’t so chosen, or who have chosen to limit the size of their family, some governments offer financial incentives in the form of tax credits and baby bonuses, cash payments to parents of newborns, although evidence is weak that bribes to have children are effective. God bless the policymakers and their green eyeshades.

As for Team Visionary, it’s a diverse and colorful mix. The convention is to divide it into two camps, religious traditionalists and techno-futurists. In the West, religious traditionalists invoke the Bible as the authority to be fruitful and multiply, as God instructs the first humans he created to inhabit the earth (Gen. 1:28). He adds that they should subdue it and exercise dominion over its creatures, a command that chimes with Catholic integralism and Protestant Dominionism, a political theology according to which Christians should

Nicholas Frankovich is a writer and book editor in Miami.

endeavor to occupy seats of power from which they can rule the government and institutions of the nation-state.

Besides being a divine mandate, pronatalism can be of service to the objectives of Christian nationalism—the nationalism more clearly than the Christianity (more about that soon)—if the message that humans have a duty to procreate fails to move secularists (who seem to have fewer receptors for it) but lands with the religiously fervent who dream of throne and altar and a new Christendom. The meek will inherit the earth, but Christian nationalists who aspire to seize it in the meantime have reason to seek eventual strength by increasing their numbers.

Jews and Christians whose inspiration for pronatalist advocacy flows from their respective religions find common ground in specific verses and the general thrust of the Hebrew Bible. The Quiverfull movement, found mostly among Protestants and Evangelicals in the Anglosphere, takes its name from Psalm 127. The New Testament offers less material on which to base a religious celebration of robust fecundity or even ordinary family formation. “There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:12). Examples of the Gospel’s ambivalence toward human reproduction are well-known and would be multiplied here if space permitted. Each in its own way, the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches preserve the value of celibacy in Christian tradition, although they also either ban or restrict the use of contraception and espouse natural-law principles that lend themselves to marriage and large families. Whichever of the two paths you take, they imply, take it all the way.

In any case, a preacher can proselytize only so many souls. When the preaching has achieved its natural yield of converts and begun to run dry, one obvious recourse is to stop chasing the dwindling supply of persuadable persons and instead to grow that supply by ensuring that the already faithful procreate. The strategy has been understood by clans, tribes, and nations since antiquity, as well as by religions, including techno-futurism, which is as ancient as any of them. History (e.g., circumcision and uncircumcision) and literature both ancient (*Pygmalion*) and modern (*Frankenstein*) provide abundant precedent for the utopian belief (which often proves dystopian when it comes to fruition) that technological manipulation to improve on human biology is both the proof of our being the image and likeness of God and the key that will unlock the door to the New Jerusalem, the eschaton after which our species lives not just happily ever after (a middling outcome acceptable perhaps to the meek) but triumphantly, roaming the cosmos and colonizing distant planets.

Like their spiritual forefathers, the Futurists who lit up the sky briefly before

flaming out after the First World War, the present-day tech pioneers funding the movement to grow the human population and engineer its genome to suit certain eugenicist ideals often speak of going fast and tearing through feeble old barriers of timeworn convention, to boldly go where no man has gone before, with special oomph on the word man. “We have been up all night, my friends and I,” wrote Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909, in the Futurist Manifesto.

As we listened to the last faint prayer of the old canal and the crumbling of the bones of the moribund palaces with their green growth of beard, suddenly the hungry automobiles roared beneath our windows. . . .

We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness. . . .

We want to glorify war—the only cure for the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.

And contempt for woman. That such contempt characterizes also the tech-bro faction of the pronatalist movement of the twenty-first century would be hard to prove in a court of law, since the bros usually choose their words on the issue carefully when they go on record at all, but let no one accuse you of bias for noticing that they wave and plant some red flags. The movement’s most high-profile event in the United States is the Natal Conference, where the tech and the traditionalist factions meet, joined by the random pragmatist such as Pakaluk. The two times it’s been held, in December 2023 and March 2025, men outnumbered women—by a lot, according to media accounts—and dominated the roster of speakers as well as the approximately one or two hundred attendees. The organizer, Kevin Dolan, a data scientist who left his job after he was exposed as the author of a Twitter account specializing in race science, has described “love between men and women as a ‘relationship between superior and inferior,’” according to NPR. According to Emma Goldberg in *The New York Times*, he says he was inspired to stage the event, “after watching a Tucker Carlson documentary about falling testosterone levels.”

“Generally, women should not have careers,” Charles Haywood, a shampoo tycoon and fellow traveler with the techno-futurist side of the coalition, told his audience at the 2023 conference. He elaborated that employers should disadvantage women and unmarried men and that workplaces should be segregated by sex.

Peter Thiel, who frowns on “the extension of the franchise to women” in an article that included the phrase “the higher one’s IQ,” is a former employer of Simone Collins. She and her husband, Malcolm, whose brother worked

for DOGE, the government organization established de facto by Elon Musk, have made themselves the movement's media stars by inviting journalists to their quiverfull of a home outside Philadelphia and by cultivating a look they call "techno-puritan" and "intentionally cringe"—thick-framed eyeglasses, a bonnet for Simone. They gain media coverage by courting "controversy," because they "know that's what get clicks."

The Collinses describe their politics in contrarian terms, presenting themselves as a youthful middle-aged couple on the far side of hip, where they affiliate with right-wing activists and embrace an eclectic ideology—this from column Blue, that from column Red—that defies easy categorization and verges on the incoherent, as if their plan is to advance a disturbing hard-right agenda by gesturing at progressive vibes and values and thereby confusing and disarming their prospective critics. They "staunchly" support Donald Trump, JD Vance, and Musk, according to a profile in the *Guardian* two days before the 2024 election, in which Simone ran as the Republican nominee for her district in the Pennsylvania state legislature.

Unless the population increases, "the only cultural groups that survive will be the ones that *don't* give women a choice," Malcolm told Jenny Kleeman, a reporter for the *Guardian*, in May 2025. Does he mean the population of Earth or only of the United States, or of rich countries but not poor ones? If he means the global population, he's wrong, because that's increasing. So is that of the United States, thanks to immigration.

And what is the choice that he thinks "cultural groups" should give women? The right to abortion, or the right to in vitro fertilization? He and his wife support both. She can conceive only through IVF. The Collinses have had "the genomes of their frozen embryos tested and are selecting which ones to implant according to how well they score on intelligence and future health," Kleeman wrote. "They don't just want a big family: they want an optimal one."

Where IVF is banned, Malcolm seems to be saying, the population will decline, leading to tighter restrictions on abortion and vasectomies. That leads to more decline, he argues, citing Romania, where a ban on abortion in most cases beginning in 1967 was followed by a brief spike in births and then a "quick fall." Abortion "makes being a parent lower-class, in the eyes of society," he says. The Romania model, which in his view amounts to slow national suicide, is also an example of "the only cultural groups [that] will survive" if birthrates fall: Ponder the paradox.

Noor Siddiqui, a recipient of a Thiel Fellowship in 2012, is the CEO of Orchid, which she founded in 2020. It serves patients seeking in vitro fertilization by offering genetic testing of more than 99 percent of an embryo's

genome, screening for predispositions to a host of diseases and conditions, including Alzheimer's, autism, schizophrenia, and intellectual disability. As Ross Douthat noted in his interview with her in August 2025, while most Americans accept the moral cost of the procedure for couples who have been unable to conceive and want to have children, discarding embryos because they fail to meet parents' exacting standards raises the moral stakes of IVF.

"Unfortunately, I think a lot of people don't understand biology," she told Douthat.

So what happens the old-fashioned way, when you and your partner have sex at home, a lot of embryos are discarded through that process. Nature is extremely brutal. A lot of people don't know that even people in their 20s have about a 20 percent chance of getting pregnant every month.

So yes, an egg can fertilize. Great. Now you have an embryo. But that doesn't mean an embryo is going to implant. There's been multiple really large-scale studies on this—lots of embryos are discarded at home. It's just that I.V.F. makes that process visible that is currently invisible to people that's happening at home.

Douthat: But that's not true. The term "discard" implies agency. If you and your spouse —

Siddiqui: I don't think it implies agency.

Siddiqui conflates miscarriage with abortion or rather, in the case of IVF, its equivalent, the discarding of embryos that the mother, the father, their doctors at the laboratory, or some combination of them reject for reasons that many people would deem defensible but that others wouldn't. She personifies nature, calling it "extremely brutal." She says that it routinely discards embryos. But when pushed by Douthat, she denies that nature has agency or, to be more precise, that the discarding of an embryo implies that anything or anyone did the discarding. She insinuates, perhaps unwittingly, that the adults who make the decision act only as instruments of nature, doing what it would do in their circumstance, and in as many as 30 percent of pregnancies, or so some researchers estimate.

She adds that no one has to discard an embryo. The mother can forgo IVF medication after implantation and thereby come close to ensuring that the pregnancy will fail, and so the adults can delegate that morally troubling business to Mother Nature. Moral philosophers have much to say about the distinction between harming someone and letting someone be harmed. Their lines of argument should be familiar, or at least intelligible, to anyone engaging the right-to-life issues of abortion, assisted suicide, and even war. Many observant adherents of "peace churches" who refuse to take up arms will cooperate with war efforts by serving as medics or in other noncombat

roles, while others, stricter in their pacifism, will not. After a thousand and one iterations of the “trolley problem,” people still disagree about which has more moral weight, the consequence of a decision or the intention of the one who made it.

The moral problem posed by IVF is subtler. No one kills an embryo they’ve discarded. They let it die or, as Siddiqui might argue, they outsource its killing to Mother Nature. Between discarding an embryo and implanting it but withholding medication to support its viability in the womb, the distinction is clear enough, but what’s the difference? In the Baby Doe cases that Nat Hentoff reported on for the *Village Voice* in the 1980s, doctors and mothers withheld care from infants born with Down syndrome or spina bifida, enacting the modern equivalent of child exposure.

IVF is only the most well-known item on the menu of reproductive technologies embraced by pronatalists. Consider another item, artificial wombs. They’re the object of much ongoing development and experimentation and raise different questions. On the theory that the right to abortion is the right to expel the unborn child from the womb, not to kill it, artificial wombs could enable both a woman to end her pregnancy and the child to survive and mature. The question of who would care for and rear him would be quite the hot potato. So would the question of whether depriving him of a physical bond with his mother would be an injustice.

Pronatalism as pursued by right-wing progressives in Silicon Valley entails technological adventurism that’s amoral or morally questionable, but the larger movement doesn’t depend on it. Technology is only a means to the end of increasing population. Skepticism about that objective begins with the observation that the global population is increasing and that demographers estimate that it will continue to do so through most of this century before plateauing at about 11 billion. After that it will slowly decline, but for how long before it settles at a new, lower plateau or begins rising again is hard to predict from this far out.

Neither pronatalists nor their critics seem to give enough thought to what the optimum size of the human population is. Two, as in Adam and Eve, is the floor beneath which we cannot fall without going extinct as a species. A number too high could lead to the same outcome. As if to compound that danger, some of the techno-futurists who wish for a population boom also take an interest in achieving physical immortality through biomedicine. An explosion of a population whose members don’t die would be the phylogenetic version of cancer.

More people in regions in the Global South (where the birthrate exceeds replacement levels) seek to migrate to the Global North than vice versa.

Much of the Global North keeps them out while bemoaning that its own population is shrinking. Some of its reasons for rejecting the answer that is knocking on its door and sometimes sneaking through it are rational. A nation that needs a stable population to sustain itself economically may be unable to assimilate immigrants beyond a certain threshold.

Or the nation may be able but unwilling. Not all pronatalists subscribe to eugenics or race science, but a disproportionate amount of their movement's energy comes from those tendencies, as well as from comic-book fantasies about dominance and hypermasculinity, the flip side of some dark emotions about women. A lot goes into that "unholy" in the unholy alliance that Catherine Pakaluk laments.

Leading with Love

Jennie Bradley Lichter

Introduction

Good afternoon! I am so glad to be here with you all today. It is a special joy to be back on this campus, which was my professional home up until about a year ago, when the March for Life came calling.

Thank you to my long-time friend Elizabeth Kirk and the Center for Law and the Human Person, as well as the Human Life Foundation for organizing today's conference and inviting me to join you. You might not know that this conference has been over two years in the making, since Maria first had this wonderful idea of bringing together faith-based ministries and programs, and I am so happy to see it come to fruition in such a beautiful way. Thank you, Maria, for your visionary idea.

I also want to thank each one of you for making the time to be here today. It is so important in our work in the pro-life movement—which is intense—that we take time occasionally to step away, to be refreshed and to be re-energized to go back into the fray. My hope for all of you who work in the pro-life space is that your time here today renews your hope and motivates you anew for our shared mission to support moms, save unborn babies, and foster a true appreciation of life.

I know we're all looking forward to the afternoon session and the opportunity to hear directly from some folks on the front lines of serving moms. Before we get to that, in our time together, I will take you behind the scenes of CUA's own Guadalupe Project, a concrete example of a community of faith taking seriously the call to accompany moms in its midst. We'll discuss the post-*Dobbs* landscape and how its complexities and challenges should inspire us to work even harder and more strategically for the cause of life. We'll take a look at the incredible work done by the pregnancy-care sector, with a special emphasis on faith-based ministries and programs, our particular theme today. And finally, I'll leave you all with some reflections on lead-

Jennie Bradley Lichter assumed the office of President of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund in February, 2025. Jennie formerly served as the Deputy General Counsel at the Catholic University of America. In addition to her legal work at the Catholic University of America, Jennie also founded and directed The Guadalupe Project, the University's campus-wide initiative to support and lift up pregnant and parenting students, staff, and faculty. The speech here was the keynote given at the Leading with Love Conference at the Catholic University of America on October 8, 2025..

ing with love, and on reasons for hope.

Those latter two are linked, of course. Because hope gives us the strength to keep on loving.

And love is what all of you gathered here and so many pro-life Americans around the country do, day in and day out: Pour out your love for expectant mothers, first-time fathers, babies, and growing families.

We are all here because we're constantly asking ourselves, how can we love even *more* and *better*? How can we create ever more of a *revolution of love* (to borrow a phrase from Pope Francis)?

Christ started this revolution of love, of course, but it's up to each of us in our particular time and place—I think of it as the particular vineyard to which the Lord has assigned us—to carry it forward to meet the particular challenges of our age. And caring for unborn babies and their mothers is one of the most urgent challenges of our time.

Three decades ago, Pope Saint John Paul II wrote a beautiful encyclical entitled *Evangelium vitae*, in which he calls us to “serve the Gospel of Life,” as he puts it. There, the Holy Father specifically calls each one of us individually to serve through “personal witness, various forms of volunteer work, social activity, and political commitment.” (87)

“This is a particularly pressing need at the present time,” he says, “when the ‘culture of death’ so forcefully opposes the ‘culture of life’ and often seems to have the upper hand.” This was in March 1995, but it sounds to me like it could have been written today.

In addition to this *individual* call issued to each one of us, the Pope also speaks of a *communal* call. The Pope exhorts us that “every Christian community . . . must continue to write the history” of the Church’s charitable work, through, among other things, “appropriate and effective programs of support for new life . . . with special closeness to mothers.”

And this is what we are doing today, we’re talking about how Christian communities can continue to write the history of the Church’s charitable work by supporting new life. We have a number of different programs, ministries, and organizations represented here today, all with different charisms and different approaches to answering this call. I’m going to begin by sharing with you about one such program with which I am intimately familiar.

Guadalupe Project

You’ve already heard it referenced: This is the Guadalupe project, Catholic University’s flagship pro-life initiative, which is a beautiful reason for hope, right here on this campus, because it’s a story of a faith-based community really taking seriously this call to serve moms.

In June 2022, in the days leading up to the Supreme Court issuing its decision in *Dobbs*, I was talking with then-President John Garvey in the waning days of his tenure here about how the university might respond to the decision once it was officially released (and remember that we all had a head-start on this because of the leak of the decision in May of that year, so everyone knew what the decision would say—which was not ideal in a lot of ways but gave us the gift of having some time to prepare).

As we thought through our response, and what would be appropriate for Catholic University to both say and then to do to meet the moment, we were mindful that a university is not a social services provider—it's not primarily a social services provider at least—we don't run a maternity home (we would love to do that someday here I think but we can't run a maternity home—that's not our charism); it's not our task to lobby extensively for changes in the law. But we also knew that several thousand people make their home here at Catholic University. In some cases, literally, like the undergrads who live on or near campus. And for many, many more people, figuratively; the staff and faculty whose lives, and whose family's lives, are intricately connected with and supported by the university.

So we decided that what we could do here, what was proper to us as a university community, and the best way for Catholic University to meet the moment, was to just go all-in on making this university the best possible place to have a baby. To make sure that our people were fully supported as they built and cared for their families, no matter their circumstances. And we chose to entrust this work to Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the unborn, who was depicted as pregnant in her apparition to St. Juan Diego.

This project was and is full-scope; it's meant to support all parents on campus, not just students, and not just mothers in unexpected or challenging circumstances.

And we chose this approach, this wide-ranging approach, because we wanted to do more than support crisis pregnancies, although that's very important of course. We wanted to foster a culture on this campus where each life is celebrated, knowing that a positive, vibrant, and joyful culture of life is truly life-giving in so many ways. It encourages openness to life among everyone in the University community. It contributes to the human formation of the students at a critical moment in their lives, when they are beginning to discern their own vocations—which, for many of them, will involve marriage and family life. And, of course, such a culture would wrap around women, including students, facing challenging or unplanned pregnancies and would support them and empower them to choose life.

I told campus leadership when we launched, one measure of the success of

the Guadalupe Project will probably be more pregnant students on this campus. That might feel uncomfortable, but a community in which young people don't feel confident that they'll be met with love and support is a community in which abortion culture will run rampant, especially in a place like Washington, D.C. where the D.C. Planned Parenthood is something like 7 minutes away on the Metro line that runs right outside this campus.

I'm grateful to President Kilpatrick that when he arrived and was sort of handed this fledgling new project, he very wholeheartedly embraced it and has made it a priority of his time at the university too; which is a big part of what has allowed the Guadalupe Project to grow and thrive.

So, with President Kilpatrick's support and with a small team of university leaders including Professor Elizabeth Kirk working with me, we set out to make Catholic University a model of radical hospitality. That was our watch word, radical hospitality for mothers, inspired by Catholic teaching and the example of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

To that end, we extended paid parental leave for staff and made it more widely accessible. Previously, for example, parental leave had traveled with the baby rather than the parent, such that if two married staff people had a baby, they would be splitting one parental leave between them. We got rid of that and other barriers to access. We introduced designated maternity parking spots around campus. We started putting diapers and wipes in Cardinal Cupboard, the campus food pantry, making them available free of charge to anyone who needed them. We ran a maternity clothing drive; we started sending gift boxes to new parents, affirming the goodness of family life and that new babies are a moment to celebrate. And this, again, came from a really insightful contribution by one of our initial Guadalupe Project committee members, this is a very *Evangelium vitae* insight actually, which was that we talk a lot about supporting moms, supporting moms, supporting moms—and that *is* what we are doing, but we need to be thinking more broadly than that, because life is something to be celebrated, it's not a burden for which someone needs support, or not solely that. It is really a cause for celebration.

We also revamped all of the University's pregnancy resource materials for students; in other words, we expanded and updated our outreach about unplanned pregnancy, we basically ran a whole new campus campaign about pregnancy. We designed a poster campaign, including one design specifically for the men's dorms, and, borrowing a great idea from Georgetown University, our neighbors here in Washington, we put stickers in every women's restroom stall on campus with a QR code leading to these pregnancy materials. The goal was to make sure that every woman on campus knows that these resources exist, and knows exactly how to find them, so that there isn't

an information gap at a critical moment in the middle of the night, driving them to CVS to get Plan B or down the Metro's red line to the D.C. Planned Parenthood the next morning.

In the early stages of building Guadalupe, I had an opportunity to speak several times with a few wonderful Sisters of Life. They told me how crucial it is to close that information gap for our demographic in particular, our demographic here at this university, because young women in this demographic, women of this age enrolled in school, tend to make their decision very quickly whether to end or keep a pregnancy. They told me that the best thing we could do would be to make our pregnancy resource materials “part of the wallpaper” on our campus. We took that as literally as we possibly could, with the posters and the stickers.

Over time, we kept building Guadalupe in response to the community's requests and needs, which has been the watchword of this project from the beginning, being responsive to the concrete needs of our particular community. We started adding more changing tables across campus—I was delighted to see one in the restroom just around the corner here in Caldwell Hall—including in men's restrooms, which was a specific request from our community. I worked with the undergraduate pro-life group who wanted to set up a babysitting service to provide childcare for parents on campus. We bought a comfortable nursing chair for the Law School Parents' Association at their request. We coordinated a baby shower in the early days for a pregnant undergraduate. And so on. And so on and so on.

I was so encouraged, when we launched this project, to see the willingness of colleagues all around campus to aid our efforts. I'll give you one small example out of many, but a wonderful colleague who works in campus services took it upon himself to go over to the campus bookstore, and used his own money to buy out *every* pair of infant socks they had in the bookstore—this kind of CUA brand of infant socks—and brought them to me in a plastic bag and said: “This is for the Guadalupe project.” It was just the sweetest and most thoughtful thing, and it sort of shows how this campus and so many people on it really bought into this project which is part of what made it so successful.

I was also deeply encouraged by the positive response that Guadalupe received on campus and even beyond. Our undergraduate intern for the project in those early days told me after we announced our initial suite of actions and initial deliverables that she'd been keeping her ear to the ground among her fellow students and that the students were really excited about this, even though most of them would never benefit from it directly. She was hearing a lot of feedback like, “this place has always said that it's pro-life . . . and now

I see that the University really means it.”

Again, the Guadalupe Project was undertaken with the goal of serving our particular community, but its approach, I would submit, is a prototype for other faith-based organizations and communities and workplaces as well. In fact, groups from two other Catholic universities reached out to me after we launched Guadalupe and asked to talk about our efforts, as they were inspired to consider something similar at their schools. I was just at Notre Dame a week ago to give a speech there, and the students at Notre Dame Right-to-Life were so excited and proud to tell me about their Be Not Afraid Project, which was inspired by the Guadalupe Project. I actually have a call scheduled in a few days with a diocesan pro-life director out in the Midwest who wants to hear about Guadalupe and think about how the diocese might emulate it for their particular context. I hope that many similar efforts continue to grow and flourish in communities, churches, and workplaces around the country. Just as Guadalupe continues to grow and flourish here in the last year thanks to the wonderful caretaking of the campus ministry team that inherited it.

So many of you here today I know are *already* doing work like this. The Guadalupe Project is just one shining light in the nationwide network of resources for women.

Post-Dobbs, Pro-Life Orgs Are More Important Than Ever

For decades, countless faith-based organizations and faithful people have quietly worked to foster a culture of life and walk with mothers in need. I suspect that for many of those organizations, just as it was for us here at CUA, June 2022 and the *Dobbs* decision served as an inflection point and a moment to reflect.

The *Dobbs* decision that consigned *Roe v. Wade* to the dustbin of history, where it belonged, put a renewed emphasis on what we’re discussing today: How do we ensure that pregnant women have what they need to confidently choose life?

Taking down the *Roe* regime of nationwide abortion on demand was the long-term legal and policy goal around which the pro-life movement was initially built. And achieving that goal in 2022 occurred thanks in no small part to the unflagging witness of the pro-life movement itself, including and especially through the visible annual witness of the March for Life, I would say, which made it very clear over the course of many decades that this issue was *not* settled.

But of course, as the people gathered here know very well, *Dobbs* didn’t mark the end of our work. The initial goal was achieved but it didn’t mark

the end of our work. Far from it.

A number of states have enacted strong pro-life laws since *Dobbs*. In these states, some women, who under the pre-*Dobbs* regime perhaps would have chosen abortion, are now carrying their pregnancies to term and having their babies. Many of these women are in need of pregnancy support.

In other states, voters have enshrined a so-called right to abortion. Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood facilities are closing around the country—over 40, at last count—but the widespread availability of chemical abortion drugs has filled that vacuum, meaning that overall, it is arguably easier than ever to end unborn life in this country, leaving countless women endangered. Chemical abortion drugs have a close to 11 percent rate of serious adverse effects for women.

And here's another part of the post-*Dobbs* story, a hard part of the story. Immediately following the Court's decision—actually, following the leak of the Court's decision in early May—we saw a dramatic uptick in physical violence towards pregnancy resource centers and other pro-life organizations. One count found that over 100 PRCs, pro-life organizations, and churches were attacked across the country in just six months after that *Dobbs* opinion leaked. This included fire-bombing, vandalization, ransacking. Sometimes accompanied by threatening pro-abortion graffiti like “if abortions aren't safe, neither are you.” Many of these centers had to hire additional security or even close their doors until conditions allowed them to reopen safely.

While this spate of physical violence and intimidation has died down, thanks be to God, pregnancy resource centers still face ongoing threats of a different kind. Some state and local government actors continue to target PRCs, seeking to limit their ability to provide life-affirming care to moms and their babies. In states like New Jersey, Vermont, Delaware, California, New York, Arizona, Massachusetts, Colorado, and beyond, in all of those places, politically-motivated politicians are trying to punish PRCs for their pro-life missions. For example in New Jersey, pending legislation would allow the state attorney general to bring consumer protection lawsuits against PRCs for misleading women. The attorney general of New York is suing PRCs that educate women about the abortion pill reversal regime; that litigation is still ongoing. Vermont attempted to limit the ability of PRCs to offer options counseling to women, among other unfair and illegal limitations on their advertising and their programs. After a lawsuit was brought by ADF, Vermont amended its law earlier this year. And so on, and so on across the country.

These political attacks on pregnancy resource centers will be in the spotlight more than ever this fall, as the Supreme Court is set to hear a case stemming from the New Jersey attorney general's unceasing harassment of faith-based pregnancy centers. Claiming that a network of PRCs called First

Choice Women's Resource Centers were misleading women and even misleading their own donors, by not referring people for abortion, the AG attempted to subpoena information about First Choice's donors. First Choice resisted, saying that this would chill its First Amendment free speech and association rights, and, to make a long and frankly very dry legal story short, they are now at the Supreme Court arguing about the proper way to challenge such a subpoena. We won't go any further into the legal weeds, but the underlying facts of the case are yet another example of politically motivated, actors motivated by pro-abortion ideology who are looking for any possible foothold to disrupt or even end the life-affirming work of pregnancy resource centers.

The good news is that with excellent legal representation from ADF, the Becket Fund, led by CUA's own Professor Mark Rienzi, and others, PRCs are prevailing in many of these attempts at silencing or intimidating them. And I do believe that First Choice will ultimately prevail at the Supreme Court in this. That hopefully will help to stem the tide of intimidating and harassing actions across the country.

But litigating is time-intensive and it's stressful, even when your lawyers are great, even when they aren't charging legal fees, even when you ultimately win. And these ministries should not have to go to court in the first place to defend their right to offer authentic, holistic care and support to women.

I am personally so grateful to the many organizations and ministries who persist in accompanying women and moving the needle towards life every single day, undeterred by this challenging landscape, carrying out their missions with boldness and courage. Because yes, those of us who work in pro-life policy legal and legislative advocacy have a very long post-*Dobbs* to do list. But if our work as a movement stops at the door of the courthouse or the state house, we are really missing something. Because what will bring the abortion rate down, save babies and transform women's lives, even in jurisdictions with bad laws?

Helping and empowering individual pregnant women to choose life. That's the name of the game because it's the right thing to do and because it's the best way to save little lives.

I think all of us are here today because we believe that we as a movement and we as a Church are called to discern how we can do even more to accompany pregnant women. In this post-*Dobbs* season, with more women carrying babies to term in some pro-life states, permissive pro-abortion laws newly on the books in other states, easily-accessible chemical abortions on the rise all over the place, we are here to learn from each other about how we can do more.

Abortion Stats

Here's a devastating statistic that's a call to action if I ever heard one:

Six out of ten women who have chosen abortion would have preferred to choose life if they had the emotional and financial support they felt necessary. (That's from a peer-reviewed study by the Charlotte Lozier Institute.) This has haunted me since I first heard it. It's very, very convicting.

We in the pro-life movement have work to do if *more than half* of women who chose abortion would not have done so, would have preferred not to do so, but didn't feel they had the support they needed to choose life.

Of those women who've chosen abortion, just one-third described their abortions as "wanted," which means a good two-thirds of women have been pressured, bullied, scared, or forced into an abortion.

Just think about that for a minute. Most women who choose abortion don't want it. They're being fed the devastating lie that they're not strong enough to be moms, or at least not right now. That no one will help them. That nobody loves them. That nobody will take them seriously if they have another baby as a single mom. That they're on their own. That their mistakes or their poor judgment will haunt them forever.

We need to make sure that pregnant women never reach the point of despair that drives them into the arms of the abortion clinics. We need to meet that moment of loneliness or fear or emptiness with encouragement and empowerment, reminding these women of their courage, their strength, and their ability to mother—it is what God made them for. We need to make sure that support and resources are available for moms in need, and we need to make sure that women know exactly where to find them. We need to give women information about their pregnancies—*that* is so empowering— and let them see and hear their baby, through ultrasound and fetal heartbeat. Abortion clinics often don't do that, by the way.

So this is where pregnancy support programs and their tireless work come into play.

Work of PRCs, Etc.

I often say in my new role that the March for Life is the heart of the pro-life movement. But, if that is true, pregnancy resource centers and other life-affirming organizations and initiatives are the hands and feet of the movement that go out and do the front-line work, embracing and accompanying moms.

There are nearly 3,000 pregnancy resource centers and nearly 500 maternity homes nationwide.¹ Their incredible staff and volunteers are providing support and comfort to women in unexpected or challenging pregnancies across the country, 365 days a year.

The services they provide are numerous, and you all know this of course. From pregnancy tests and ultrasounds that let women hear their baby's heartbeat, to abortion-pill reversals and post-abortion counseling, to parenting classes and material support and much, much, more, pregnancy resource centers play a critical role in supporting expecting moms.

A 2022 report gives us some figures about just how much this network, this nation-wide web of supports, does every year. This report counted over 700,000 pregnancy tests, over 540,000 ultrasounds, over 400,000 parents educated through prenatal and parenting classes, and nearly 21,000 men and women accompanied through post-abortion counseling.²

And the pregnancy resource movement does this work *well*. A recent study reported an exceedingly high rate of client satisfaction at just over 97 percent.³

Another study found that when compared to abortion clinics, PRCs were almost twice as likely to offer same-day appointments and six times as likely to offer free pregnancy testing.⁴ In the anxious, uncertain hours when a woman is not sure she is pregnant, that matters, every minute matters.

I'm happy to share that our fellow Americans, by and large, affirm the good work done by PRCs. A Marist poll from the beginning of this year found that 83 percent of Americans support or strongly support pregnancy resource centers. And that *includes* 80 percent of people who self-identify as pro-choice!

So this is a really key point of commonality among our fellow Americans, that I hope we can find ways to talk about more and to lean into more and more. . . .

One of the best things about my new role at the March for Life is that I have had the opportunity this year to see the work of pregnancy care organizations firsthand. In my travels as the president of the March, I have committed to visiting a pregnancy resource center, maternity home, or other similar organization in every city that I visit.

From Denver to Dallas to Des Moines, Phoenix to Harrisburg to Trenton and beyond, these have been incredibly inspiring visits. I have been so moved by the faith and the joy of the people behind these initiatives, and I've walked away from each visit with my hope renewed knowing that *they* are giving hope to countless women facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy.

Since I know most people don't have the opportunity to see this kind of work firsthand, let alone to visit a number of different organizations across the country, I am trying my best to use our platform at the March for Life to shine a light on this beautiful work. We want to do our part to make people aware of the incredible resources that are available to pregnant moms all across this country. I'd love to tell you a little bit about some of the places I've visited as

a microcosm of that enormous web of resources across the country.

- *In My Shoes* maternity home in Dallas is an amazing place doing the Lord's work as they offer expectant and new mothers a safe and stable home while they work towards living on their own. The staff (including some young live-in staff) not only provide 24/7 support and companionship, but they also walk with the women through whatever challenges they're navigating as they prepare for motherhood—escaping abusive partners, finding steady work, whatever they have going on. The staff and residents do Bible study and pray together regularly. They share meals. And the building and grounds are really lovely. *In My Shoes* emphasizes truly creating a dignified home for these women, tangibly manifesting God's love for them and their babies, helping them build community, and reaffirming them in their choice of life.
- *Alternatives* in Denver has prioritized creating very peaceful, calming spaces—it feels very zen—that help the women who come through their doors feel comfortable and put at ease. I loved that they have a growing program for dads as well.
- At *FirstWay* in Phoenix, the space is bright and colorful, like you would imagine in the Southwest. And if moms participate in parenting and other classes they will earn credits, that they can use for diapers, wipes, baby clothes, toys, and more, from an overflowing little store. I was also glad to see another program to support dads, a peer counseling program. If we want to see more women choosing life, we need to also support the men in their lives who are part of their journey to the extent that that's possible. Of course, it is not always possible for a complicated number of reasons, but programs for dads are a key part of this landscape as well.
- *MorningStar* in Harrisburg similarly allows women participating in their programs to select sweet little baby clothes and other items. They have set up what truly looks like a high-end baby boutique for the moms to browse (I even took some photos because it was just so adorable) and in addition, once their moms reach third trimester they're gifted a full layette, a laundry basket full, complete with hand-knitted baby blankets and big bundle of clothes, and bibs, and other items.
- *InnerVisions HealthCare* in Des Moines, Iowa is primarily a health clinic. They are a little bit different than a number of other pregnancy resource centers I have been with. Their particular aim is to reach women who are seeking out, actively seeking out abortions, and they do a lot of strategic advertising in pursuit of this goal. Once they have connected a client with an obstetrician or midwife for their ongoing prenatal care,

InnerVisions stays in touch with them throughout their pregnancy, continuing to offer support, and often ultimately getting to meet the baby, once he or she is safely in the mother's arms.

- Most recently, I was in Trenton, New Jersey for the New Jersey March for Life a few days ago and was blown away by what they have been able to accomplish in a hard, very hard environment in NJ in a lot of ways. Chris (Bell's) home environment too, thank you for your work there. *Options for Her* in Trenton, through their four mobile ultrasound units, have saved 2,700 little lives and counting! It's amazing: They park right outside abortion clinics, and they offer ultrasounds to moms, so that moms can see and hear their babies, which is so often a transformative experience that these women are typically not getting in the abortion clinics, and often just what a mom needs to understand that she is carrying a precious life, a life that's worth saving.

I have been so heartened by all of these visits. Seeing the power, the reach, the generosity, and the joy of the pro-life warriors at these places has renewed my hope in our ability to turn the tides of our culture to embrace, rather than to destroy, life.

Faith-Based Ministries

Now, not all of these places I've mentioned are explicitly branded as Christian, but every single one of them is truly rooted in faith, whether they say so explicitly or not. One center I visited does not market itself as Christian in any way—but is nonetheless staffed entirely by people of faith. I was so moved to see that in the back area, their staff-only section, they have a very small chapel. The Director told me, "this work can be so heavy. We're all here because of our faith, and we all turn to our faith in the harder moments as well as the in the moments of joy. So it's important for us to have a place where we can slip away to spend a few minutes with the Lord, to pray for our clients and to find refreshment and renewal." They do offer to pray with their clients there once a client has mentioned that she is a person of faith.

So here I am going to just linger for a moment and try to articulate the particular contributions of *faith-based* pregnancy care ministries. (Again, understanding here that there is a range of ways in which a ministry can be faith-based.) Faith-based pregnancy ministries undertake this work knowing that they are the hands of Christ to the women, babies, and men they're serving and seeing Christ in those that they serve. This allows them to carry out their work with authentic love and joy at the gift of life. Second, faith-based ministries are singularly mission driven as they are responding to a call from the Lord. They are in it for the long haul. They

don't flinch. And finally, crucially, I think maybe most crucially, these organizations go beyond simply addressing material needs. They also care for the spiritual wellbeing of those they serve and in doing so care for the whole person.

Again, some places are doing this implicitly and with a lighter touch, some are much more explicitly evangelistic, but faith-based ministries are in the business of seeing and caring for the whole person.

The importance of this point has become clear to me, as I've met the people and heard the stories of a number of faith-based ministries. Part of the mission and part of the results at these places is to help the clients discover their identity as beloved daughters of God. These ministries offer a full range of support and resources, they offer a lot of stuff, they offer counseling and education, and all of that is super important, but they are also offering mothers an invitation to uncover their dignity and their worthiness in the eyes of the Lord. To know that they are deeply, extravagantly loved, and that God's love can set them free from whatever burdens and wounds they are carrying. It helps the women to know that because they are loved so profoundly, they *do* have love to offer to the little person they are carrying. Whether that looks like raising their baby, or making the sacrificial act of letting another family raise their baby through adoption. Sometimes this is conveyed to the moms more or less explicitly. One place I have been runs a bible study as part of their PRC ministry; it's not a required thing for the moms to participate in but it's very evident that that's it's part of their model. Sometimes it's implicit, just in the love extended to these women by the PRC staff and volunteers, and by the way in which they dignify the mothers by entrusting them with information about their pregnancies, helping them prepare to step in to their God-given call to be good mothers, allowing them to select the clothing and baby items that they want to give to their children, kind of creating their own aesthetic, if you will. All these things are really powerful at a human level.

Abortion is a crisis of human rights, absolutely, but it's also truly a crisis of the human heart. Too often abortion is the result of fear, shame, loneliness, emptiness. It's a wound that springs from existing wounds. The love of Jesus will bind up those wounds, given the opportunity, and that is the particular contribution that faith-based pregnancy care organizations can make.

A similar dynamic, I think, obtains for the organizations that have men's programs, too. This is complicated in our space because the dads are sometimes not available, sometimes the dads are the problem, there is a lot going on there, but trying to have a program for dads is so important because using God Our Father as a reference point, faith-based ministries can help fathers

understand real masculinity and encourage them to be the selfless, strong, loving leaders that their new little family needs. That is a stark contrast to what these young men are often hearing from the world, with its prioritization of a form of masculinity that too often degrades women, shirks responsibility, and leads to the destruction of the family.

Leading with Love

Now let's talk about leading with love, the beautiful theme that Maria and Elizabeth chose.

Love is the best way to draw people in. It's the best way to make moms feel comfortable approaching a pro-life pregnancy resource center or other organization. And it's the best way to invite people into our movement who have perhaps been on the peripheries, or who haven't been sure that they want to call themselves "pro-life." Because of the impression that they have of the pro-life movement about who is in it, how it engages, etc.

We in the pro-life movement need to be ready to engage at the level of the *head*; with our persuasive arguments and our key facts at the ready, about fetal development, about the dangers of the chemical abortion pill, about how abortion hurts women. We also need to engage at the level of the *heart*. We have to let the love, the hope, and the joy of the pro-life movement shine through and lead the way.

Speaking clearly about hard issues is important to me. I almost feel funny talking in this way because I am a former philosophy major, and I'm a lawyer. I believe to my very core in the power of strong arguments and the importance of making our arguments airtight. I don't want to minimize that. But human nature being what it is, people don't always change their minds because of a great set of bullet points. Often, people are moved to change their minds because of their *encounter* with the transcendentals—the permanent things—truth, beauty, and goodness.

This seems to me to be often true of conversions to the faith and certainly often true I think of conversions to the pro-life movement, the pro-life cause, or even to conversions to being open to keep a pregnancy that initially seemed like a burden.

I'm sure we're all aware of other social movements, events, demonstrations, maybe even other marches that burned hot for a time and then petered out. The March for Life (the marquee event of the pro-life movement, the March is a stand-in for the movement in many ways) is still going strong after over 50 years—despite being held at the absolute worst time of year weather-wise—yes, we're aware of that! But people still come. I believe it's because events built on anger don't have staying power. They can't. That is

an emotion or a state of being that is not sustainable long-term. It is not natural for human beings. The March for Life continues to flourish, the pro-life movement continues to flourish, people continue to come, year after year, and to engage the movement, to renew our movement with more and more young people every year, because our movement is rooted in things that are timeless and that are universally compelling. Truth, beauty, and goodness speak to the heart of every person and they cut through the noise. The good news for us is that the transcendentals are on our side in this work. Life is true, and it's good, and it's beautiful. Life is a Gift. These are core human truths that have immense staying power. They speak to people and move people, in and out of season.

If you've ever been to the March for Life, and I hope you all have and I hope you will come this January too—you know that the most remarkable thing about it is the effervescent *joy* of the pro-life movement on full display. There is incredible energy at the March for Life. It is a day—I'm describing it like it's Woodstock!—about love. The love for babies and their moms. Countless young people, as far as the eye can see, singing and chanting and holding their signs, totally on fire for life. That joy is the natural outgrowth—it's the overspilling if you will—of truth, beauty, and goodness. It's just an outpouring of love. It's infectious, and it's contagious.

I'm delighted to share that the theme of the 2026 National March for Life, which I just announced last week at a press event here in Washington, will be *Life is a Gift*. For all of the reasons I just laid out, we're embracing this theme as a way to invite people into the pro-life movement at the level of the heart. We are inviting the pro-life movement to lean into our joy, the sheer joy of life, and the joy of being together to celebrate it and to work for it, which is really one of our most persuasive arguments. We are inviting the pro-life movement to lead with love. That will tell the truth about what it means to be pro-life more powerfully than any slogan ever could.

So I am very happy to share with you the theme video for the 2026 March for Life which we just started sharing last week, and which encapsulates this theme, *Life is a Gift* (video; applause).

Our team really poured our hearts into that video, because we were all so convicted that is the message that the movement needs to both hear and share right now in our particular moment; to speak to the level of the heart, and to invite people into our movement and to show that the face of the pro-life movement is the face of love. I love seeing all the archival footage we have, so many decades of archival footage of the March for Life, because I think

it makes that really so clear. Love is what gives the pro-life movement so much staying power. It's what moves people to our side. It's what allows our wonderful life-giving faith-based ministries to save lives and change hearts.

When we lead with love, meaning we are leading with Christ's love, allowing him to love through us, we will change the world.

Closing

And now, a final word about hope in our current pro-life moment. Monsignor James Shea, the President of the University of Mary, and a Catholic University alumnus as well, gave a beautiful talk on hope at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast earlier this year. I encourage everyone to look it up and read or watch it in full if you haven't. He said there, "human beings cannot live without hope." And further—I'll quote at length now—"This question of hope is so central for us as [Christians] because we know that Jesus Christ speaks about hope in the course of his Revelation in the Gospels and that the New Testament insists again and again that hope is essential to the way in which we navigate our lives, that Jesus came to give us a kind of hope which is a bedrock, which gives us the perspective necessary to navigate all the vicissitudes of life, the disappointments and the heartbreak and the triumphs and the joys as well, placing everything in its proper order and its place. We need to have a hope which is deep Hope, with a capital H, a bedrock foundational hope."

Msgr. Shea identifies what he calls "proximal hopes," which are hopes for good things on this earth: we hope for good weather on the weekend, we hope our travels will go smoothly, that kind of thing. We also of course hope for more significant things, like to meet and marry a Godly person, or for a parent's illness to be cured. But none of those things, even the really good things cannot be our foundational or bedrock source of hope. Quoting again now from Msgr Shea: "We are immortal beings with eternal destinies. We were not made for this world. Our citizenship is in heaven. And so as a result, when we found our hopes upon things of this Earth, our hearts will always be broken, we'll always find disappointment."

There are so many reasons for hope in the pro-life movement. The incredible organization I am privileged to lead gives me hope. The tens of thousands of Americans who come to Washington on a January day gives me hope. The energy and momentum among young people for the cause of life. The tireless work done by so many people of faith for decades, to support women, fills me with hope. But truly those are all proximal hopes.

**Our Bedrock Hope, of Course, Ultimately Lies in Jesus Christ
and His Literal Victory over Death.**

That is so important to hold on tight to because the cultural and political landscape in our country can at times seem very hard. I jokingly said to some folks last year although it wasn't entirely a joke—I'm not sure it's really the right time to become a full-time professional pro-life activist. The landscape looked hard last summer and it still looks hard in many ways. The number of abortions still occurring in our country is devastating. The number of post-abortive women who would have preferred to choose life is deeply convicting. At times it can feel like perhaps we're moving in the wrong direction. Initial reports after *Dobbs* about abortion numbers seemed in some ways to be going up rather than down. I believe that is reversed now, but the numbers didn't look great coming right out of the gate. I often think of my predecessor, Nellie Gray, the founder of the March for Life—who answered the call to stand up for life and who fearlessly and tirelessly led the March for almost 40 years, until the day that she died. Nellie passed away in 2012, ten years too early to see the fall of *Roe*, for which she had poured herself out and launched an event, and a movement, that has made history and changed history. But guess what. The *Dobbs* decision was released on the eve of Nellie Gray's birthday, in 2022. God has a way of winking at us, and letting us know us that He sees and blesses our efforts.

So what I want to leave you with is: Don't ever give in to discouragement. There will be ups and downs. There will be some losses along the way. The post-*Dobbs* landscape is challenging. But there is no room for discouragement in our line of work. We should have the peace and confidence that comes from knowing that we are working for a truly just and righteous cause. And we should have the peace and confidence that comes from knowing how the story ends. We know that Life wins, in the end.

Life wins, thanks to Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

This is what ultimately gives us the hope—the foundational, bedrock capital H Hope—to carry on in this fight to build a nation where every unborn baby is protected and every mother is supported and empowered to confidently choose life.

And I know that we will get there, thanks largely to the tireless work of all of you gathered here and so many others across this nation who, day in and day out, are leading with love.

Thank you very much for your work.

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DR. CHRISTINA FRANCIS AND ANNE CONLON

WILLIAM BLACKBURN

My name is William Blackburn, I am the son of Ross Blackburn, who is a contributor to the *Human Life Review*. The first Great Defender of Life dinner that I came to, I was 13—dad brought me out—and I was just about the youngest person at the dinner, and—ladies and gentleman, Miss Oklahoma was also at the dinner! From that point on, I was, needless to say, smitten with the *Human Life Review*, which leads me to where I am today. I get to work with the *Human Life Review*, which is an incredible honor.



I have worked for several non-profits, and I can say that one of the things that is special and unique about the *Human Life Review* is that it is not just a vision but a family legacy—Maria McFadden Maffucci picked up where her father left off, which leads us to where we are today, over 50 years after its founding.

FR. DAVID POECKING



*Fr. David Poecking chats
with MC William Blackburn*

God, our creator. Over the formless and empty waters your spirit breathed light and life. And from the weary people your spirit evoked a vision and beauty. Make us grateful for your work of creation. Especially the gift of every human being and most especially every child whose presence in the womb and in the world betokens our infinite dignity and our eternal destiny.

Bless those whom we honor tonight: Doctor Christina Francis and Anne Conlon,

each of whom has brought light and life to those in need, imitating your divine mercy. Pour out on this gathering your spirit, Lord and giver of life, that you may animate our fellowship tonight, that you may inspire our labors for the lives of the unborn, for their mothers and fathers, and for all who serve and protect them.

HELEN ALVARÉ

I am at a loss to know how I received the honor of honoring and introducing Anne Conlon. Even if I wasn't familiar with her intellectual heft and skills as an editor, I would have felt insufficiently "cool" to preface a woman I have always put at the top of the "cool" pyramid. Her demeanor, her way of speaking, her resume, her style, wow . . . She had me the first time I met her . . . wearing all black in a very Manhattan way . . .

But *then*, you consider in addition to all those initial impressions, her *record* of shaping and marshaling and polishing the intellectual side of the pro-life movement. Her instincts about the topics to pursue, the right author for the right task . . . Her instincts about how to make an argument sing, . . . how to sharpen a point . . . how and when to say a hard truth in a way that, while bracing, even sometimes shocking (because isn't killing shocking?), . . . was always true and always necessary.

She is a hero to the pro-life movement which is so accustomed to being caricatured as anti-intellectual, under-educated, fideistic, anti-science, and anti-women. Such a movement needs its cool, confident, credentialed, cerebral cats, and Anne is all that. People who take the talents God gave them and put them at the service of something big and good, in the style of Etienne Gilson's "Intelligence in the Service of Christ." People about whom others could say: "that woman would succeed anywhere she went, but look . . . look . . . she chose pro-life."

In Anne's case, her service was making sure that the record of public debate over abortion was preserved in sparkling form. And that the wide variety of actions and arguments and players and proposals and personalities and fields—constituting what we all know lovingly as the *pro-life movement in the US*—could represent themselves in the most clear and reasonable fashion; in the midst not only of elite scorn, but of sometimes serious disagreement within the movement itself. And all the while knowing—as she once said—that the arguments against abortion were all present from the very beginning of the debate . . . but needing to be presented to new generations in a way that was fresh, and attuned to the "signs of their times."

While Anne was rarely in the media spotlight herself, when she was, she shone, with the same gift of words she shared with all those she edited, bril-

liantly skewering, for example, Notre Dame's decision to honor Obama who used his podium to pretend to call for human rights for all, . . . and her calling for the use of "logic" in the pro-life debate for those she said "old enough to remember it," and pleading with Americans to stop substituting entertainment for use of their moral imaginations.



In sum . . . I love Anne, *and* her work, for many of the same reasons I have loved my mentor Cardinal O'Connor. Because in addition to their virtues on the professional and public planes . . . we have the *persons* themselves and how they *love* others. We all know Anne's love for her family. Her love for her coworkers . . . her compatriots in arms. And I will add on a personal note, the love she showed me with her many "missives" as we called them, since my husband passed away a few years ago. As happens with the dynamic/physics of love, the love you showed US Anne is returned to YOU many-times over, in abundance. Carry on sister, and Godspeed.

MARIA MCFADDEN MAFFUCCI

God works in mysterious ways, and sometimes ways that frustrate us. As some of you know, as we gather together to celebrate tonight, one of our stars is absent. Editor Anne Conlon, who we are saluting tonight, is unable to be here due to a medical situation with her husband, Raymond, who is also part of our HLF family. However, let us not be sad: You will hear from Anne, from Helen Alvaré, who will read Anne's prepared remarks, and she will see the film of this evening, so we must show her the love and joy on our faces . . .



Maria presents the Great Defender of Life award to Dr. Christina Francis

ANNE CONLON

Thank you, Helen, for all the nice things you may have just said about me. Helen and I have an old-fashioned letter-driven friendship, one that has endured and deepened over three decades, even though we've actually met in person only about *two* handfuls of times. And thanks to Jane Devanny, who promotes our Great Defender of Life dinner every year with such gusto, for her lovely tribute. I was looking forward to my close-up; alas, fate intervened. But my remarks were already written—I never speak in public without a script!—and I couldn't ask for a more gifted understudy, so to speak, than Helen Alvaré.

Thirty years ago, I wrote to *National Review* about a job opening there. At the time I was a copywriter, mentored by the kind of mid-century characters in the television drama *Mad Men*. The challenge of finding fresh ways to sell familiar products like perfume and cognac was enjoyable, fun even. But I was ambivalent about continuing a career in advertising. I'd just finished up a long-term freelance project—a so-called tactical guide for Mercedes Benz dealers—when I saw the notice in *National Review*. I was 43 years old, I wrote in my letter, and looking to trade selling luxury goods for something different; something more serious.

I got a nice response. The position had been filled, but they would keep my letter and resume on file. And they did. Not long after that, when the *Human Life Review* was about to lose its managing editor, Jack Fowler gave my resume to Maria. She called and asked if I'd be interested in working for another journal, one associated with *National Review* but focused on bioethical issues like abortion and euthanasia. Now that sounded serious. I came in for an interview with Maria and her father Jim, bringing my portfolio, which they didn't look at, and a few abortion-inspired letters to the editor, which they did. The *Wall Street Journal* had published one of them. Maybe that helped me get hired, I don't know. But I suspect if they'd seen my "I am addicted to desire" ode to Opium—the perfume—you might not be saluting me tonight.

That was 1995. I had no idea there was such a thing as a pro-life movement, let alone that Jim McFadden was a prominent member. Jim, who would die three and a half years later, was then two years into his life with cancer. The disease was baggage he brought to our relationship, gallantly brought. I remember him joking about his strong heart and lungs and how physically fit he otherwise was. Jim's wife, and Maria's mother, Faith Abbott, had just published *Acts of Faith*, her memoir of growing up in another movement I hadn't heard of—Moral Re-Armament, an international one, she wrote in her book, that "believed it had been commissioned by God to renew the face

of the earth.” Faith was a senior editor and frequent contributor to the *Review*, but she mostly worked at home back then. I met her for the first time here at the Union League Club at a book party in her honor. A gracious woman, with a beautifully lined face and an impish smile, she really did have me at hello . . . and all the way to goodbye. When she died in 2011, after her own valiant bout with cancer, she was a cherished mentor and friend.

Fast forward to 2025. I told Maria in January I would be retiring at the end of the year. It was a hard decision, but one prompted by personal responsibilities that made it inevitable. When she told me I’d be saluted at this dinner tonight, I was both touched—and terrified. What to say? What to say to Maria, especially, who along with her father took a chance on someone who abhorred abortion but had no publishing experience, hiring me on the spot and later honoring me with the title of editor. Well, what else to say but “Thank you.”

Thank you, Maria—and Faith—for bravely carrying on after Jim’s death, sparing me having to look for another job, knowing full well I would never find one I could love as I had come to love this one. Thanks to Ellen Wilson Fielding, our senior editor and magnificent essayist who mentored me in the fine art of editing. My nickname for her is Ezra, after Ezra Pound, to whom Eliot dedicated *The Waste Land*, calling him *il miglior fabbro*, the “better craftsman.” Which indeed Ellen is. And thanks, too, to Mary Meehan, our now retired senior editor and model of dedication to the pro-life cause. An ace investigative reporter, Mary could have had a far more lucrative career in mainstream journalism but chose the “getting by on a shoestring” life of writing important stories for journals like the *Human Life Review*.

Thanks to all those who have supported us through the years, even as, early on, some wondered whether Jim’s ship would sail without him at the helm. Though I must say that with the indefatigable Rose Flynn DeMaio at the financial helm, as she has been since long before I came onboard, there should have been no doubt. Thank you, Rose, for keeping us on course through fundraising swells and slumps, and most of all, for being another cherished friend.

Thank you to everyone who joins us tonight. To say the *Review*’s friends and supporters are like an extended family is no exaggeration. I remember many times over the years when someone, maybe one of you, either wrote or called the office in response to one of Jim or Maria’s letters, saying they felt they knew the writer even though they’d never met. It was this way too for William Murchison, our longtime senior editor whose unexpected death last month has been such a jolt. I don’t believe Bill ever met Jim. Yet here’s how he described their relationship in his 2009 Great Defender of Life speech:

“We bonded in a wonderful way over the many years. And I came not only to admire

that man, but to love him profoundly for what he stood for, and for what he did. Jim McFadden invited me into this civilizational warfare.”

Bill Murchison wrote over 100 articles for us. If there is a thread running through them, it is that attention must be paid—to God. His last one, “There Are Boys; There Are Girls,” appears in our Fall issue. As the title no doubt cued you, it deals with transgender ideology’s attack on the age-old understanding of human sexuality. Here’s Bill, in the distinctive voice our readers will certainly recognize.

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

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

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

The brain kicks in is a good way to describe Jim McFadden’s shocked response to *Roe v. Wade*, the breathtaking judicial undoing of centuries of thinking about life—and death. “There has to be a record,” he insisted, “no one should be able to say, whatever happens, that they didn’t know what’s really going on here.” When I came to the *Review*, that record resided in a shelf full of bound volumes. Pat O’Brien, our dear friend and benefactor, joined us as a volunteer in 2003, and proceeded to spearhead a project to digitize all those print issues. We were also joined in 2003 by now managing editor Christina McFadden Angelopoulos—who immediately set about creating a Master Index, and soon after, redesigned our website, uploading the complete *Human Life Review* Archive, along with



The Human Life Review will greatly miss Anne Conlon

the Index, which Ida Paz, our indispensable production coordinator, updates with each new issue we publish. Jim McLaughlin, our longtime Board chairman, and a lawyer, was an invaluable guide as we made our way into online publishing.

What a unique and unparalleled education is waiting to be had in our Archive for anyone who wants to know what's really been going on these last fifty years. And what a rich resource for disinterested future historians who will one day tell the whole story to people who will then wonder, as George McKenna memorably put it in a symposium earlier this year: "Did they really do that? And to children?" Yes, someone might answer, they did. There's a record.

It's been a privilege to mind that record for going on three decades. Truly a labor of love. Serious, yes, but not without a measure of fun, too. I wish Mary Rose Somarriba and Chris Reilly, the *Review's* new co-editors, all the best as they take over from me. And I send Dr. Christina Francis, who is so deserving of the honor about to be bestowed on her, a heartfelt thank you for all she is doing to remind professional medical associations that they are in the business of life—not death. My husband Raymond and son Gabriel and I have been living in medical world these last several days. And I am happy to report that our experience at the ground level has been all good and that the patient is on the mend.

WILLIAM BLACKBURN

And now, to introduce our Great Defender of Life, I am introducing Kate Connolly. Kate Connolly is New York-based. She works in PR and communications, specializing in storytelling, media relations and crisis communications. She's held leadership roles in the National September 11th Memorial and Museum, Saint Patrick's Cathedral and the Archdiocese of New York and now co-leads the boutique agency Honor and Gold.

Please welcome her to the stage.

KATE MONAGHAN CONNOLLY

Thank you, William. Thank you, Maria. It's an honor to be here. I'm also a reader from childhood, and my parents are longtime supporters. I'd like to start with just a very short anecdote as I introduce our honoree.

A few years ago, I found myself in great need of a life-affirming physician. The doctor giving me the diagnosis for my son said only this: "Most women terminate when they receive this diagnosis."

He offered no words of comfort and no alternatives. Walking away, my

husband and I were heartbroken for many reasons, and one of them was the stark realization that women receiving diagnoses like ours often don't stand a chance. If we had not already been pro-life, we might have simply followed the advice of our doctor. Doctors, especially OBGYNs, are on the front lines of the fight to protect both women and their pre-born children.

We need physicians who are willing to find solutions other than death, solutions that affirm life even in the face of hardship, uncertainty, or fear. It was through my work with Peche, the public relations firm that represents the American Association of Pro-Life OBGYNs, also known as AAPLOG, that I had the privilege of getting to know one such physician: Doctor Christina Francis.

Doctor Francis is a board-certified OBGYN and OBGYN hospitalist and the CEO of AAPLOG, the largest life-affirming medical organization in the world, with more than 8,000 members. She has always had a passion for human rights, spending years in various countries working tirelessly on behalf of women and children. She served for three years as the only OB-



GYN at a mission hospital in rural Kenya, before returning to the US to continue her work for women and children, both here and abroad, who are too often victims of the abortion industry.

Her writing has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, and *USA Today*, and she has been interviewed countless times. In addition to her role at AAPLOG, she's an associate scholar with the Charlotte Lozier Institute, a board member of Indiana Right to Life, and a physician member of the Abortion Pill Reversal Network. Doctor Francis is an incredible physician, leader, and dear friend, and it is my great honor to introduce her this evening as the recipient of this year's Great Defender of Life Award.

Please join me in welcoming Doctor Christina Francis.

DR. CHRISTINA FRANCIS

Thank you, Kate, for the kind introduction. And I would like to thank Maria and the entire team at *Human Life Review* and the Human Life Foundation for the amazing honor of being selected to represent pro-life medical professionals being honored as Great Defenders of Life!

I am so grateful that the Human Life Foundation has decided to recognize the significant contribution, and sacrifices, that pro-life medical professionals make for the cause of life—at the beginning of life, the end, and everywhere in between. This is only accomplished due to the hard work of many of the people in this room who support so sacrificially the work that AAPLOG is doing.

In fact, we play a critical role in ensuring that life is respected and protected. And this weighty responsibility, is one, unfortunately, that has been abdicated by so many within my profession over the last nearly 60 years. However, the American Association of Pro-life OB/GYNs, the largest professional medical organization of pro-life physicians with approximately 8000 members, is changing that.

And our aim is to do this through respectful, compassionate and informed conversation—in the public, with our colleagues, and with our patients. And we are providing clarity in the midst of the confusion by speaking the truth about what abortion is and why it is not healthcare. This is something we have in common with *Human Life Review*—who since 1975 has been dedicated to civilized discussion of the legal, philosophical, medical, and scientific perspectives on life issues. AAPLOG was started in 1973 for a very similar reason.

We were started as a special interest group within ACOG, the American College of OB/GYNs, when their leadership went against the views of the majority of their membership and filed pro-abortion amicus briefs in both the *Roe* and *Doe* cases. We were formed in order to ensure that open dialogue continued within ACOG about abortion and that the voices of pro-life physicians advocating for our patients would continue to be heard. And the voices of our group (their largest special interest group) *were* heard for many years.

Unfortunately, beginning in the mid-90s, an increasing hostility towards life-affirming medical care began and has grown progressively worse ever since. From claiming that physician conscience should not be tolerated if it interferes with abortion access to stating that physicians who won't perform abortions must refer for them and also relocate their practice in close proximity to someone who will.

From requiring that abortion training be available to all OB residents (regardless of the religious or moral convictions of the training institution) to now re-

quiring abortion training as standard training for all programs and all residents.

From launching a smear campaign against pregnancy centers and labeling them as fake clinics to bolstering the attacks across the country against abortion pill reversal, denying women the choice to save their child when they regret their abortion decision.

And now, on top of spreading lies that state pro-life laws are killing women and preventing physicians from providing life-saving care, they have tried to completely silence the voices of any dissenters.

On the day I took over as CEO of AAPLOG in 2023, we were kicked out of an ACOG conference we had exhibited at for years—one for those educating the next generation of medicine—simply because we are pro-life. When we arranged for an academic and scientific debate on the issue of abortion at Duke University, ACOG refused to participate—stating that the role of abortion in our patients’ lives is “settled science.”

And, to try and ensure that all OB/GYNs would be scared to say anything other than full endorsement of induced abortion after the *Dobbs* decision, our board certification entity has threatened to revoke the board certification of any OB/GYN found to be spreading mis- or disinformation about abortion or any other “essential healthcare service.”

All of this despite the fact that induced abortion, which intends the death of my fetal patient, carries *zero* health benefits for my maternal patient and often causes significant mental and or physical harm for her. It also directly contradicts the oath I took as a physician to never intentionally harm or kill my patients. These are just some of the reasons that 76-93 percent of OB/GYN’s do NOT perform them.

Abortion is not a political issue. It is a moral and human rights issue that has been politicized. This politicization has caused deep divisions in our culture as well as my profession. And it is harming countless women and children.

So how do we begin to heal that division and help others see the beauty of life and the benefits of life-affirming healthcare? I think it’s by having respectful and thoughtful dialogue (and, when needed, debate) first with those in our sphere of influence and then in the larger public square.

These are often not easy conversations to have but have them we must. The good news is that there are simple tools and crucial information that we can utilize to help make these conversations fruitful. I was “trained up” in the pro-life movement by an amazing pro-life apologist, Scott Klusendorf. He says that the case for life centers around a simple syllogism: It’s wrong to intentionally end the life of an innocent human being. Abortion *intentionally* ends the life of an innocent human being. Therefore, abortion is wrong.

While our conversations around abortion often necessitate slightly more

nuance, this truly is the crux of the issue. One tactic to improve the chance of a productive conversation about a difficult topic is to do more listening than talking. In that listening, often you will be able to identify an area of agreement. For instance, you might say, “I agree that unplanned pregnancies are really difficult for women and they often feel like they don’t know where to turn.”

After identifying where you agree, then you can respectfully begin to differentiate your position. And a key to doing this is asking good questions.

Two very effective questions for this conversation are: What do you think abortion is and what makes you have that opinion? Their answers will give you very clear insight into why they support abortion, as well as more insight into who they are as a person (something I often overlook in my quest to be right). Using what or how questions allows them to see that you truly are interested in what they have to say without putting them on the defensive. It will also give you a chance to respond with some facts.

First, the sole intent of an induced abortion is to produce a dead baby. It is not an intervention intended to save the mother’s life, to treat a miscarriage where the baby has already passed away or to treat an ectopic pregnancy. There are ethical and legal ways to care for women in these



circumstances that do not require intentionally ending the life of their child. And this isn’t just proliferators’ definition of abortion—it’s the CDC’s. The verbal gymnastics by abortion supporters since the *Dobbs* decision to try to equate induced abortion with actual healthcare are not only meant to hide their true position, but they’re harmful for women as well.

Second, abortion is bad for women. Induced abortion causes a 7 times increased risk of suicide in addition to increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Surgical abortions significantly increase a woman’s risk of preterm birth in future pregnancies—not only putting the lives of her future children at risk as well, but also increasing her risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke. Abortions that are done before a woman carries a pregnancy to term increase her risk of breast cancer.

And currently, approximately two-thirds of abortions are being done via dangerous abortion drugs that are often dispensed online with no medical supervision—increasing women’s risks of complications like hemorrhage,

infection, and death as well as of forced abortions. This is not empowering—it's demeaning, harmful, and deceptive.

Women and their children deserve better. This is something we all should be able to agree on. It is anti-feminist to tell a woman that the only way she can succeed in life is to deny the miracle of the life of her child and to intentionally end that life.

Abortion is a very temporary Band-Aid that makes us lazy as a society and as a medical profession. Rather than do the hard work of finding REAL solutions or improving medical treatments, abortion is touted as the panacea for everything.

The pro-life physicians I represent care deeply about our patients and we understand that the true purpose of medicine is health, healing and wholeness. We understand that pregnancy is NOT a disease and death is NOT healthcare. And, we understand that though the laws in many states have changed, hearts and minds need to change even more. I know that seems like a daunting task, but I draw encouragement from the words of apologist Greg Koukl, who said that our job when we have hard conversations is not to change someone's mind—that's God's job. Our job is to put a pebble in their shoe so that when they leave that conversation they can't stop thinking about it.

This we can accomplish! Through exemplifying the beauty and benefits of life-affirming, as opposed to death-glorifying, healthcare. And through having winsome, robust, and respectful conversations—even when it's hard and even when it's risky.

It may be scary at first. But it just takes compassion, a commitment to truth and a little bit of courage. I will close with an excerpt from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's essay "Live Not by Lies" because I think it's as pertinent now as it was when it was written in the 1970s:

The simplest and most accessible key to our self-neglected liberation is this: personal non-participation in lies. Though lies may conceal everything, though lies may control everything, we should be obstinate about this one small point: let them be in control but without any help from any of us...

It is the easiest thing for us to do and the most destructive for the lies. Because when people renounce lies it cuts short their existence. Like a virus, they can survive only in a living organism . . .

This would not be an easy path, but the easiest of all possible ones. Not an easy path—but there are people among us, dozens of them, who have been observing all these conditions for years and who live by the truth. Therefore you will not be the first to take this path, you will join others! It will be easier and shorter if we embark on it in great and friendly numbers. If we are in thousands it will not be possible for them to do anything to anyone. If we are in tens of thousands we will not recognize our own country!

May it be so!

WILLIAM BLACKBURN

When the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,
And the ground you thought was stable almost bursts,
When you can't see all the damage but it still hurts,

When all the promised actions turn to words,
And the dust settles from mushroom clouded burns,
You feel so tired and sleepless nights just blur,

When all we want is love but it doesn't come,
So we settle for politics and drugs,
The world's not black and white but we wish it was,
But still all we want and need is love,

When bought and sold addictions take control,
Between the barrel, the bottle, and the rope,
Scared as hell to move cause Hell's so close, so close,

When the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,
Then every baby boy and baby girl,
Can laugh in awe and wonder, and feel their worth,
Cause the hand that rocked their cradle made their world,

—*William Blackburn and Eric Novakovich*



*Mary Rose Somarriba and
William Blackburn*



Sister Lucy of the Sisters of Life



*Christina Angelopoulos
and Michael Scarnati*



Alton and Grace Pelowski



*Madeline Fry Schultz
and baby Quincy*



*Laura and James O'Dwyer with
our Board Chairman Jim McLaughlin.*



*Rose Flynn DeMaio, Chris Reilly,
and Diane Moriarty*



*Eileen Fitzsimons, Walter Russell and
Edgar M. Fitzsimons IV*



Mr. Edward Short



Alexis Carra-Tracey and baby Maria



Sylvia and George McKenna

Save the Date!

Monday September 28, 2026

**The 23rd Annual
Great Defender of Life Dinner**

Honoring

**His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop Emeritus of New York**

**at the Union League Club
New York City**

As Western Civilization Lay Dying

Ellen Wilson Fielding

When she was in her teens, one of my daughters was drawn toward drama (the on-stage kind), performing effectively in several high school productions before her interests veered in other directions. My mind keeps returning to one performance that featured an emo Hamlet hugging the walls of a high school mixer, all brooding teenage angst, exhibiting both swiftly descending despair and frustration with the slow tempo of progress toward desired goals.

That is one way of visualizing our civilization's increasingly suicidal course over the past century or so: acting out a death wish like someone who is young and insistent on either getting what they want now or holding their breath until they turn blue. Our many-faceted death urge manifests in orgies of literal death, including abortion, euthanasia, and mass murders; in avoidance of life, such as the retreat from marriage or formation of families; and in escape from reality like transgenderism, social media, pornography, and the seemingly endless prolongation of adolescence. At other times, though—especially when I survey the long span of Western Civilization's lethal downward spiral—this death wish resembles less the nihilistic impatience of youth than the sclerotic despair of decrepitude. And then there are times when it seems we have managed to combine the two.

Regardless, here we are. And now, roughly half a millennium after Europe embraced the scientific pursuit of human betterment—subduing diseases, reining in plagues, dulling pain with analgesics, ameliorating handicaps with medicine and technology, and most recently cracking open the door to a new era of gene therapy and artificial human enhancement—many of us sense we have profoundly lost our way. All these accomplishments (and they are real accomplishments, many of them magnificent accomplishments, particularly in the medical sphere) that were intended to advance us toward a new and better, humanly derived Eden have clearly failed to do so.

That health is more enjoyable than sickness is beyond doubt. That a full stomach is an improvement on an empty one is also true. But first vaguely and then fretfully and finally despairingly, many of us have begun to realize that relief from pain and hunger and the provision of comfort, entertainment, labor-saving devices, even intoxication in all its forms, are not the same

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

thing as happiness, peace of mind, and sense of purpose. They inhabit separate categories. They are not the same kind of experience. So, for instance, however many five-star meals we enjoy at however many first-class restaurants, those meals will not by themselves fill us with peace or satiate any of our non-gustatory gnawing desires. It is increasingly apparent that all our progress, all our work, all our brain power and pizzazz, will not be enough to make us happy. Nothing—no thing—will be enough.

This uneasy acknowledgment of science's limits persists even in the face of excited promises of scientific utopias; for example, CRISPR's doorway to genetic manipulation on a grand scale, offering physically (and intellectually) faultless human beings. Even AI—that sorcerer's-apprentice-like enhancer of human productivity and efficiency reputedly destined someday to make human participation in the world of work unnecessary—heightens rather than allays unease.

Why are such seemingly “good news” scenarios not the particular kinds of good news we are most seeking, even if what they foretell someday comes to pass? I think it is because such scenarios leave unaddressed the real problem, the real human challenge in this and every age—how to discern our human purpose and attempt to fulfill it. What do we humans *mean*? Why *are* we? The info technology utopias inadvertently let out their secret despair by disclosing the pointlessness of human beings, or at least the great mass of them, if the I.T. dream/nightmare ever becomes reality.

Whether or not we believe him, when we hear a tech billionaire speculate that within a decade or two or three human workforces will be almost wholly obsolete, but that AI will be so productive that everyone can be paid not to work, does this outlandish promise of universal leisure and prosperity strike us as any less depressing than the tech nightmare version where AI ultimately takes over everything and annihilates the human race? Aren't both versions really nightmares?

The cherry on top would be fulfillment of the belief famously expressed by Ray Kurzweil and shared by others in the tech cohort that humans will someday, not very far in the future, outrun mortality. Forget for a moment whether you consider this likely or even possible and just entertain it as a thought experiment. Would our condition then be better or worse than it is now, let alone than it was 1,000 or 1,500 or 2,000 years ago? There we are, living on and on and on (again, if AI doesn't do away with us—we are in the supposedly happy AI dream now), our physical necessities and needs for entertainment perfectly fulfilled. If we fill up one planet with ourselves or our junk, we just move on to another, and another. The only catch is that, in John Lennon's unintentionally dystopian lyrics, we'll have “nothing to live

or die for.” Just yawning oceans of time waiting to be filled with ever-new video games or other essentially pointless activities.

That is the dead end to which our efforts in the last 500 years or so to master the mysteries of both nature at large and human nature, seeking thereby to eliminate pain and want and disease and maximize ease and pleasure and prosperity, have brought us. We have achieved much—Francis Bacon himself would likely be astonished at the success of his project to pursue mastery over our physical world. But we have not achieved happiness. In fact, arguably we have seen the relative stock of human happiness decreasing rather than increasing, as evidenced by rising tides of suicide, depression, and anxiety, and by the failure of growing subsets of the last few generations to launch successfully into adulthood.

Perhaps we can visualize the post-Renaissance happiness project, particularly as it has gathered steam exponentially in the last century, as the effort to fill to the brim a watertight human progress compartment that at the beginning of the Baconian project was perhaps a quarter full. Centuries later it is now perhaps three quarters full, and the heady projections of some in the medical and technological worlds suggest it will fill up completely within another generation. But side by side with the great strides made in this direction is the realization that little has changed with the level of the human happiness container.

Or maybe we should say that the human perfectionism project has in fact affected human happiness, only not in a good way. This might not be a direct or necessary effect: Life-changing alterations—like mechanizing the process of spinning and weaving cloth, thereby precipitating the Industrial Revolution; or taming and employing electricity to power engines, light night-time cities, transfer sound and sight through telephones, phonographs, radio, television, and movies, and on and on to our present-day laptops, cellphones, smart appliances, GPS, and AI—might not be directly opposed to happiness. There may be ways of pursuing the one that do not also deplete the other. Machines do not actually run on or consume happiness, peace of mind, or sense of purpose. But the nature-dominating, power-seeking, wealth-amassing, reductionist and materialist-focusing mindset that has grown and strengthened with centuries of successes and whose less life-enhancing implications have become more apparent has somehow been draining the well-spring of human happiness, such as it is and can be in a fallen universe, at ever greater rates.

Let’s look at that mindset, then, and consider what within it leaches peace of mind and heart while it mows down disease, the need for physical exertion, and the limitations of time and space.

To begin with, the scientific revolution conceived by Bacon and his contemporaries and carried on by their immediate inheritors, though focused on earthly progress and ambitious to gain greater control over nature, was not then an explicit rebellion against God and moral law either in origin or intention. Regardless, the focus was on achieving greater power; the emphasis was on mankind's dominion over the earth, with Genesis 1:28-29 as the permission slip (“... fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves upon the earth”). Setting out on this project to establish and extend our dominion more systematically and scientifically than had ever been done propelled humanity further away from the natural world. We needed, after all, to view it as an object to be acted upon and both extracted from and transformed in order to make progress in mastering it. But nothing done to nature does not also have ripple effects upon us.

For we not only inhabit nature, as we might inhabit a house, but we draw sustenance from it as we once did from our mother within the womb. The very term Mother Nature shows how ancient and natural that comparison is. Nevertheless, this impulse to extract ourselves from what we study has hampered our ability to understand our own limits, to distinguish between good and bad desires or the good and bad ways of achieving them, and to trace the sources of that happiness we are seeking, which 18th-century Americans identified in the Declaration of Independence as our natural right to pursue.

A natural right. In that same 18th century, French philosopher and social critic Jean-Jacques Rousseau was developing his own ideas on nature and human beings and education and rights—ideas that both reacted against and were influenced by Enlightenment rationalism. To begin with, he had rejected the idea of original sin, which left him free to believe in human perfectibility, if one were only properly taught. Rousseau's repudiation of original sin made possible an excessively rosy view not only of human prospects, but of nature's, contradicting the traditional Christian belief that the natural world had also mysteriously experienced the effects of our fall from grace through the sin of Adam. See St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, for example: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:19-21).

This belief in a fallen nature is still largely discounted today. And given a purely materialistic understanding of the universe, why not? What would it

mean for an atom, or anything composed of atoms, to “fall”?

This brings us back to the emo-Hamlet rebellious side of our civilization’s death wish, with its refusal to accept the civilizational inheritance bequeathed to us. Such a refusal inevitably also entails rejecting responsibility for passing on our civilizational inheritance to those who come after us. This rejected inheritance could consist solely of the specific flowering of Western civilization in the arts, philosophy, religion, and morality—a drastic enough disavowal of our ancestors. However, in our case we see even more fundamental upheaval, including the desire to turn our backs on the most basic and essential roles that any society in history has deemed necessary to preserve its existence and even flourish, including marrying, having children, and rearing those children (to the best of our ability) in conditions of relative security, stability, and love.

If a large cohort of any generation—and especially of successive generations—fails to value and assume these roles, then a crucial continuity is broken. For those of us who inherited something we would still call Western Civilization, this continuity includes passing on to our children our “family” history, even in partial or fragmentary form. “These fragments I have shored against my ruins,” as 20th-century poet T. S. Eliot put it near the end of his groundbreaking poem “The Waste Land,” a 1922 presentation of the fragmenting West after World War I.

Eliot’s poem is evidence that breaking with the past is hardly a late-20th century idea. But the rest of that century should already have thoroughly convinced us of that. And in partial or temporary ways such ruptures have been happening for centuries—consider the French Revolution, which was so anti-traditional that it introduced a 10-day week. The Industrial Revolution also exerted a subversive influence on society’s conception of the primacy of family and other complex social ties, as well as providing the machine model of comprehending the functioning of both human beings and society. And then there is Marxism, which in its elevation of the collective and its insistence on evaluating human beings through the limiting lens of class, rejected not only religion but almost all of the West’s hard-earned wisdom about the value of the human person, as well as our understanding of human motivation and destiny.

But there have also been all kinds of fringe movements, esoteric religions or -isms, and small-scale utopian experiments infecting subsectors of Western societies throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. And even in the mid-1950s (often regarded by those who came after as a hyper-traditional period), rebellion against transmitting Western culture was becoming evident, particularly in certain sectors. Randall Jarrell’s satiric novel *Pictures*

from an Institution, for instance, took aim at the role post-World War II America's progressive institutions of higher learning were playing in rejecting the West's intellectual tradition:

Miss Batterson retorted to a colleague's objection that all Benton students read *that* in high school: "There is no book that all my students have read." Dr. Rosenbaum knew that it is in sentences like this, and not in the pages of Spengler, that one has brought home to one the twilight of the West. He gave a brotherly laugh and agreed: "*Ja, dey haf de sense dey vere born vidt.*"

Of course, even when civilizations are in their prime, not everything need be or will be handed down, since each generation necessarily culls what it deems ephemeral or outgrown to make space for new wisdom or artistic advances. So each era's new intellectual or cultural treasure is not just an isolated artistic achievement but an augmented way of seeing. In healthy civilizations, new or better ways of doing something will be incorporated by one generation and then, over time, either retained or discarded as their persistent usefulness or unusefulness becomes clearer. But the wholesale dumping of a cultural inheritance does not occur without causing great violence to the society formed by that culture.

And the dumping of much more fundamental handings-on—the sort of institutions and arrangements that have been foundational for all societies we know of, such as marriage or the benefits to individuals and societies of having and raising children—will hollow out such societies' will to live. Such wholesale repudiation marks the abandonment of belief in the goodness of that society or that civilization.

We are bound to grapple with many aspects of our cultural inheritance, ranging from objectionable habits of mind or moral blind spots to our idiosyncratic lapses of sympathy with aspects of our national life. But if we believe in a society's basic goodness and soundness or believe in a foundational goodness we can work to repair, then we will be drawn to act in ways that build up this society so that we can hand it on as a continuing project to those coming after us. Otherwise, if we withdraw from the generational relay in which this precious cultural handoff takes place, our descendants will lack what they need to run their own lap of the race.

Recently, I've been reading the Book of Sirach, one of the Wisdom books of the Bible similar in style to the Book of Proverbs. The prologue explains how the grandson of the author translated the original from Hebrew into Greek for the benefit of "those living abroad who wished to gain learning, being prepared in character to live according to the law." Like the Book of Proverbs, it is crammed with adages and advice on almost every topic, from

dinner etiquette to desirable qualities to seek in a wife to truth-telling and avoidance of gossip.

Near the conclusion, the author introduces a series of chapters with the words, “Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations” (Sir 44: 1). (If that sounds familiar, it is because the opening words were used as a book title by James Agee and a musical composition by Ralph Vaughn Williams.) Beginning with Enoch, who “pleased the Lord, and was taken up; he was an example of repentance to all generations” (Sir 44:16), Sirach celebrates the signal virtues and accomplishments of Noah, Abraham, and so on, up to those of his near-contemporaries who were martyred for their Jewish faith during the Hellenistic persecutions of the Seleucid kings. Sirach is a classic example of someone working to pass on a heritage from one generation to the next. You can hear the voice of Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof* singing “Tradition!” as you read.

But again, this process of transmission succeeds only if the chain does not break. Both the givers and the receivers have to believe there is something worth handing on and something worth receiving. And that means that the inheritance must be something real rather than imaginary, something good rather than bad, and something capable of being emulated. Utopian projects cannot be handed on in this sense because they are by definition unreal (after all, the word Utopia, coined by St. Thomas More to describe his imaginary society in the book of the same name, comes from the Greek for “No place” or, more colloquially, “Nowhere”).

Our fears, though certainly real in the sense of being truly felt, are also unreal as reliable prognosticators. They are projections of possible future states rather than realities we have known or inhabit now. Nevertheless, the dark futures they present can appear to be so inevitable that some end up seeking death as an escape from what looks like certain defeat. But reality is not so easily gotten rid of. Unreal fears provide unreal release.

Substack writer Bethel McGrew recounts an event in the life of English theater critic Kenneth Tynan when he was a student at Oxford. C.S. Lewis was his tutor there, and one day a desperately unhappy Tynan came to him “to ask whether his final exams could be postponed, but truthfully, at the moment he didn’t see much point in living at all.” In reply, Lewis:

. . . reminded the young man of a memory [Tynan had] shared from his boyhood during the Blitz: A plane hovering near the Tynan family house dropped a land mine by parachute, which blew up mere inches away. “Now,” Tynan loosely remembers Lewis continuing, “if the wind had blown that bomb a few inches nearer your house, you would be dead. So ever since then—and that was seven years ago—all the time you have lived has been a bonus. It is a gift.”

. . . All in a moment Tynan felt his bubble pop in the best sense. All his problems suddenly appeared in perspective—the perspective of this great good gift he had been given called Life. . . . This thought so impressed the young man that he walked out of Lewis’s office “exhilarated and uplifted.”

If it is true—objectively true, as a sharp-edged piece of reality is when you bump against it—that life is a gift, then to act on a desire to die is to fall in with a lie, leaving you floating along in unreality, because suicide denies the real, incarnate, objective good of the gift. The gift remains real, right now, even if evils such as poverty, sickness, or loneliness are also present companions. Our fearful and fatalistic projections onto the future, on the other hand, however rational they may appear to our pessimistic mind, are no more real than our daydreams of winning the lottery. It is much easier to laugh at ourselves for indulging in the daydreams, because their greater unlikelihood is so apparent. But lots of unlikely things, bad and good, end up happening in life—outcomes that once seemed against all odds. For, as J.R.R. Tolkien displayed in his fiction and explained in his essay *On Fairy Stories*, eucatastrophes—unlooked for, unexpected happy endings—occur in life and art as well as catastrophes. “Call no man happy until he is dead,” the ancients counseled. But on that basis we also should not call any man *unhappy* until he is dead. Reversals come in all shapes and sizes.

Perhaps, then, we should not call even a seemingly decadent and doddering civilization like our own dead until it reaches its last gasp. Instead, perhaps we should busy ourselves with observing and encouraging the vital signs, fanning into flames each ember, and attending most especially to the health of heart and mind. Whether the West ultimately survives or perishes, those would be useful actions to help ourselves, those around us, and even those after us.

A living Western civilization requires a culture of life. It requires respect for human beings, not overlooking the unborn, the young, those burdened with handicaps or health conditions or psychiatric problems, and those whose advanced age or adverse circumstances or depressed spirits or bad breaks or terminal illness tempt them to, like the spirits entering Dante’s *Inferno*, “Abandon all hope.” Only a culture that values life—that is grateful for life in its particulars, its individuality, its full moons and fall leaves and soft snowfalls, its small children making chalk pictures on the sidewalk, its bikes and skateboards, skinned knees and broken hearts—can keep itself from desiring death.

We introduce here a new feature:

Life Stories

We asked our readers what they want to see in our pages and several responded: “How about some positive, hopeful stories?” Exposing the culture of death, though necessary, can also cause a heaviness of heart, but we can’t forget the wonderful stories of life and hope that illuminate the culture of life.

What better way to begin but with stories of mothers who chose life for their babies? Because the Human Life Foundation, in addition to our educational endeavors, also has a grant program for pregnancy resource centers, we reached out to the life-saving organizations we support.

Our first story is from the Sisters of Life. The Sisters were founded in 1991 by the late, great Cardinal John J. O’Connor, who was a dear friend of the *Review* from its early days. In 1991, he wrote a column in *Catholic New York*: “Help Wanted: Sisters of Life,” in which he spoke of his vision for an order that would be devoted to protecting human life, starting with the most vulnerable. And here is what happened, from “Our History” at www.sistersoflife.com:

The article was reprinted across the nation, and to the surprise of the Cardinal, hundreds of letters poured in. On June 1, 1991, eight women gathered in New York to form the new community of the Sisters of Life. Since then, the community has grown to over a hundred Sisters from across the globe: USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, England, Spain, El Salvador, and the Philippines, and expanded missions from our birth place in New York City, to Denver, CO, Stamford, CT, Philadelphia, PA, Phoenix, AZ, Washington, D.C., and Toronto, Canada.

Our missions include serving women who are vulnerable to abortion, giving them the support and resources to be able to choose life for themselves and their children; hosting weekend retreats; evangelization; outreach to college students; and helping women who have suffered after abortion to encounter the mercy and healing of Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

The following originally appeared in the Sisters of Life *Imprint* publication (Fall, 2021) and is reprinted on their website, along with other life-saving accounts. (<https://sistersoflife.org/media/stories/>)

My Daughter, Emma

When I found out I was pregnant, it wasn't a joyous occasion for me. I was scared to have the baby and scared not to have the baby. If you had asked me a couple of years ago if I was pro-life, I would have said, "Sure." But when you find yourself in a situation where you could possibly lose your house, lose the ability to feed the three children that you already have—now all of a sudden your morals are really put into question.

But I knew if I didn't have the baby, I'd be left with shame and regret for the rest of my life. I have had an abortion before; it's not something I'm proud of. I would often cry about the baby that I lost. I think it was probably out of guilt that I got pregnant again. I was hoping my boyfriend would be happy, because he had told me that he wished we had kept the other baby. But there was also a lot of shame in having a baby, too. I was afraid of how the community would view me.

I asked my boyfriend, "What do you want me to do?" And he kept saying, "It's your choice." It just didn't seem fair. [It was our baby,] but now it was all on my shoulders. I think what I really wanted to hear was, "I'll be with you every step of the way, no matter what!" I felt that there was no good option, and I didn't know what to do.

So I made an appointment at the abortion clinic. I begged them to let me take the abortion pills home because I wasn't 100% sure what I was going to do. I put them in the cupboard, and I would take them out and look at them. I even took them out of the package, and I held them in my hand. But I just couldn't do it.

I reached out to an online group called "I Regret my Abortion." A man connected me with the Sisters of Life, who offered that support that I had been looking for. They called me every other day when I was scared and trying to make up my mind. They kept pouring life into me and saying, "You can do this." But I wanted to know how, because on paper there was no way I was going to be able to afford to have a baby. They just said, "We can't tell you how—but we know that God provides."

I took a leap of faith and destroyed the abortion pills. I said, "Welcome to the world, little one. I don't know how I'm going to feed you; I don't know how I'm going to keep my house, but God does, and that's all I need to know." But in other moments I would think, "What did I just do? I just flushed my life down the toilet." The anxiety was paralyzing. I still had bills

to pay. I was still working 60 hours a week at a factory.

One day, when I was really struggling, I told the Sisters that it was my dream to get out of the factory. It was physically taxing. The Sisters encouraged me to go back to school, so I applied. I just wanted to see if I would get in; I never thought I'd actually go. It seemed impossible with a baby on the way.

Although I was accepted into the program, I continued working at the factory. When September rolled around, I could no longer stand for a 12-hour shift, and so my doctor qualified me for short-term disability. That freed up the time for me to start school. While waiting for my first disability paycheck, I received a scholarship grant just when I needed it. The timing was amazing. I completed my first semester, and then gave birth during my Christmas break.

I never would have thought in a million years that things would just fall into place for me like that. I had to get the brakes done on my van, and miraculously I got the exact cost sent to me from a government grant. I was worried that I didn't have enough baby things. But when the Sisters came to visit me, they had the whole room full of gifts for me and the baby. I was bawling when I saw it. The Catholic ladies in my town did a diaper shower. They figured out how many diapers a child would need from birth and gave them all to me. The community here has really stepped up in so many ways. There is a woman who would come over and just hold my baby so I could do my school work.

My friend, the one who reached out to me online, was inspired to send me a Bible passage from Hosea: "I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope" (Hos 2:14-15). That same day, I was speaking to Sr. Mary Grace on the phone, and when I read it out loud there was dead silence, and then Sister said, "That is the Scripture I was praying with this morning."

I always believed God existed, but I never felt His presence until things like this started happening. I was raised going to Church, but I was lukewarm and just did my own thing. So for Him to pour out grace on me . . . Why? Why me? There are really good people out there who didn't mess up! But it's just nice to know even when you do mess up, He's still there; He still loves you. I know now that nothing I can do will make Him love me more or less.

If you had asked me last year to write the script of how my year was going to go, I never would have imagined that it would go like this. How does a single woman with three kids at home doing online school recover from a C-section, go to school full-time, and make the Dean's Honor Roll? I can't even tell you how! It's God—that's it. He's all-powerful, and He has provided for me. So lately, I have found myself reaching out to other women online who are in the position I was in. I feel privileged to walk beside them.

BOOKNOTES

I don't know what the future holds for me. I look at my smiling girl, and I can't imagine life without her. I know that she was meant to be here. God had poured out so many blessings on me because I took that leap of faith. It has inspired me to keep taking leaps of faith.

BOOKNOTES

HUMAN EMBRYO ADOPTION, VOLUME TWO: CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

Edited by Trent Horn and Kent Lasnoski

(National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2025, paperback, 396 pp., \$34.95)

THE ZYGOTE OF CHRIST AND THE MYSTERY OF MAN

Francis Etheredge and Elizabeth Rex

(En Route, 2025, paperback, 173 pp., \$14.95)

Reviewed by Jason Morgan

Human Embryo Adoption, Volume Two—a follow-up to a 2006 edited work, now edited by Catholic Answers’ Trent Horn and theologian Kent Lasnoski—is aptly subtitled “Catholic arguments for and against” the practice of embryo adoption, which is transfer of a cryopreserved (frozen) human embryo from a suspended state at a fertility clinic to the uterus of a woman who is not the biological mother but who intends to nurture and raise the child. The term “embryo adoption” is most commonly distorted by physicians to “embryo donation” (p. 4). The difference in wording underscores a profound difference in understanding. For many physicians and other medical practitioners, embryos are “tissue, like blood products or gametes, and only potential lives” (p. 4). But that embryos are not just tissue is attested by the strenuousness of the debate over what should be done with them, some 1.5 million frozen embryos in the United States alone (p. 17). As the eighteen editors of and contributors to this volume make clear, people of good will can and do come to radically different conclusions about what is to be done with the frozen embryos, little human beings in an unnatural state of cryogenic suspension.

The teachings of Pope John Paul II and others of the twentieth- and twenty-first century Catholic Church are central to these debates, but there is no magisterial consensus on how these poor souls should be cared for, including how or even whether they should be freed from their frozen limbo. Contributor and Catholic Answers apologist Jimmy Akin points out that, in the 2008 document *Dignitas personae* (no. 19), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (under Pope Benedict XVI) referred to statements by John Paul II and observed that “the thousands of abandoned embryos represent a *situation of injustice which in fact cannot be resolved*” (cited on p. 44; emphasis in

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

original). As Akin (I think rightly) argues, John Paul II did not mean to say that nothing could or should be done about frozen embryos. And yet, the adoption of these embryos, as other contributors point out, involves much moral hazard.

For example, Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, senior ethicist at the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Broomall, Pennsylvania, while acknowledging that “each of these [cryogenically] ensnared human embryos is a being with full dignity and human rights,” nevertheless holds that “embryo adoption is illicit and unlikely ever to be sanctioned by the Catholic Church” (pp. 125, 126). Fr. Pacholczyk’s reasoning is that “embryo implantation as a *form of pregnancy initiation* constitutes an intrinsic evil because of the instrumentalization and misuse of the goods of marriage when a woman is made pregnant using an IVF-derived embryo, apart from a unifying marital act with her husband” (p. 128; emphasis in original).

What should be done with the unborn children, then? Theology professor Irene Alexander proposes “thaw[ing] the embryos and allow[ing] them to die naturally” (p. 163). This would seem to be the inevitable fate for human beings, like those conceived in ectopic pregnancies, who have been given life but denied a womb. There is much internal cohesion in these and other statements by highly trained ethicists, theologians, and other thinkers. But one gets the distinct sense that there must be more to offer the “[cryogenically] ensnared” than the cold logic that saving them from suffering and death is not morally licit.

There is another way to think about this seemingly intractable problem of human beings trapped in the bitter cold of the laboratory machine, beings whose only escape would appear to be through the commission of another sin on top of the sinful manipulation of nature that created the conditions for their conception. Two of the most eloquent contributors to the volume, Francis Etheredge and Elizabeth Rex, go into the heart of the mystery of man to find their answer. For Etheredge, a freelance writer and prolific bioethicist, and Rex, a bioethicist and associate scholar at the Charlotte Lozier Institute and a former adjunct professor at Holy Apostles College and Seminary, the way forward is illuminated by the divinity of our Savior and by the dignified nature of the humanity which He, through His Mother, took on as part of the plan of salvation. As Etheredge writes, “the first instant of human personhood is integral to the incarnational union between Christ and all who come into existence. The identity of the human embryo is no less relevant to the identity of Mary, who was miraculously conceived without original sin and [. . .] could not be conceived without original sin if she were not one in body and soul from the first instant of fertilization” (p. 241). These miracles, Etheredge writes, should shape how we think about the children trapped in

suspended animation. “The discussion on embryo adoption takes place in the context of salvation history,” he observes. “It is not enough to speak of living in a fallen world, because the fallen world is embraced, from the beginning, in Christ’s work of redemption” (p. 242). Where moral philosophy falters, the unstoppable force of God’s salvation comes through.

We humans are not, in other words, as merely human as some moral theologians might presume. We love in “totality, like God, and not just in a functional sense,” Etheredge writes (pp. 255-256). Letting the light of God shine through the gauze of our human ratiocination about Him, Etheredge understands the Trinity to be at work “in the conception of every human being,” and argues that we should see the “psychological and spiritual suffering entailed in welcoming into a marriage a child who both came to exist outside the body and has no relation, beyond that of being human, to either the mother or the father who have adopted him or her as an embryonic infant child” as analogous to the “spiritual and psychological uncertainty” that “Mary suffered” when she “became pregnant from the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit before she came to live with Joseph” (pp. 246-248). The Christian thing to do, beyond but including being the right thing, is to let the babies live. “Offering the hospitality of the woman’s womb [to a frozen embryo] [cannot] be separated from her total identity as a person called to love” (p. 256). Therefore, Etheredge concludes,

embryo adoption, in its holistic reality, contributes to the reciprocal gift of personhood to which each of us is called and from which, in a dramatically real way, the frozen embryo is excluded—both the naturally dynamic engagement as integral to his or her living response to life and the mother’s recognition of her vocation as taken up into relationship with the Author of life to whom, as it were, she will introduce her child. In other words, the mother stands in a certain more direct relationship to the action of God at conception than does the man, and in view of this, she introduces him to that action, so that together they can bring the child up in the perspective of the relationship to God which his action at the child’s conception has established (pp. 256-257).

For Etheredge, motherhood is not simply a function of marriage or wholly subordinate to the theology of such, but is rather something even more mysterious, imbued by God with an expansive and even cooperatively redemptive power that overcomes the “intrinsic evil” of implanting a child conceived by another mother and father into the uterus of a mother who will bear the child whom God Himself has loved into existence. The mother, on Etheredge’s liberating reading of human conception and development, is the conduit of a grace that breaks free of human sinfulness.

Elizabeth Rex takes up a similar line of argument in her work in the edited volume. Rex places the “theology of the body” teachings of Pope John

Paul II in historical context while also giving full moral and theological rein to them in arguing that “the theology of the body defends the dignity of the body as inseparable from the dignity of the person” (pp. 270-271). The Magisterium (that is, the teaching authority) of the Catholic Church, Rex points out, “praises the adoption of orphans,” a teaching in keeping with “the Church’s unchangeable doctrine on the dignity of the human person” which “makes clear that the responsibility to protect frozen embryos from harm and death is not just a secondary concern but rather a moral imperative” (pp. 277-278). In this broader view of human dignity, Rex writes,

the only moral options for parents who have surplus frozen embryos is to practice what the Theology of the Body has called “responsible parenthood”. It is the duty of the parents who have frozen embryos to responsibly decide whether to (1) lovingly raise their own children or (2) lovingly place their frozen embryos for adoption by a married couple longing to start a family or increase their family by means of adoption. The *Catechism*—under the heading of “The gift of a child”—eloquently praises adoption and encourages married couples to “give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children” (pp. 279-280).

Jesus Himself, Rex reminds us, teaches that “‘What you do to one of the least of my brethren, you do unto me’ (Mt 25:40)” (p. 291).¹

If Etheredge and Rex make arguments in *Human Embryo Adoption, Volume Two* that are complementary, this is no coincidence. The two authors are collaborators in a way that goes beyond being co-contributors to an edited work. They are, in fact, the co-authors of *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man* (En Route, 2025), in which they actively build on one another’s scholarship in elaborating their profoundly spiritual view of the human person at every moment of his or her natural life. Informative essays republished from other journals form the last fifth or so of their book, and the remaining chapters are sourced from some of their other writings. Taken as a whole, the chapters in *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man* provide a beautiful portrait of the human person as “an indivisibly psychosomatic being from conception” (as Etheredge puts it), an act that both authors affirm is “an icon of the beginning,” of God’s Creation (pp. 7, 41, 73).

To answer the questions and overcome the moral quandaries surrounding embryo adoption, we must go back to the start of each one of us and rediscover our true identity as created in the image and likeness of God. We must remember that we are loved into existence and therefore are carried along by a goodness and a power that demolish the logical contradictions hamstringing us in our wish to do what seems right from a human perspective, no matter how dedicated to the service and the truth of God. To those who might leap to the conclusion that a demolished human reason makes per-

missible any assault on the human person so long as that assault is couched in the language of “love,” I would caution that the love that Etheredge and Rex mean is the love of God, which is always life-giving, always the conqueror of death. Each human being is “‘one’ being,” Etheredge emphasizes, stressing the “‘immediately’ enfleshed and animating human ensoulment of the human being” (p. 43). The beginning of the human being at conception, Etheredge argues, is a “mystery” in which God is “completely” and “intimate[ly] ‘involve[d]’” (p. 46). Human persons and God work together in “a truly human-divine act of begetting a child of man, male and female, and a child of God” (p. 46).

From this it follows that there are two kinds of arguments for embryonic adoption, a natural argument and a supernatural one. On the natural plane, “a child conceived outside of the womb is without the immediate possibility of benefitting from the mother’s nurturing contribution to the completion of embryological development”; such a child is therefore “dependent on being given hospitality in the womb of [another] woman” (pp. 60-61). Supernaturally, “God’s saving acts are always in the context of man’s prior sin. Thus man’s prior sin is not an obstacle to God’s saving acts but, rather, the ‘occasion’ of God showing a love greater than the death of sin” (p. 63). It is God, and not man, who is in control of reproduction. We need only try to love as He loves, and all will work out in the end. In the light of the Incarnation, the acts that humans do out of love for the innocent who suffer injustice are redeemed, in Etheredge’s view, by the greater love of God.

Just as God’s gift of life is completely gratuitous, so an act of redemptive love is completely gratuitous; and, just as God gives human life according to the covenant of the flesh He founded, so His saving acts are according to the needs of the human life conceived. Nevertheless, even the gratuitous nature of redeeming love acts in accordance with the natural law that expresses our human participation in the divine law; and, therefore, what is done to rescue an illicitly conceived child is completely different to the action which caused the child’s embryological, developmental and relational ‘homelessness’: the injustice expressed in the conception of a ‘maternally homeless’ child is addressed by the justice of an indispensably generously gratuitous adopting love. In a word, just as redemption goes beyond original sin without endorsing it, so an adopting love goes beyond the injustice of a child conceived ‘maternally homeless’ without endorsing the method through which the injustice was perpetrated (pp. 64-65).

Rex echoes these sentiments in her own chapters of *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man*. For example, in Rex’s “Icon of the Beginning” essay, she writes of a series of photographs published in *Scientific Reports* in August 2016, which show “the ‘transformative’ moment of human conception as billions of zinc ions, referred to as ‘zinc sparks,’ suddenly burst through the cellular wall of the newly fertilized human egg that has become a human

embryo” (p. 109). For Rex, writing in an Etheredgean vein, this moment is not simply biologically significant, but is also defined by its theological context. “What can these absolutely stunning photographs reveal to us,” Rex asks, “about Mary’s Conception and Jesus’ Incarnation, and about every human being who has ever been conceived?” (p. 111). Rex answers that “beautifully implicit [. . .] in the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the necessary truth that God must also immediately create and directly infuse our spiritual and rational souls into our one-cell human bodies at the very first instant of human conception” (p. 112). The photographs of the illuminated moments when sperm and egg unite to produce a new human being have been “hailed” by “many commentators,” Rex writes, “as a tiny glimpse, as a miniature ‘icon,’ of the very beginning of Creation itself, when God the Creator summoned the entire universe into existence from nothing, *ex nihilo*, with His almighty command, ‘Let there be light!’” (p. 112).

Both *Human Embryo Adoption, Volume Two: Catholic Arguments For and Against* and *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man* are important volumes for understanding many of the thorny bioethical questions of fertility treatments. (Many, but not all. Stem cell research is not covered extensively in either volume, so readers will have to seek out moral and theological reasoning on this issue separately.) To my mind, however, *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man* is the volume that succeeds in answering such questions, beyond simply understanding them. We are born from a pure act of self-gift by God, a sacrifice that, as many other thinkers (including John Paul II) have taught, can be imitated by husband and wife in our limited, human way. I believe that Etheredge and Rex get to the very heart of the matter when they say that the human person is not simply clothed in dignity but is part of the divine sacrifice of love that God chose to perform at the Immaculate Conception, at the Incarnation, and, in a deeply related way, at the conception of us all. I closed *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man* in agreement with Etheredge and Rex. Our brothers and sisters in the indignity of cold storage are suffering. Let us go to them and save their lives, confident that the God Who created them and us will overcome the world.

I hope everyone reading this review will read *The Zygote of Christ and the Mystery of Man* and relearn, as I did from Francis Etheredge and Elizabeth Rex, that we are pro-life because we are loved and therefore commanded to love others in turn. No humanly induced condition—not imprisonment, not even in a cryogenic bottle—can stop the love of God. No logic is sufficient to prevent God, who works through us, from breaking through, as the light did at the creation, and as it still does at the creation of each of us.

The Innate Dependence of all Humanity

Leah Libresco Sargeant

My book *The Dignity of Dependence: A Feminist Manifesto* is comprised of a set of words, each of which I was counseled against using, whether it be *dignity*, *dependence*, *feminist*, or *manifesto*, though at least *manifesto* is a warning about the other three. I'd like to begin considering what may be the most controversial of those words: *feminist*.

Why do I say that this book is a *feminist* book, a *feminist* project? Feminism, obviously a contested movement over time, is at its core about responding justly to women as women. Not women as neutral human beings—a kind of being who has never existed in all of human history—but as women. Not women as defective men, but distinctively women with our own needs. I contend that women's equality is not premised and cannot be premised on our interchangeability with men.

That mindset that turns up in various ways in the feminist movement, attempting to help women get over the hump of not being men by finding better ways to “pass as men.” You can say, obviously we aren't fully interchangeable with men. There are some differences, some more or less dramatic, more or less morally valenced. A trivial difference between men and women is not even height—which is one of those cases where you see those overlapping bell curves move a little further apart—but grip strength. Men and women are perhaps most easily distinguished on grip strength, where 90 percent of women have weaker grip strength than all but 95 percent of men. The two bell curves are pretty far apart. This is the kind of difference between men and women it feels safe to acknowledge because even though this is true, I don't think anyone says, “this is why we have to repeal the 19th amendment.”

When Fairness Looks Unequal

But when we look at other differences between men and women, we see that they become a little more threatening a little faster. Consider the example of the WNBA which has to decide what it means for women's basketball

Leah Libresco Sargeant is the author of *The Dignity of Dependence*, as well as *Arriving at Amen* and *Building the Benedict Option*. She runs the substack Other Feminisms, a community focused on advocating for women in a world that makes an idol of autonomy. This is a version of her talk given at the Catholic Information Center on October 7, 2025.

to exist on parity with men's basketball. I'm not going to touch the salary dispute here; I mean something more straightforward: Should the hoop for women be lower than the hoop for men? Is what's fair a hoop that's equivalently hard to dunk on when women are shorter? Or is it a hoop that's exactly the same height as men's?

This has been controversial when it comes to the three-point line, partly because you can *see* the difference. When colleges have two different three-point lines for their men's and women's teams, everyone can see there are two lines. It's made people extremely uncomfortable to the point where it's been rolled back to require women to play from the men's line. Players were divided, but a number of women felt as long as people could see women weren't playing the exact same game, women couldn't make the case for being treated equally as players. If the line was a little closer, even if that made it equally hard to shoot, it wasn't the same game, and they couldn't be treated with the same respect.

They're right to worry. Acknowledging differences between the sexes feels profoundly dangerous, precisely because we rely on the crude measure of interchangeability to make the case for equality. If I don't know that you share my premises on what gives dignity to men or women, the easiest way for us to agree is to say, "We can agree they're equally dignified because they are basically the same." Everything that testifies against that sameness puts women's equality in jeopardy.

Now, we might think this is not too consequential. You can put the three-point line at the same place as the men's and all you're doing is making it a little harder to shoot. Certainly some very strong words have been exchanged over it, compared to grip strength, but it doesn't have that much force on my own life. But there are other differences between men and women that we find it harder to sidestep or cover up—other ways the physical differences between men and women play a role in our lives that are a lot harder to compromise on.

Responding to a World Calibrated for Men

If you share a car with your spouse, you probably have had the experience of getting into the driver's seat and either cranking it all the way back or cranking the seat all the way forward so either the husband or wife can reach the pedals comfortably. The problem with this isn't just that it's tedious to move the seat back and forth; it's that airbags are designed assuming the person sitting in the driver's seat is sitting back at a male-typical distance. When women scrunch the seat forward for an average car ride, it's not a problem besides the actual moving of the seat. But when you get into an accident and

the airbag goes off and it expects to come to a halt and cushion you several inches further back than you actually are, it hits women's chests with a lot more explosive force because it hasn't reached the end of its expansion. As a result, women in minor car accidents are much more likely to be sent to the hospital with broken ribs or pierced lungs than men are because it isn't calibrated for the actual distance you're sitting behind it.

There have been efforts to figure out what can be done about this. Some very short women petitioned the U.S. government for the ability to turn off their airbags, thinking they were safer without them than with something that they were so close to at the maximum expansive force. A safety regulator in Europe said, this was very sad, but it was also very hard to solve and wasn't the car maker's problem; you can't expect manufacturers to deal with this. Just because females are slightly weaker and sit closer to the wheel, they can't possibly be expected to accommodate. The act of being a woman in the world is interesting because it's every individual woman's problem to bridge the gap between herself and the way the world is prepared to receive her.

Abortion and the Price of Interchangeability

There's another way that America has responded to the problem of women being too exposed, and too close, that has a very different set of victims. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, before *Roe v. Wade*, never thought abortion should be a matter of a constitutional appeal to privacy, which she thought was a weird and muddled way to make this case. She thought the strongest grounds for a claim to a right to abortion was on equal protection under the law grounds—that it would be hard for women to be treated as equal citizens under the law if they were not equivalent interchangeable with men, and abortion was a way of restoring that equality when the differences and asymmetries in reproduction had robbed women of equal stature.

What she and others argued is that when there is an unexpected pregnancy, men and women biologically have very different capacities to walk away. For a man to abandon a baby he has fathered requires only cowardice. He just has to disappear and leave no forwarding address—it's just a matter of running. For a woman to separate herself from her baby cannot be done as a mere act of the will; it requires an act of violence. It requires lethal drugs or a surgeon scalpel to sever the connection that she and her baby inhabit. Ginsburg argued that the strong asymmetry between men and women here made it hard for women to be treated as equal citizens and to make their case under employment law that they could be treated the same way as a male worker. The way she framed it is that abortion is the entry price for being an equal

citizen in America. You must be equally able to walk away from childrearing responsibilities to be able to ride the rides.

Where she and I agree is I think she's descriptively correct—that *is* the expectation we place on women. It's even the expectation we place on men that obviously a man would choose to walk away when things were hard, when a baby is disabled, when some constraint or thing that's asked of him is too much for him to easily bear. I just don't think helping women reach an equality of vice with men is a real vote for the equal dignity of women.

Why Needing Others Does Not Degrade Us

As I noted earlier, one of the provocative words on this book cover is *feminist*, but one of the other ones is *dependence*. I was counseled several times, does it have to say *dependence*? Can't it say *mutuality* or *sharing* or something else? Because dependence isn't bad, but *how could it be dignified to be dependent*? But that's why it's on the cover—to warn you that the book will make you uncomfortable, that I'm arguing for a revaluing of values.

Because when we look at the arguments dehumanizing the baby in the womb, they often start with the baby's dependence. There can even be an instinct within the pro-life movement to eagerly respond with what the baby *can do*, as if embarrassed that the baby indeed is dependent on the mother. We appeal to what the baby does have: Did you know after *x* many weeks old, the baby can hear you? Did you know the baby can sense light and darkness from outside the womb? Did you know, as they say in the movie *Juno*, that your baby has fingernails? Fingernails aren't quite autonomy, but they're a gesture toward the autonomous, walking-around person this baby will one day be.

I understand why people make these appeals to abilities a baby does have to get others to consider their personhood. But I was moved when I read O. Carter Sneads' *What It Means to Be Human*, because instead of analogizing the baby to its mother (i.e., this baby is almost as good as a woman), he analogized the mother to the baby. Part of what we must remember is that the baby is desperately needy, and the mother is made needy by the way her child depends on her, by the things it requires from her body, by the way her own strength is diverted to serve the baby's needs.

It's very unusual to ground a dignity claim that way. To compare someone to a baby is usually viewed as insulting—our word for it is *infantilizing*. We view it as an insult because we think it is to some degree disgraceful to be a baby, and that being a baby in utero, or a baby who is unwanted, is something that can cast you out of the human family.

The Fantasy of the Autonomous Adult

But dependence is not a temporary embarrassment we all get over in our infancy and gradually learn to walk and eat and eventually graduate to autonomy. Dependence is the pattern of our human life. Every single one of us starts our life utterly dependent on one woman in particular. Although American law began its abortion jurisprudence around the viability line (when could a baby survive outside the womb), that's still just a question of when could a baby survive dependent on someone other than his or her mother, because a baby delivered is not a viable baby in any meaningful sense. Babies need to be fed, need to be held, need to be changed. They require immense sacrifice and love but it can be from a broader range of people and not from their original birth parents.

Human beings are dependent during infancy, for much of childhood, possibly longer now that we're pushing off adulting to like the mid-twenties, but eventually, gloriously as an adult, we're not dependent on anyone, especially if we're male—so every day you can walk with total confidence that no one is bodily dependent on you. All of your ties are chosen ties, or at the least they're ones you're aware of.

From the autonomy-centered perspective, the peak of human existence is walking around as let's say a 32-year-old man who is unmarried, so not exposed to his wife's need; whose parents are currently well, so he's not exposed to their need; and whose siblings are all relatively stable. If we consider what the best version of human life is from the point of view of the experience of autonomy, then I suppose we celebrate this young man as he gets hit by a bus at 32—maybe 38 depending on how you feel about the issues he's having with his back. He'd be cut down in his prime, having lived a full vibrant human life.

Who Gets to Be Human

That might sound absurd, but this logic is increasingly creeping in as we see the expansion of euthanasia in Canada and in country after country, taking as its assumption that not all human lives are fully human and therefore not worth living. That as the 32-year-old man becomes exposed to others' needs and eventually once again needs his diapers changed himself, he has to some degree lost his hold on what it means to be a human being in society with others and might prefer to make his quietus if not with a bare bodkin than with a surgeon or with his doctor's prescription.

When we look at the states in the U.S. with legalized euthanasia, we see the most commonly cited reasons for seeking medical aid and dying are not questions of pain, they're questions of embarrassment: "I don't want to burden my

family” is one of the most commonly cited reasons for seeking suicide at a doctor’s hands. “I don’t feel dignified going on this way.”

This outlook is something we catechize each other into day by day. It’s very hard to have a society that says children are non-persons when they depend so utterly on others and then assert the dignity of the elderly when they are dependent in the same way, and on a broader suite of people without any one mother responsible for them at that time.

It is very hard to disvalue the disabled, to talk openly about rationing care during a pandemic based on whether or not someone has Down syndrome, and then make the case that elderly lives are worth living. Piece by piece, we chip off parts of human life from a full, flourishing human life—in the womb, across the scope of life and disability, for large swaths of pregnancy when you’re not able to do everything you once did, and then at the end of life. When you look at it, you see this thin patchwork of a human life almost as though you were a swimmer drowning where you only bob your head above that waterline of autonomy occasionally. To be honest it’s easiest to do during the period where you love the fewest people, because even when you yourself are strongest, when you are exposed to the needs of others, your own autonomy becomes fragile because someone is capable of interrupting you, of making large claims on you that will blow up other parts of your life to be able to answer properly.

I don’t think this is a compelling account of a human life, and almost no one does when they look at it in toto—when they see how much of human life they have to write off as not fully human to hold on firmly to the idea that the baby in the womb is not human and that a woman is endangered by the way she is specifically asymmetrically exposed to need.

We Are Not Our Own

What is the alternative? There’s a quote I love by St. John Henry Newman:

We cannot be our own masters. We are God’s property by creation, by redemption, by regeneration. He has a triple claim on us. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? Is it any happiness or any comfort to consider that we are our own? It may be thought so by the young and prosperous, but as time goes on, they as all men will find that independence was not made for man—that it is an unnatural state that may do for a while but will not carry us on safely to the end. No, we are creatures, and being such we have two duties: to be resigned and to be thankful.

But we live in a culture that increasingly tells us we have two rival duties if we want to pass as autonomous. We have to obscure our dependence, and we have to privately resent it. This burden falls more heavily on women because women are more obviously and intimately exposed to the claims someone

else can make on them. But it doesn't do men any favors either. Men no less than women are beloved by God.

When you think about the catechism of autonomy we are offering ourselves—hiding and resenting the ways in which we are creatures, the way in which our needs direct us to rely on the loves of others—we aren't just disordering our horizontal relationships with our brothers and sisters, we're doing violence against our vertical relationship with God. We can't day by day think we are made undignified, degraded by needing things from other people and then turn in prayer to God and say with thanksgiving, "Thank you for making me. Thank you for redeeming me."

In life, there's some hope, and people certainly strive for it, of paying people back—if not in kind, then to the best of your ability. If you can't gestate your mother to make things up for her, then at least you will take care of her in her old age, and hopefully the number of diapers changed on both ends winds up roughly equal and she dies with you having paid back your debt in full. This is ludicrous, of course, but this is a mindset we slip into often without meaning to—that our relationships are best when they are relationships between equals—and when they aren't, at least we try and pass things on in some way.

The Courage to Be Helped

There's a piercing example of this. A man who was a veteran made a long drive to visit his wife daily in assisted living. She had passed beyond the point where he could care for her himself, but every day he went and sat with her. Then one day, in from the Pacific Ocean, an atmospheric river dumped heavy snow on him and his driveway. He went out once the snow storm had passed and started digging. He dug until he'd injured his hands. But he couldn't move enough snow to clear the path to get his car out. Only then, after he had hurt himself in his attempt to get to his wife, did he post in his neighborhood Facebook group that he needed help.

In his call for help, he didn't lead with the fact that he needed help shoveling out, or with how much he loved his wife. The opening words of his post to his neighbors were, "I am so ashamed." When he posted it, people came to help, and it took a lot of people because it was a big snowstorm. They shoveled him out, and he drove off again to visit his wife. But I get teared up thinking about him waiting until he was hurt before he asked for help—thinking for a moment that when his neighbors saw his first priority in the storm was to go see his wife again to make sure she didn't miss a day, that his neighbors would think badly of him for asking for their help.

This man was a veteran. He'd spent his whole life in service trying to put

his strength at the disposal of other people who needed him. Every day he put what he could at the disposal of his wife, even if it was only his presence and his hand in hers. I don't believe he thought that when he joined the army, he was degrading civilians by offering his strength to help them. And I certainly don't believe that when he drove out to see his wife, he thought, "She's so humiliated to see me here, every time I show up here, it makes her feel ashamed." But he couldn't see himself as a recipient of the same love he offered others. He couldn't see his own need as parallel to theirs—not degrading—and that by having such a tremendous love for his wife that wouldn't let him skip a day, he had made himself vulnerable.

If he loved her less, he wouldn't have needed his neighbors. If he thought, "I can wait a day or two until I go. This is too much for me," he wouldn't have needed them. He was made vulnerable by the largeness of his love, which exceeded his own strength. But we only can receive the full blessing of that love if we are willing to accept the help of others, if we are willing to love in ways that go beyond what we ourselves can supply, if we make ourselves humble and say simply, "I need help to love this baby, to love my wife, to love my mother." I do not think, if we catechize ourselves by opening our requests for help with our shame and humiliation, that we can say to God, my love here is so great that I need your help to give it force.

Learning to Rest in Dependence

My goal is to tell the truth not just about who women are, but who women and men are. Women are the canary in the coal mines of a society that makes an idol of autonomy. To imagine we are not creatures, to imagine our loves can be made small enough to be answered by our own strength is not a lie men or women can live comfortably within. The real difference between the sexes is that men can live with the lie for longer on average. But this is one of the differences that has overlapping bell curves, not an absolute difference like reproduction. Women are exposed early to the ways that our mere existence makes us vulnerable to the need someone else can place on us, but, for a man, to live an autonomous life can only happen when his life is narrow and lonely.

So when I look at these questions of feminism and abortion, what I see is the blaring fire, the signal that something is very wrong in how we conceive of the human person, male and female. It's only by acknowledging that we are in fact very like the child in the womb, held by Someone much greater than ourselves, sustained without regard for our merit, dependent—and because we rest in dependency, able to grow and thrive and flourish—that we can understand ourselves truthfully as we are, as the sons and daughters of God.

Legal Euthanasia Begins in Latin America: **An Interview with Prof. Miguel Pastorino**

Uruguay recently became the first country in Latin America to legalize euthanasia. Its General Assembly, the national legislature, approved legislation in October 2025 to allow euthanizing persons over 18 with a chronic, irreversible, and incurable disease that causes “unbearable suffering.” Over at least five years, Uruguay has been a target setting for introducing euthanasia into Latin America; the election of the left-wing Frente Amplio in late 2024 cleared the way for the euthanasia bill to advance. There is currently discussion to legalize euthanasia in other Latin American countries, including Mexico, Argentina, and Chile.

Miguel Pastorino is a professor at the Catholic University of Uruguay, holding a doctor of philosophy with a master’s degree in bioethics. He is founder of Prudencia Uruguay, a movement of professionals opposed to the legalization of euthanasia in Uruguay. Professor Pastorino discussed the new Uruguayan law in an interview with the Human Life Review.

HLR: Uruguay is the first country in Latin America to legalize euthanasia. Why did it happen, and happen there?

Prof. Pastorino: Contrary to what many think, Uruguay’s legalization of euthanasia had nothing to do with its advanced secularization. While it is true that Uruguay as a country has the fewest Catholics in Latin America (32 percent who identify as “Catholics,” practicing Catholics not exceeding 5 percent), the debate around euthanasia, as in other countries, arose for the same reasons, the same arguments repeated on both sides in the debate. What is unique about Uruguay is that the political parties that promoted it created a narrative that legalizing euthanasia was part of the “rights agenda,” an expansion of individual freedom and human rights. However, the law as adopted represents both a setback in legal protection for the most vulnerable and a loss of patients’ rights. There are a number of widespread myths in public opinion that predispose people to favor euthanasia.

HLR: What are the provisions of the new Uruguayan law? Under what conditions can one obtain euthanasia, and how is euthanasia carried out? When does the law go into effect?

Prof. Pastorino: The law was approved October 15 and has 180 days to go into effect after presidential promulgation, i.e., sometime after mid-March 2026. It allows any adult to request euthanasia who is in the terminal stage of an illness, has an incurable and irreversible disease, or who has a health condition (disability), and who in any of these cases presents with suffering that they consider unbearable and resulting in a serious deterioration of quality of life.

The procedure requires two consultations with general practitioners, i.e., no specialist. The law allows the patient to withdraw consent up to the last moment and establishes conscientious objection for any doctor who does not wish to perform it. But it does oblige the health system to offer euthanasia, because it considers it a health benefit, a patient's right.

HLR: How will euthanasia take place?

Prof. Pastorino: The procedure is not assisted suicide, but rather an intravenous lethal injection. Without regulations yet, there is little precision. What is clear, according to the bill, is that the "physician or someone under his or her direction will [directly] cause the death of the patient." It is an act against the patient.

HLR: What do you see as the main dangers or problems the new law poses?

Prof. Pastorino: Article 2 makes clear that euthanasia is not only for people in the terminal stages of a disease but for any person with a disability or chronic illness, the decisive criteria being quality of life and subjective suffering. A patient is evaluated by a general practitioner, followed by a second who confirms the previous opinion. Nothing more is required: no pre-evaluation committee, no psychiatrist, no psychologist, no social worker. In other words, there are no guarantees for the patient. Furthermore, by not first requiring palliative care, instead of providing relief if the person is suffering greatly, the solution unfairly offered is death.

The law establishes an evaluation committee *after death*, meaning the person will not be resuscitated if things were done wrong. It's absurd. Topping it off, euthanasia will be classified as "natural death" so that life insurance can be collected. Isn't euthanasia an artificially induced death? It is post-truth in a legislative text.

HLR: Most countries that legalized euthanasia initially adopted restrictions that, over time, were nullified either legally or in practice. Do you have concerns in this respect and, if so, what are they?

Prof. Pastorino: Article 2 of the bill is already quite broad, encompassing chronic illness and disability. I would not be surprised that in the future euthanasia will also include mental health. The current Minister of Public Health, who is a pediatrician, said at a conference when she was a member of parliament in 2021 that we should consider including children, taking into account their "progressive autonomy."

HLR: Uruguay also has one of the more liberal abortion regimes in South America (legal up to 12-14 weeks of pregnancy). How do you evaluate the overall "culture of life" in Uruguay?

Prof. Pastorino: An abstract individualism dominates in politics, both on

the left and right, one that ignores social causes and the problems of others. Everything is reduced to freedom as an absolute right: What matters is that one can decide as one wants, no matter what it is. Life has become a relative value, freedom an absolute value. What matters is deciding, no matter if it is contrary to the life or dignity of people.

HLR: What, if any, impact does the Church have on “life issues” in Uruguay?

Prof. Pastorino: Given Uruguay’s more than one-hundred-year-old culture of anti-clericalism, the Catholic Church here has very little influence on public debate. Catholicism is, in fact, a true minority. Only 32 percent call themselves Catholic, the lowest level on the continent, and only 5 percent are committed to practicing faith and morality as taught by the Church. In general, Uruguay’s liberal and secular tradition has meant that even Catholics disagree with doctrine on such serious issues as abortion and euthanasia. However, regarding euthanasia, there are atheists and agnostics who have joined the debate against euthanasia because they share humanistic values and are critical of the moral relativism and individualism dominant in our societies. Many Catholics have participated in the public debate, but without alluding to their identity, because it is counterproductive in communication. If the Church in Uruguay opposes an issue, the majority generally supports the issue by default. The best strategy that let the debate drag on for five years was to avoid having the Church’s voice as a central figure at the beginning, because in Uruguay that would have accelerated the pro-euthanasia stance. It’s very difficult to understand the negative and pejorative view of the Church in Uruguay outside of our context. The Church has never been as strong at any point in its history as it has been in other Latin American countries.

HLR: Were there any foreign influences or actors pushing for the euthanasia law?

Prof. Pastorino: I don’t know. It’s sobering how quickly they needed to vote on the bill this year without listening to experts who warned about improving the law. There was a sheer blindness and haste to pass it without dialogue, without listening. Although we prolonged the discussion for five years, the text remained unchanged.

HLR: What are the reasons for the growing trend in some countries to legalize euthanasia?

Prof. Pastorino: I think there is a growing cultural tendency towards hedonism and avoidance of any type of suffering, because there are no narratives that give meaning to life and suffering. Being immersed in consumerism and a culture of well-being, we do not want to see old age, dependency,

or vulnerability as part of life. The sooner they disappear from our sight, the better. Nor do we want to care for others either: There is no time nor appreciation for care as something humanizing. Life expectancy is increasing, and people spend many years in a state of dependency and needing care. It is cheaper and less tiring to convince them that they are a burden and to leave sooner. People have also normalized euthanasia because they have stopped valuing their own lives if they are not productive. The only way to reverse these practices is if we recover what Christianity bequeathed to Western culture: compassion.

HLR: What is the outlook for euthanasia legislation in Latin America?

Prof. Pastorino: Projects are underway in Argentina and Chile.

HLR: Thank you, Professor Pastorino.

APPENDIX A

[The following first appeared in Catholic World Report on November 10, 2025, and is reprinted with permission]

Parish-based Initiative by the USCCB Connects Mothers with Key Resources

John Grondelski

Walking with Moms in Need is a nationwide, parish-based initiative by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to connect pregnant and parenting mothers with resources they need to address their challenges.

Launched in 2020, Walking With Moms In Need is a Catholic version of faith-based initiatives seeking to address the needs of women, particularly since the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision allowed states to regulate abortion.

Kat Talalas, who helped start Walking with Moms in Need, is Assistant Director for Pro-Life Communications in the USCCB's Pro-Life Secretariat. She spoke with *Catholic World Report* about the initiative.

CWR: The Supreme Court's decisions on abortion have twice thrown pro-life work for a loop. In 1973, after years of organizing at the state level, *Roe* turned abortion into a federal issue, where pro-life institutions were thin. After almost 50 years focused on Washington, *Dobbs* threw abortion back to the states, where, in many places, pro-life resources were thin. Three years after *Dobbs*, how do you think we're doing?

Ms. Talalas: For decades, pro-life warriors across the country have provided significant resources and personal accompaniment to women facing challenging pregnancies. Approximately 2,750 pregnancy help centers all over the United States offer a spectrum of life-affirming services to pregnant and parenting women in need.

That said, whether you are in a state that has laws preventing abortion or a state that allows abortion up to birth, there is always more that can be done to support pregnancy care and to support women in choosing life.

CWR: Returning abortion to the states not only reaffirmed the need for local political organization but, even more so, local practical support. Amy Ford has argued that every Christian church ought to be a resource center for a pregnant woman in need. How are Catholic parishes doing in this regard?

Ms. Talalas: The goal of Walking with Moms in Need is that any pregnant woman should be able to come to any Catholic parish and receive the help that she needs. We are moving forward on this goal!

Our rough estimate is that at least one-third of dioceses are participating in Walking with Moms in Need and have at least some active parishes, and that is a low estimate. Some dioceses start with pilot parishes, like one or two parishes doing the process, while others have 20-30 parishes participating. We've only been doing

this for five years, and things take a while to move in the Catholic Church, so this is really significant.

CWR: You play a leading role in the Walking with Moms in Need Project, while Chelsy Gomez, as Program Consultant, helps those starting up Walking with Moms in Need in their parishes. Tell us what the Project is about and how it can support pregnant women in need.

Ms. Talalas: Walking with Moms in Need isn't really a ministry model or a program. It is a process and a framework for a parish to evaluate how they are serving pregnant and parenting moms in need in the community, discovering what resources are available, and prayerfully deciding what they can do uniquely to bridge gaps in services.

It's basically an "examination of conscience" to see how we are serving the most vulnerable, and a tool to help us decide how we can try to be the hands and feet of Christ to them.

CWR: Walking with Moms in Need aims at getting to know the "lay of the land" in a local parish, inventorying what resources are locally available and where there are gaps. Why is this important?

Ms. Talalas: The inventory is key! There are so many wonderful resources out there: Catholic hospitals offering free or low-cost care; maternity homes offering housing; organizations like St. Vincent de Paul providing material assistance, to name a few. We need to know about them and have that list on hand so that we can be prepared and confidently offer genuine options when we do encounter a woman facing a challenging pregnancy.

As you said, the inventory is also a useful tool to see what isn't available, so we can think and pray about how our parish can help fill gaps in services.

CWR: Once we know what is and isn't available locally, what's next? Given the prevalence of abortion, how do we put that information to work, operationalizing what we now know?

Ms. Talalas: After inventorying, we look to meet needs where there are gaps. If there isn't a pregnancy center locally, can we start one? Or maybe there is a great pregnancy center—do they have enough volunteers? Part of this step is also "walking in the shoes" of a pregnant woman in your community who is scared and looking for help. Maybe your town has a Catholic health clinic that offers free care to low-income moms; might low-income moms need help getting a ride there if they don't have a car?

So this step is about looking at where the gaps may be, and prayerfully considering how to fill those gaps so that no one gets left behind.

Another important consideration is awareness and outreach. A community may have a fantastic pregnancy center, but how is the local parish advertising it to people in the community and in the pews? Do people know about the center? Are we regularly communicating about these services in a positive way, so that when someone is in a crisis pregnancy, they know they won't feel judged in reaching out to us?

Walking with Moms in Need does not compete with any pro-life programs your

parish might already have, like the Gabriel Project. If your parish already has an active Gabriel Project or a pregnancy center, Walking with Moms in Need seeks to support, enhance, and advertise the work being done. So if you already have robust pregnancy care support at your parish, Walking with Moms in Need can help ensure everyone at the parish knows about it.

CWR: A local needs assessment is important to Catholic parishes, but doesn't seem exclusive to them. Do you think other Christian groups could adapt the initiative to their pro-life ministry needs?

Ms. Talalas: Absolutely! Walking with Moms in Need could definitely be utilized in other ecclesial communities, and we hope it will be.

CWR: The USCCB is the "home" of Walking with Moms in Need, but its work has to be done in local parishes. How do we bring this "up-top" idea down to local parishes and implement it? What is the role of laypeople in achieving that?

Ms. Talalas: Walking with Moms in Need is led by regular Catholics who want to serve Christ and save lives! We pray that individual people, even if they have never volunteered at their parish before, will be inspired to bring this idea to their priest and offer to get it started. All the tools and guidance they need to get started are available for free on the Walking with Moms in Need website.

CWR: Walking with Moms in Need is five years old, but I only heard of it recently. How do we get information about it out there?

Ms. Talalas: Start Walking with Moms in Need at your parish and tell your friends!

CWR: If somebody wants to know more, what can they do?

Ms. Talalas: Go to WalkingwithMoms.com. We have videos on the website explaining the program, including a webinar on how to get started. We also have a thorough action guide that explains the whole process, from what to say when you reach out to your pastor, to finding friends to help you, to creating a plan with your parish.

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“We in the pro-life movement have work to do if *more than half* of women who chose abortion would not have done so, would have preferred not to do so, but didn’t feel they had the support they needed to choose life.”

—Jennie Bradley Lichter, “Leading With Love”