

ANOTHER PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT IS POSSIBLE

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On November 30, 2018, Naiad Reich was fired from her job as a high school teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School in the Diocese of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, three and a half hours from where we meet today. The diocese explained that she was fired because she was pregnant and had no immediate plans to marry her boyfriend of four years, Matt Grabowski. A spokesperson for the diocese released a statement saying: “As outlined in our policies, every professional employee agrees to follow the teachings, doctrine and laws of the Catholic Church as part of the hiring process.”¹ If this is what it means to be pro-life and Catholic, we have a problem.

The same diocese confirms that the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report named twenty-seven clerics credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors in their diocese. While the eight who are still alive have all been removed from ministry, none have been criminally charged for sexual abuse because, according to the diocesan website, “the laws of our Commonwealth prevent these charges.”² Presumably, had the diocese come forward with names of credibly accused priests before the statute of limitations had expired, or reported the abuse themselves, charges could have been pressed. All over the country, lay people are wondering if protecting priests accused of sexual misconduct with minors from criminal prosecution is consistent with what it means to be pro-life and Catholic.

I have been attending Catholic Mass for three years at a parish eight miles from the US–Mexico border, and I have never heard a homily on immigration, inhumane

¹ The fact that Ms. Reich was not Catholic did not seem to be a factor in the decision that was made to terminate her employment as she prepared to welcome her first child. Morgan Winsor, “Catholic School Teacher Claims She Was Fired for Being Pregnant and Unmarried,” *ABC News*, December 6, 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/catholic-school-teacher-claims-fired-pregnant-unmarried/story?id=59623619>. For similar stories, see my blog post: Emily Reimer-Barry, “How to Be Fired From Your Job at a Catholic Institution: It Is Easier Than You Think!,” *CatholicMoralTheology.com*, June 18, 2013, <https://catholicmoraltheology.com/how-to-be-fired-from-your-job-at-a-catholic-institution-it-is-easier-than-you-think/>.

² “Frequently Asked Questions: Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report,” Diocese of Harrisburg, December 11, 2018, <https://www.hbgdiocese.org/frequently-asked-questions-pennsylvania-grand-jury-report-diocese-of-harrisburg/>. The report names twenty-two priests, three seminarians, and two deacons from the Harrisburg diocese. An additional eight religious order priests and six clerics from other dioceses were named in the report, and four names were redacted.

detention facilities, or Customs and Border Patrol family separation policies.³ Despite the fact that children are dying in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody,⁴ abortion seems to be the only “life” issue the pastor and deacons wish to address from the pulpit.

On May 15, 2019, in my home state of Alabama, House Bill 314 was passed; if implemented, abortion and attempted abortion would be felony offenses in the state.⁵ The next day, Michael Brandon Samra was executed by lethal injection.⁶ Governor Kay Ivey declined to delay or halt the execution, even though on that same day she issued a statement saying that HB-314 “stands as a powerful testament to Alabamians’ deeply held belief that every life is precious and that every life is a sacred gift from God.”⁷ Meanwhile, since 2016 maternal mortality in Alabama has increased 21%.⁸ Maternal mortality rates for black women are five times those of white women, and infant mortality rates for black women are double those of white women.⁹ While NRA-funded politicians in Alabama¹⁰ refuse to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, twelve hospitals have closed since 2011.¹¹ Is this really a step forward for the pro-life movement?

³ Yet every week during the prayers of petition, we pray for “those who protect us, including military, law enforcement, firefighters, and border patrol.” The point-of-view analysis is striking.

⁴ Nicole Goodkind, “Trump Officials Acknowledge Sixth Migrant Child Death in U.S. Custody in Six Months After None the Previous Decade.” *Newsweek*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/border-family-separation-child-death-democrats-investigate-1434591>.

⁵ For full text, see “Alabama House Bill 314 (May 15, 2019),” Legiscan, <https://legiscan.com/AL/text/HB314/id/1980843>.

⁶ Adeel Hassan and Alan Blinder, “Alabama Executes a Murderer a Day After Banning Abortions,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/16/us/michael-samra-execution.html>.

⁷ “Governor Ivey Issues Statement After Signing the Alabama Human Life Protection Act,” Office of the Governor, State of Alabama, May 15, 2019, <https://governor.alabama.gov/statements/governor-ivey-issues-statement-after-signing-the-alabama-human-life-protection-act/>.

⁸ “2018 Health of Women and Children Report: Alabama,” American’s Health Rankings, United Health Foundation, <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/learn/reports/2018-health-of-women-and-children-report/state-summaries-alabama>.

⁹ Black women are 243% more likely than white women to die from complications of childbirth in the US. See Nina Martin (ProPublica) and Renee Montagne (National Public Radio), “Black Mothers Keep Dying After Giving Birth. Shalon Irving’s Story Explains Why,” Special Series – Lost Mothers: Maternal Mortality in the US, National Public Radio, December 7, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/07/568948782/black-mothers-keep-dying-after-giving-birth-shalon-irvings-story-explains-why>. According to the CDC, the infant mortality rate for black women is more than double that for white women. “Health Disparities and Inequalities Report (2013),” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/CHDIRport.html#anchor_1547838233.

¹⁰ Daniel Nass, “National Rifle Association Spending Tracker,” The Trace, December 6, 2018, <https://www.thetrace.org/features/nra-campaign-finance-tracker/#state/alabama>.

¹¹ Kim Chandler, “Alabama Lawmakers: Medicaid Expansion Can’t Happen Without Funding” *Tuscaloosa News*, March 23, 2019, <https://www.tuscaloosanews.com/news/20190323/alabama-lawmakers-medicaid-expansion-cant-happen-without-funding>.

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How is it that a teacher can be fired for choosing to give her baby life when faced with unplanned pregnancy, priests who abuse minors face no criminal penalties for the harm and suffering they caused young people and their families, border towns hear nothing about Catholic teaching on immigration from the pulpit, and state legislatures across the country prioritize legal protections for fetal life without funding strong systems of social support for pregnant women? What counts as a “pro-life” issue? How does the construction of the “pro-life” movement and its agenda form (and mal-form) moral agents in the pews of our churches, and what should be done?

The pro-life movement that my generation inherited is deeply flawed and Catholics need to rethink our support for it. Another pro-life movement is possible. My argument unfolds in three steps:

1. *Violence*: We need to untangle patriarchy from the pro-life movement.
2. *Resistance*: We need to resist patriarchy and the related mindsets of double-standard morality, oversimplification, and single-issue politics.
3. *Transformation*: We need to practice what we preach in an expanded pro-life movement.

I do not challenge the magisterial teaching that there should always be a presumption against taking human life.¹² Instead, I ask what that means for Catholic participation in political life and pragmatic discernment about how to foster a culture of life most effectively.¹³

¹² See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae* (February 27, 1987), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html. Given space limitations I am unable in this context to identify the key distinctions between indirect and direct killing that are so important in the tradition, nor to elaborate upon the principle of human dignity that is central to theological anthropology and social ethics, even though the tradition has maintained that human life is not an absolute good. On the latter point, see John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995), 2, 47: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html. For an important essay on bodily life support within the Catholic tradition, and internal inconsistencies within the tradition regarding compulsory bodily life support, see Patricia Beattie Jung, “Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support,” in *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 9: Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick, (New York: Paulist, 1996), 440-480.

¹³ I acknowledge that there is no perspective-free location from which we make moral claims. My privilege as a white, cisgender, heterosexual, well-educated and well-fed woman shapes my power in the world and my moral intuitions. While my faith is certainly significant in shaping my views on abortion, I cannot always separate my faith from my experience as a woman in a sexist world, a white person in a racist world, and a Christian in a country in which Christians hold significant social and political power. I strive for coherence in my identity, but I am also persuaded by intersectional and decolonial thinkers who describe coherence in identity as an illusion. Many of us are fragmented, “not fully contained by one discourse.” Kathy Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice: Moral Diversity in the Abortion Debate* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 133.

The pro-life movement is right to call our attention to the scope of the problem.¹⁴ Abortion has become a routine part of women's reproductive health care delivery in the US context.¹⁵ I am a Catholic feminist who wants to identify as pro-life, but not at the cost of supporting real women in precarious situations. And not at the cost of shaming women in the pews, or of perpetuating a toxic partisan political climate. The pro-life movement, if it is to get my support, will have to be pro-woman and pro-justice in the very thickest sense.¹⁶ Before I describe what that looks like concretely, it is

Rudy's book was a significant resource for this project. In naming the importance of intersectional frameworks I am grateful for the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mariana Ortega, Marilyn Frye, Patricia Hill Collins, Ann Garry, and Loretta Ross. I cannot elaborate in this paper on the racism of the pro-life movement, but it is important to note how scholars such as James C. Mohr have demonstrated that race played a part in early nineteenth-century public discourse, including the fear that nonwhite women were outbreeding white Protestant women. See James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy 1800-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). For more on the intersectional methods of reproductive justice community organizing, see the anthology co-edited by Loretta Ross, Erika Derkas, Whitney Peoples, and Pamela Bridgewater, *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 2017).

¹⁴ The Guttmacher Institute reports that forty-five percent of pregnancies among US women in 2011 were unintended, and about four in ten of these were terminated by abortion. It may be startling for us to realize, but at 2014 rates, *one in four US women* will have an abortion by the age of 45. And we need to realize that our sisters, aunts, mothers, grandmothers, friends, and neighbors beside us in the pews are indeed among this number. Twenty-four percent of abortion patients in 2014 identified as Catholic; more Catholics have abortions than mainline Protestants or evangelical Protestants. "Induced Abortion in the United States: Fact Sheet," Guttmacher Institute, January 2018, https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/factsheet/fb_induced_abortion.pdf. A 2011 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute provides evidence that the binary "pro-choice" or "pro-life" terms do not seem to reflect Americans' views on abortion. In that poll, seven-in-ten Americans say the term "pro-choice" describes them somewhat or very well, and nearly two thirds simultaneously say the term "pro-life" describes them somewhat or very well. This overlapping identity is present in virtually every demographic group. Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, "Committed to Availability, Conflicted about Morality: What the Millennial Generation Tells Us about the Future of the Abortion Debate and the Culture Wars," Public Religion Research Institute, 2011, <https://www.prrri.org/research/committed-to-availability-conflicted-about-morality-what-the-millennial-generation-tells-us-about-the-future-of-the-abortion-debate-and-the-culture-wars/>. Christian ethicists on both 'sides' of the abortion debate cite this study in their work; e.g. Charles C. Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars: A Way Forward for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 12; Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 135; Marvin Ellison, "Is Pro-Choice What We Mean to Say?," in *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 104, 154n. 22. Reproductive justice advocates also resist the pro-choice/pro-life binary. See Ross et al., *Radical Reproductive Justice*.

¹⁵ As Rachel Atkins has stated, "There aren't 'women who have abortions' and 'women who have babies.' Those are the same women at different points in their lives." As quoted by Marvin Ellison in *Making Love Just*, 153.

¹⁶ Feminists for Life presents a pro-woman pro-life agenda; for more, see <https://www.feministsforlife.org/>. My proposed action plan departs in some ways from the FFL

imperative that we ask whether and how patriarchy shapes the pro-life movement today.

I. Violence

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin is credited with articulating the consistent ethic of life which he developed in his 1983 Gannon Lecture at Fordham University, in which he said he was “convinced that the pro-life position of the church must be developed in terms of a comprehensive and consistent ethic of life.”¹⁷ He saw the same principle operating in Catholic teaching against nuclear war as in Catholic teaching against abortion: namely, “the principle which prohibits the directly intended taking of innocent human life.”¹⁸ It is this principle, then, and the corresponding attitude of respect for human life, that must be applied consistently across all moral issues. Bernardin then explains how this would demand a heroic social ethic that would translate to political and economic positions on tax policy, welfare policy, nutrition and feeding programs, and health care. More recently, Jesuit author James Martin has explicitly advocated for this position. Martin links his advocacy for refugees, the LGBT community, and the environment to his consistent ethic of life position.¹⁹

Thirty-six years after Bernardin’s lecture, does the pro-life movement reflect his vision of a heroic social ethic? The victories celebrated by spokespeople of the pro-life movement include the election of Donald J. Trump as President;²⁰ the addition of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court after one of the most painful series of public testimony for survivors of sexual assault; weakening of health care legislation through explicit challenges to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; and attempts at

agenda, but I share central convictions regarding the need to focus first on what contributes to the full flourishing of women and children.

¹⁷ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American-Catholic Dialogue,” (December 6, 1983), in *Consistent Ethic of Life: Joseph Cardinal Bernardin*, ed. Thomas Fuechtmann (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 1-2. The address can be found on the website of the Holy Name Province of the Franciscan Friars, <https://www.hnp.org/publications/hnpfocus/BConsistentEthic1983.pdf>.

¹⁸ Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life.”

¹⁹ James Martin, “Why I am Pro-Life,” *America Magazine*, January 10, 2019, <https://www.americamagazine.org/2019/01/07/martin-why-i-am-pro-life#>. See also Charles C. Camosy, “The Consistent Ethic of Life under Pope Francis,” *Crux*, October 4, 2016, <https://cruxnow.com/commentary/2016/10/04/consistent-ethic-life-pope-francis/>. Camosy sees Pope Francis building on the work of his predecessors to put all life issues in context and to demonstrate the connections between human trafficking, consumerism, climate change, and abortion.

²⁰ The Susan B. Anthony List worked to “get out the vote” for Trump in 2016. See Seth McLaughlin, “Pro-Life Groups Claim Victory in 2016 Election,” *The Washington Times*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/nov/9/pro-life-groups-claim-victory-2016-election/>. For enthusiasm on Brett Kavanaugh nomination among pro-life Catholics, see Christine Rousselle, “Pro-Life Groups React to Kavanaugh Supreme Court Nomination,” July 10, 2018, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pro-life-groups-react-to-kavanaugh-supreme-court-nomination-57865>.

new restrictions on contraception access within employer health care plans for working women.²¹ I cannot celebrate these victories. Can I call myself pro-life?

How did we get here? In 1973 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops explicitly called for civil disobedience to resist laws legalizing abortion.²² In 1975, they crafted their Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, which outlined a grassroots mobilization effort against abortion and initiated a strategy of endorsing a “single issue” approach to election politics, focusing on abortion policy in their analysis of candidates for office. The plan specifically encouraged Catholics to oppose each and every political candidate who supported the legalization of abortion. Forty-four years later, the pastoral plan has undergone revision, but the bishops restate the need to give “urgent attention and *priority*” to abortion as a life issue.²³ They name their political aim: “The abortion decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court must be reversed. ... Our own commitment will not waver. Our efforts will not cease. We will speak out on behalf of the sanctity of life wherever and whenever it is threatened.”²⁴

If we review the USCCB Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, we see how abortion is given the most attention even as the bishops claim that they will speak out on behalf of the sanctity of life wherever and whenever it is threatened.²⁵ These priorities align with the list of “life” issues in the National Right to Life mission

²¹ The USCCB opposed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as well as the Equality Act. Catholic institutions (University of Notre Dame, Little Sisters of the Poor) have framed their opposition to contraception access for female employees as an issue of religious liberty.

²² Eva R. Rubin, *Abortion, Politics, and the Courts: Roe-Wade and Its Aftermath* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 87-100, at 88. Note that the bishops have not issued similar calls of civil disobedience to border patrol agents, military officers, or other Catholics engaged in occupations on contested ‘life’ issues. And in their explicit responses to racial injustice, the bishops often remind Catholics to respect law enforcement and obey civil laws as good citizens. See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts* (November 6, 2018), 5, http://www.usccb.org/_cs_upload/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/271721_3.pdf. The contrast in their approach to ‘the law’ across ‘life’ issues is stark.

²³ Abortion is the litmus test even for understanding the consistent ethic of life, according to the pastoral plan: “We pray that Catholics will be advocates for the weak and the marginalized in all these areas. But being ‘right’ in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life. Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the ‘rightness’ of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life,” <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/pastoral-plan-prolife-activities.cfm>

²⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities.” “For it is impossible, as our Holy Father reminds us, to further the common good ‘without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop.’” Here the document cites John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 101.

²⁵ In a word count of the document, abortion appears 68 times; euthanasia appears 14 times; capital punishment/death penalty 8 times; contraception 7 times; war 4 times; poverty 3 times. But many important ‘life’ issues are left out.

statement,²⁶ which issues scorecards for politicians depending on whether they vote “with” or “against” the National Right to Life position on a given issue.²⁷ Similarly, Priests for Life describes their mission more narrowly as galvanizing the faithful in the effort to end “abortion and euthanasia.”²⁸ As we can see from even this review, the Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities is not guided by a consistent ethic of life²⁹ but rather by a focus on abortion. Here and elsewhere, the consistent ethic of life is a rhetorical tool that is employed haphazardly. Had the consistent ethic of life been a guiding force in the crafting of the pastoral plan, one would have expected to see equal attention to a broader range of “life” issues and an urgent appeal to Catholics to get involved beyond issues of advocacy for unborn children.³⁰

The reality of this fact breeds mistrust among women like me—women who want to support the USCCB pro-life agenda but wonder what other motives are at work when faith leaders begin to advance single issue politics as the best moral choice.³¹ The

²⁶ The National Right to Life mission statement says that their areas of concern are “abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and the killing of unborn children for their stem cells.” See “Mission Statement,” National Right to Life, <https://www.nrlc.org/about/mission/>

²⁷ See interactive “National Right to Life Vote Scorecards,” Legislative Action Center, National Right to Life, <http://cqrcengage.com/nrlc/scorecard>.

²⁸ See the website of Priests for Life: “Who We Are,” Priests for Life, <http://www.priestsforlife.org/intro/introbrochure.html>. Other major organizations in the pro-life movement include the Susan B. Anthony List, Human Life International, American Life League, Americans United for Life, and the Center for Family and Human Rights. These organizations focus on changing the law (to criminalize abortion) in order to foster a culture of life in the United States. It is true that non-Catholic pro-lifers have different values that galvanize their commitments and animate their moral universe. See Christel Manning, *God Gave Us the Right* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1999). I understand that Catholics need to partner with non-Catholics in a variety of social movements. My central problem here is that Catholic pro-lifers find common cause with these groups more fruitful than with Planned Parenthood and feminist social movements. If we agree that we cannot expect perfection from our partners, we need to be honest about the calculus that privileges these over other potential partners.

²⁹ Tellingly, the USCCB pastoral plan does not include advocacy for affordable child care, a living wage for working parents, or housing assistance for homeless women, but does affirm the value of chastity education and Natural Family Planning in programs that offer assistance to pregnant women.

³⁰ For example, the leadership of the Catholic Church seemed ill-equipped to speak authentically about police brutality and did not support the Black Lives Matter social movement as a “pro-life” issue, despite overwhelming evidence of the brokenness of the criminal justice system and racism endemic in US culture. See Bryan N. Massingale, “The Erotics of Anti-Blackness: Police Sexual Violation of Black Bodies,” in *Antiblackness in Christian Ethics*, ed. Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 173-194; Bryan N. Massingale, “The Church’s Appalling Silence on Racism,” *U.S. Catholic* 82 (March 2017): 10; Bryan N. Massingale, “Let’s Be a Church Where Black Lives Matter,” *U.S. Catholic* 81 (December 2016): 8.

³¹ I am not suggesting that all bishops are consciously sexist. It is not always clear to me what motivates ecclesial leaders, and I do not claim that it is clear to them either, but whether sexism functions consciously or unconsciously, if we have evidence that it is functioning, it should be named as problematic. See also Cathleen Kaveny on problems with *Forming*

USCCB says they offer principled, not partisan, solutions. A consistent ethic of life provides a challenge to both Democratic and Republican platforms and legislative agendas; neither political party maps neatly onto Catholic teachings. But when abortion is prioritized above all other life issues—as regularly happens in the pro-life movement’s rhetoric—this tips the scales towards Republican agendas.³² The alliances forged between the pro-life movement and the Republican Party seem to have the blessing of many Catholic pastors and bishops, especially those who have become more partisan in their own rhetoric.³³ Beverly Wildung Harrison complained in 1983 that the net result of faith leaders focusing on single-issue politics “is inevitably the punishing of politicians in abstraction from their total contribution to a broad-based social justice agenda.”³⁴ Many pro-life Catholic Democrats would say that this is exactly what has happened.³⁵

Is the USCCB’s 46-year campaign to overturn *Roe v. Wade* rooted in care and concern for women, or is it instead evidence of patriarchy (by which I mean a desire to control, dominate, and disempower women)?³⁶ I will not be able to answer this question

Consciences for Faithful Citizenship not including analysis of politicians’ virtues and vices in addition to issues-based analysis. Cathleen Kaveny, “Voting and Faithful Citizenship,” in *Law’s Virtues: Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity in American Society* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 189-218. In his plenary address at the Catholic Theological Society of American in 2018, David E. DeCosse articulated a theology of conscience that is grounded in the principle of human dignity and attuned to the *sensus fidelium*, encouraging further development of discourse on religious liberty and conscience in advance of the 2020 election. David E. DeCosse, “Faithful Citizenship and the Theology of Conscience: A Reflection on Grace, The World, and the 2020 Election,” *CTSA Proceedings* 73 (2019): 42-52.

³² Abortion has always been a political issue, but it has become increasingly politicized since 1980 when the Republican Party first called for a constitutional amendment to protect the unborn child’s right to life in their election year party platform. Political scientists argue that this was a political strategy employed by Republican leaders, and subsequent platforms elaborated on this messaging to appeal to a base that thinks of themselves as pro-family and pro-life. The 1984 platform included opposition to the use of public funding for abortion and the goal of stripping funding from organizations that advocate or support abortion, as well as a call for the appointment of judges who respect the sanctity of life. From 1992 to 2004 the Democratic party deemed abortion a fundamental liberty while advocating that abortion should be safe, legal, and rare. The Democratic platform of 2008 added strong support for “access to comprehensive affordable family planning services and age-appropriate sex education which empower people to make informed choices and live healthy lives.” See “Political Party Platforms of Parties Receiving Electoral Votes: 1840-2012,” American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/platforms.php>.

³³ See the discussion of the writings of Charles Chaput, Raymond Burke, Joseph Naumann, and Robert Finn, in Cathleen Kaveny, *Law’s Virtues*, 252-256.

³⁴ Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 239.

³⁵ See the website of Democrats for Life: <https://www.democratsforlife.org/>

³⁶ The USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities stated: “The Church forms its position based on principles—here the principles of religious liberty for all and the life and dignity of every human person—not polls, personalities, or political parties.” See “Twelve Things Everyone Should Know About the Contraceptive Mandate,” Issues and Actions, Secretariate for Pro-Life Activities, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, January 6, 2014,

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satisfactorily. I wish it were easy to simply say that Catholic bishops are opposed to abortion out of respect for women. But Catholic bishops have a strange way of demonstrating respect for women.³⁷

The choice to advocate against legal abortion (in other words, the choice to restrict women's agency) instead of focusing on an agenda *to reduce the number of abortions* is an important distinction.³⁸ Many feminists have noted that it would demonstrate respect for women if the culture treated women as subjects capable of being *persuaded* to the good—as moral agents capable of making decisions for themselves. So much is made of the question of the status of the fetus and whether the fetus should be called a person. And of course, it is an important one. But are *women* respected as persons, or are they simply tools in a system of reproduction controlled by men?³⁹ Catholic theologian Christine Gudorf has noted that the Catholic tradition has given men wide latitude with respect to the ethics of war, but it has demonstrated mistrust of women when it comes to life-and-death decisions about pregnancy and childbirth. Gudorf explains that church leaders and theologians have recognized a legitimate diversity of moral opinions about state violence and warfare, all of which have been placed under the rubric of a respectable, morally principled debate. In the context of war, bishops acknowledge that decisions about killing are morally complex and should be approached through dialogue, moral education, and ongoing discernment. Gudorf asks, “Why is the same method not assumed to be appropriate in the context of women’s decision making around abortion?”⁴⁰ Why are women who consider abortion

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/upload/Twelve-Things-Everyone-Should-Know-About-the-Contraceptive-Mandate.pdf>

³⁷ Despite Pope Francis’s call to include women in meaningful positions of leadership, women hold few positions of real authority in the Catholic Church. The #metoo movement within the church has demonstrated a lack of attention to the sexual exploitation of women religious and the stigma women face for speaking up against abuse. Women did not have voting rights at the Synods on the Family or the Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment. And I contend that the USCCB withdrawal of support for the Violence Against Women Act is another example of their strange way of demonstrating respect for women.

³⁸ Archbishop Charles Chaput said, at his September 29, 2016, Address at the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation Dinner, weeks before the 2016 US Presidential elections: “If we really believe that abortion is an intimate act of violence, then we can’t aim at anything less than ending abortion. It doesn’t matter that some abortions *have* always occurred, and that some abortions *will* always occur. If we really believe that abortion kills a developing, human life, then we can never be satisfied with mere ‘reductions’ in the body count.” See, Charles Chaput, Keynote Presentations and Addresses, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, September 29, 2016, <http://archphila.org/address-at-pennsylvania-pro-life-federation-dinner/>. My position is that focusing on reducing the number of abortions is precisely what Catholic pro-life activists should be working to address, but through different means than those proposed by Archbishop Chaput.

³⁹ See the first chapter of Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, for elaboration on the claim that the system of human reproduction privileges male power over women.

⁴⁰ Ellison, *Making Love Just*, 111-112; Christine E. Gudorf, “To Make A Seamless Garment, Use a Single Piece of Cloth,” in *Abortion and Catholicism: The American Debate*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and Thomas A. Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 281.

threatened with excommunication⁴¹ while “men in the military are treated to an exercise in persuasion?” Why does our church so easily recognize the agency of men, and seek to restrict the agency of women?⁴²

In many ways, women are asking: Does my church believe that my body matters? Does my church believe that I am capable of making good decisions? Does my church accept that I am best positioned to understand the circumstances of my life and what is possible for me to do? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then the pro-life movement is not (as it claims) an extension of the civil rights movement, but rather an extension of patriarchy.

It is time to reject the inherent violence of a pro-life movement that seeks to undermine the moral agency of women. Agency and dignity go hand-in-hand. To rob women of their control over something so central to their wellbeing is harmful, paternalistic, and undercuts any claim to be “pro-life.” If women are not valued intrinsically, but only in relation to men or to their unborn children, we have not achieved full human dignity. If women are objects and not subjects in their own rights, we have not achieved full human dignity. And if the fetus she carries generates more care and empathy from the pro-life movement than the woman who carries it, women have not achieved full human dignity. The unfinished business of the sexual revolution is to extend *to women* the “sense of dignity” and the demand that women “should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty.”⁴³

II. Resistance

Global social movements are born when communities come together to say: “Enough. The status quo is not working. Things must change.” Successful social movements energize their base by identifying clearly what the group must resist, and then constructing a vision of transformation. So, what must we resist? A renewed pro-

⁴¹ “A person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication *latae sententiae*.” *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgates* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), Canon 1398, cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2272, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a5.htm.

⁴² Charles Camosy defends coercion of women when that coercion saves fetal life: “It is up to those who would like to see our set of values prevail to convince others of our point of view,” but “if we are honest, it may happen via raw imposition of power.” See Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars*, 181n. 10.

⁴³ “A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man [sic], and the demand is increasingly made that men [sic] should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty.” *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1. What we recognize as true for men with regard to religious freedom—that no one is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will—can be applied also to women facing unplanned pregnancies when we advocate for their freedom from coercion. *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965), 10, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html#.

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life movement must resist patriarchy,⁴⁴ resist a double standard morality, resist oversimplification, and resist single-issue politics.

We see evidence of patriarchal attitudes and practices not only in the Catholic Church⁴⁵ but also in US culture more broadly. The church must resist patriarchy in all its ugly forms including clericalism, benevolent sexism, toxic masculinity, and theological discourse that assumes that the “normative human” is male. Catholic theologians have only just begun to recognize the importance of naming the patriarchal contexts in which women find themselves struggling to make meaningful decisions about their reproduction.⁴⁶

We also must resist the double bind/double standard morality so prevalent in abortion cases. In the case of the pregnant high school teacher fired because she is

⁴⁴“Patriarchy is at work when the legal, economic, political, and ecclesial systems that structure a social order create advantages for men and disadvantages for women.” Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 18. An intersectional lens recognizes how race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity and other facets of identity also confer privilege and/or contribute to oppression. A reproductive justice framework is intentionally intersectional.

⁴⁵ Too often women are socialized into roles that imply a lesser status for women than men. Gerda Lerner explains that patriarchy is perpetuated by gender assumptions that lock men and women into different roles. “Men and women are essentially different creatures, not only in their biological equipment, but in their needs, capacities and functions. Men and women also differ in the way they were created and in the social function assigned to them by God.” Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 4. It is this logic that Archbishop Chaput employs when he explains that men and women are different, and while he says it takes nothing away from his claim that men and women have equal dignity, men are tasked as “leaders” and should lead in a “masculine” way because “the role of good men is to provide, to protect, to build, to lead, and to teach.” Archbishop Chaput tells a gathering of men: “There was nothing effeminate or devious or ethereal or bent about Jesus Christ, or the men who followed him. The Son of God called *men* – real men – to be his apostles, the first bishops. And the great saint of the early Eastern Church, John Chrysostom, described every human father as the bishop of his family. All of you fathers here today are bishops. And every father shapes the soul of the next generation with his love, his self-mastery and his courage, or the lack of them.” Archbishop Charles Chaput, “Address at Salinas Men’s Conference: Why Men Matter,” Keynote Addresses and Presentations, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, August 13, 2018, <http://archphila.org/archbishop-chaputs-address-at-salinas-mens-conference-why-men-matter/>. Similarly, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said: “It is understood in a certain sense the role that Genesis details to us for the woman, in her most profound and original state of being, she exists for ‘the other.’” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,” May 31, 2004, 6, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html. These statements reinforce patriarchal power dynamics.

⁴⁶ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler have stated: “There seems to be a surprising unawareness on the part of the Pope and bishops worldwide of how patriarchal culture, gender norms, familial relations, socio-economic, and political factors impact reproductive decisions in marriages.” See Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *Amoris Laetitia: Towards a Methodological and Anthropological Integration of Catholic Social and Sexual Ethics*, “*Theological Studies* 79 (2018): 634-652, at 650.

unmarried,⁴⁷ we could call her situation a “double bind,” in that church teaching tells her not to terminate her pregnancy because of the intrinsic value of the life she carries, while diocesan policies say that she cannot keep her job while pregnant and unmarried.⁴⁸ Further, we must raise concerns about the double standard for men and women. A gender ideology rooted in different roles for men and women has in fact led to different standards for men and women, to the detriment of women. On the college campuses where many of us teach, sexually active men gain social status while sexually active women lose social status.⁴⁹ Meanwhile male responsibility for care of children is often overlooked or downplayed.

We need to resist oversimplification of our terms in the abortion debates.⁵⁰ Catholic leaders frequently describe prenatal life before viability as human life without recognition of the contingent nature of prenatal life. Rebecca Todd Peters has argued persuasively for an understanding of pregnancy as a liminal space; we should train our moral intuitions to recognize how the pregnant body is different from the non-pregnant female body, and how prenatal life is different from newborn life.⁵¹ Patricia Beattie Jung warned us over three decades ago of the problem of romanticizing pregnancy and motherhood in Christian theological discourse, saying that it “reflects a failure of persons on both sides of the abortion debate to take the experience of women

⁴⁷ Ms. Naiad Reich was fired because she was unmarried and pregnant. Morgan Winsor, “Catholic School Teacher Claims She Was Fired for Being Pregnant and Unmarried.” *ABC News*, December 6, 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/catholic-school-teacher-claims-fired-pregnant-unmarried/story?id=59623619>. For similar stories, see my blog post: Emily Reimer-Barry, “How to Be Fired From Your Job at a Catholic Institution: It Is Easier Than You Think!,” *CatholicMoralTheology.com*, June 18, 2013, <https://catholicmoraltheology.com/how-to-be-fired-from-your-job-at-a-catholic-institution-it-is-easier-than-you-think/>.

⁴⁸ For more on the double-bind for women in Christian theological discourse see Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 62.

⁴⁹ Kathleen A. Bogle, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus* (New York: NYU Press, 2008); Lisa Wade, *American Hook Up: The New Culture of Sex on Campus* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018); Elisabeth T. Vasko, *Beyond Apathy: A Theology for Bystanders* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 29-58.

⁵⁰ In a context in which the President of the United States tweets false claims regularly, simply telling the truth is a basic step forward. In the context of abortion, Trump’s “incendiary falsehood” about third trimester abortions at a Wisconsin rally provide an opportunity for Catholics to recommit to at least understanding the issue before spreading lies. Eli Watkins, “Trump Offers Incendiary Falsehood on Abortion at Wisconsin Rally,” *CNN*, April 28, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/28/politics/trump-rally-wisconsin-abortion/index.html>. Beyond basic truth-telling, we should rely on the best medical science available to us in our evaluations.

⁵¹ Peters, *Trust Women*, 153. “When we imagine pregnancy outside the male gaze and from the perspective of the pregnant woman and her body, we recognize how the pregnant body is ontologically different from both the male body and the not-pregnant female body. Similarly, the prenatal body is also ontologically different from the bodies of newborns, infants, or children. Both the pregnant body and the pre-nate defy the strict logic of individualism and exist instead within a liminal space defined by the potential for creation of new life.” Further, for Kathy Rudy, “We have a hard time conceptualizing the fetus as both part and not part of its mother because liberal ideology has trained our eyes to register only whole, bounded human subjects. Human subjectivity is either present or absent in our philosophy; there is not room for an ontological in-between.” Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice*, 135.

seriously.”⁵² Attending more systematically to the breadth of women’s experiences of pregnancy and motherhood will be essential for our moral evaluation going forward. We need precise moral language, but we also need to recognize variability and contingency. The circumstances of every pregnancy are different. Our moral tradition is capable of recognizing great variability while at the same time raising up principles to guide moral discernment in complex cases.⁵³ It does violence to women when we speak in moral absolutes that do not reflect the lived realities of confusing, complex contexts.⁵⁴

I suggest we also need to resist the temptation to obscure the complexity of life issues by focusing on abortion as the heart of our approach to the common good.⁵⁵ Life in the womb does not have any greater claim on us than lives threatened by structural violence of war, food insecurity, homelessness, police brutality, gang violence, substance abuse, poverty, child neglect and abuse, and migration. A consistent ethic of life highlights many other related “life” issues that merit attention in a movement that takes the name pro-life.

A renewed pro-life movement must resist patriarchy, resist a double standard morality, resist oversimplification, and resist single-issue politics. But we cannot only be known for what we resist. Our moral discernment must be informed by a method that listens to understand women’s complex experiences, wrestles with ambiguity, and accompanies women in their difficult circumstances.

⁵² Patricia Beattie Jung, “Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support,” in *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 9: Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1996), 440-480, at 469.

⁵³ Stephen Pope has argued that the notion of “intrinsic evil” has so many conceptual problems that it would be better for it to be dropped from the vocabulary of moral theology and, indeed, the moral teachings of the magisterium. The category is employed in oddly selective and often imprecise ways and obscures important discussions of moral gravity. See Stephen Pope, “Intrinsic Evil in Catholic Sexual Ethics: Time to Move On,” in *The Concept of Intrinsic Evil and Catholic Theological Ethics*, ed. Nenad Polgar and Joseph A. Selling (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2019), 29-51.

⁵⁴ A recovery of an agent-centered proportionalism in Catholic ethical methodology could be helpful here. See Aline Kalbian, “Where Have All the Proportionalists Gone?” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 301:1 (Spring 2002): 3-22. See also James T. Bretzke’s plea that theological ethicists still need to know the precise range of meanings and the grounding concepts of the moral act, “the relation of the *finis operis* to the *finis operantis*, and the absolute necessity of consideration of circumstances in every *actus humanus*.” James T. Bretzke, “Intrinsic Evil in *Veritatis Splendor* and Two Contemporary Debates,” in *The Concept of Intrinsic Evil and Catholic Theological Ethics*, ed. Nenad Polgar and Joseph A. Selling (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2019), 55-66, at 63.

⁵⁵ Rev. Richard John Neuhaus described abortion as the “heart of the contest for what Pope John Paul II calls the culture of life” in the foreword to Teresa R. Wagner, ed., *Back to the Drawing Board: The Future of the Pro-Life Movement* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2003).

In order to affirm women's agency, we must understand the reality of their stories. One cannot presume to know fully what you have not experienced.⁵⁶ Pope Francis invites us to be a church in the streets, to accompany women facing difficult discernments. When we accompany women, we learn that the reasons women give for having an abortion underscore their understanding of the responsibilities of parenthood and family life. The three most common reasons—each cited by three-fourths of patients—were concern for or responsibility to other individuals; the inability to afford raising a child; and the belief that having a baby would interfere with work, school or the ability to care for dependents. Half said they did not want to be a single parent or were having problems with their husband or partner.⁵⁷

Many women have chosen not to tell their abortion stories in ecclesial contexts because of the way that church teaching on abortion has contributed to shaming discourse. As a result, our moral discernment is impoverished. I recall the textbook my high school morality class used to teach about abortion described abortion as an “abominable crime,” “moral evil,” and “grave offense.”⁵⁸ Too often, our language about abortion—from catechism classes to the pulpit to the brochures at the church doors—fosters a discourse that labels women as sinners without taking into account the complexities of the moral discernments women face.

Instead, the #shoutyourabortion movement challenges stigma and shame associated with abortion stories. #Shoutyourabortion is unsettling for Catholic readers but I am suggesting we step back and listen. What one hears will likely disrupt expectations. Not all women describe abortions as ‘tragic losses.’ Some women describe their relief. They describe how their choice to terminate a pregnancy made sense to them given the particularity of their situations and the competing values at stake in their discernments. I submit that we can learn by attending to these women's narratives and if we seek to build an incarnated culture of life, we cannot close our ears to their stories.

For example, Miki Sodos was 27 when she had an abortion. She'd spent the last year taking care of her mother as she battled cancer, and her mother died in her arms six days before Miki found out she was pregnant. Miki was struggling with substance abuse, and the person who got her pregnant was her dealer. She writes:

⁵⁶ Catholic magisterial documents do not reflect adequately on the epistemological gaps in knowledge that result from an all-male episcopacy, and this has troubling consequences for the crafting of moral norms that pertain to women's particular embodied experiences. Catholic natural law ethics has wrestled with the need to craft claims that address universal human experience while also expressing adequately the reality of diverse human experiences. Cristina Traina stated helpfully, “The most persistent and trenchant feminist criticism of natural law ethics, both traditional and revisionist, resembles this complaint: that the natural law objections to abortion value abstract or potential human life over particular, pregnant women, and, often, their families.” Cristina Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 303. See also Lisa Sowle Cahill's *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 214-216.

⁵⁷ “Induced Abortion,” Guttmacher Institute, 1.

⁵⁸ McGill Toolen Catholic High School, Mobile, Alabama. See Catechism of the Catholic Church (1995), nos 2270-2275.

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The path I was on was one of drugs and destruction. ... My abortion was the first empowering choice that I had made for myself in a very long time. I was drowning. I believe that my abortion was a major catalyst for me to get my life together.⁵⁹

Clementine Ford describes feeling relieved after her abortion, and then celebrating the birth of her son with complete joy when she was ready to parent. “I look at my son every morning and marvel at the progress he’s making on his journey to becoming an aware human. ... He is the child I was waiting for. ... Abortion is part of his story as much as it is mine. Abortion is what made his life possible, but my life too.”⁶⁰

Shelly Bell met Paul on the dance floor, and after a casual hookup she discovered she was pregnant. She texted Paul, “feeling extremely guilty about getting pregnant by some random guy in a club.” They met to talk about it, and they agreed to end the pregnancy by abortion, but to continue to see each other. They had second thoughts in the waiting room, but Shelly did have an abortion that day. When they went out together again, they talked “openly about the abortion and how it made us feel.” They laughed, talked, and fell “in love in a way neither of us could ever have imagined happening.” Shelly and Paul are still together, now with kids, and describe their relationship as a “nontraditional fairytale love story.”⁶¹

Can we find common ground with these women who have chosen abortion, even as we grieve the loss of unborn life? I think we can. But we won’t find it by protesting at clinics. Perhaps we can begin by finding common ground in Miki’s self-giving love for her mother, and her self-care⁶² for herself. We can honor Clementine’s discernment by telling the truth about the difficulty of parenting. We can respect Shelly and Paul’s mutual discernment and celebrate the love they share today. Women’s experiences of pregnancy and abortion must become part of our moral discourse to a much greater

⁵⁹ Miki Sodos, in *Shout Your Abortion*, ed. Amelia Bonow and Emily Nokes, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018), Kindle Location 511-533.

⁶⁰ Clementine Ford, *Shout Your Abortion*, Kindle Location 431-489, at 489.

⁶¹ Shelly Bell, in *Shout Your Abortion*, Kindle Location 1569-1624. I cannot do justice to the depth of these three women’s narratives within the space constraints of this paper, and three brief stories cannot do justice to the complexity of women’s experiences of abortion in the US. Nevertheless, I want to encourage theological ethicists to resist any discussion of abortion as an abstract question detached from real women’s messy lives.

⁶² Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women*, 176-177. Rebecca Todd Peters, in her book *Trust Women*, argues that the decision to abort can be framed according to the Christian virtue of self-care. “The decision to abort is often a reflection of self-care. The self-care may be motivated by a wide variety of circumstances. It might reflect a woman’s desire to finish school so that she can get a decent job and care for herself and her family. It might reflect an attempt to protect herself in the midst of an abusive relationships. It might reflect her constrained economic reality and the difficulty she has in caring for existing children. It might reflect an acceptance of personal limitations in caring for a baby or another baby at that moment in her life. It might reflect the dissolution or fragility of her relationship with her partner. It might reflect a thousand and more different realities that represent the very real-life circumstances out of which women daily make the decision to end a pregnancy so that they can tend to themselves and their current life circumstances. Self-care is not the same thing as selfishness.”

degree than they are already. And embedded in so many of these abortion stories are women navigating a complicated world in which they are making choices within situations of constrained agency. When Pope Francis talks about listening, he reminds us of the need for humility before the mystery of the other, reminding us that “each person’s situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without.”⁶³ I propose that the church needs to do a lot more of this kind of listening. Tina Beattie has argued that “if we are to create a world in which all can flourish, then we must allow those who bear the children of the future to tell their stories.”⁶⁴ If the aim of the pro-life movement is to reduce the number of abortions, then we need to understand the ways that women are already making judgments about what it is possible for them to do.

III. Transformation

The reproductive rights movement of feminist activists in the 1970s were explicitly critical of abortion-rights activists and can provide a helpful guide for envisioning the kinds of structural supports that we need to craft today as part of a new pro-life movement. Marilyn Katz, founder of Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) stated that “the real impetus for the network (R2N2) was to reframe the debate, to talk about *the conditions which would be necessary for women to be able to make a real choice* [about whether or not to have children].”⁶⁵ R2N2 did not narrow their political agenda to abortion rights, but perceived their cause much more broadly to include access to affordable child care, health care, a living wage, birth control, and disability pay during pregnancy for working women. For R2N2, “any political strategy that did not attend to these structural needs was inadequate.”⁶⁶

⁶³ “One who accompanies others has to realize that each person’s situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without. The Gospel tells us to correct others and to help them to grow on the basis of a recognition of the objective evil of their actions (Mt 3:15), but without making judgments about their responsibility and culpability (Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37).” Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 172, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁶⁴ Tina Beattie, “Maternal Well-Being in Sub-Saharan Africa: From Silent Suffering to Human Flourishing,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed. Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 175-188, at 188.

⁶⁵ Emphasis mine. As quoted in Suzanne Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 110. I am indebted to Kathy Rudy’s work in this section. See Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice*, 88. Similarly, Beverly Harrison opens her book, *Our Right to Choose*, by saying “the ‘choice’ which receives moral defense in these pages is women’s right to the *conditions for procreative choice*, not merely the narrower option of elective abortion.” (ix). Her emphasis. See also Loretta Ross and Ricki Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), especially the second chapter.

⁶⁶ Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice*, 88.

Following *Roe*, many in the abortion rights movement argued that abortion was a private matter;⁶⁷ but reproductive rights feminists like Katz and Petchesky were suspicious about the anthropological basis for this private/public distinction, thinking that the same line of reasoning would be used to argue that the state did not have a role to play in providing childcare, prenatal health care, or protection for women in abusive relationships in the ‘private’ sphere of the home.⁶⁸ Marlene Gerber Fried claimed, in a critique of abortion-rights-feminists, that “the decision to fight for choice rather than justice is itself a decision to appeal to those who already have choices.”⁶⁹ Following the lead of these early advocates for a wider vision of reproductive justice, we can begin to describe the conditions in which women would be empowered to choose life for their unborn children. I argue that an expanded pro-life movement today should look back to Katz, Petchesky, and Fried, and adopt their expansive vision of what a social movement in support of women’s reproductive agency really looks like.

We need to develop a revised pro-life action plan that heralds back to the work of these feminist activists. This plan should shift priorities of the pro-life movement away from legislative action that tries to overturn *Roe*, and focus instead on social and structural supports that enable women to choose life for their unborn children.⁷⁰ Charles Camosy, Julie Hanlon Rubio, Tina Beattie, Cathleen Kaveny, and Sidney Callahan are among the Catholic theologians who have advocated for broader structural supports for women to craft a more pro-life culture.⁷¹ I part ways with those thinkers who continue to want to focus on legislative action as the top priority.

⁶⁷ Rhonda Copeland, “From Privacy to Autonomy: The Conditions for Sexual and Reproductive Freedom,” in *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, ed. Marlene Gerber Fried (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 33.

⁶⁸ Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice*, 89.

⁶⁹ Marlene Gerber Fried, “Transforming the Reproductive Rights Movement: The Post-Webster Agenda,” in *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, ed. Marlene Gerber Fried (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 6.

⁷⁰ Ziad Munson, a sociologist, describes four streams of pro-life activists. I reject the first two as flawed (clinic direct action protests, political) and align my proposal with the third and fourth, the approach of public outreach and crisis pregnancy centers that respond directly to women in need without shaming them. See Ziad Munson, *The Making of Pro-Life Activists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Ziad Munson, *Abortion Politics* (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2018).

⁷¹ Camosy’s recent policy proposal includes just such structural supports for women: equal pay for equal work, nondiscrimination regarding ‘family status’ in hiring and firing, protection for victims of domestic violence, ending pregnancy and new mother discrimination in the workplace, reform of parental leave, universal prekindergarten and subsidized child care, reform of adoption system, coordinated attempts to collect child support, and protection for women at risk for coerced abortions and other violence. Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars*, 140-142. See also Julie Hanlon Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 159-192; Sidney Callahan, “Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-life Feminism” in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 9: Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1996), 422-439; Tina Beattie, “Catholicism, Choice, and Consciousness: A Feminist Theological Perspective on Abortion,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 4 (2010): 51-75; Cathleen Kaveny, *Law’s Virtues*, 276.

Catholics will not ‘win’ the abortion debate in the Supreme Court, Senate, House of Representatives, or even state legislatures. We need to recalibrate what it would mean to “win” in a new pro-life movement. Following Kathy Rudy, I believe that “a tradition only ‘wins’ in the abortion debate when a woman with an unwanted pregnancy sees the hope and possibilities offered to her by that tradition and changes her interpretation of her pregnancy as a result.”⁷² Julie Hanlon Rubio has stated that reducing the abortion rate in the US “depends on identifying strategies that can be pursued by both liberals and conservatives working together at the grassroots level.”⁷³ To that end, I conclude my presentation today by briefly sketching out what a Catholic Action Plan for Reproductive Justice would prioritize: listening to women, changing our political strategy, providing robust structural supports for women and children, and attending to a wider range of “life” issues.

This plan begins by centering women in our abortion discourse.⁷⁴ One important step forward would be to appoint a women-led sub-committee at the USCCB to create a new series of liturgies for Catholic women healing from miscarriage, sexual violence, and abortion.⁷⁵ We should also develop an entirely new communication strategy on pro-life issues. From the USCCB to diocesan family life offices and parish bulletins, we need a pro-life message that empowers people in difficult discernments. Shaming discourse must be eliminated from our formal communications, and the consistent ethic of life must be evident in all pro-life communications. Every diocese should revise its employment contracts so that pregnant employees feel supported and encouraged to choose life for their unborn children, not forced to choose between working for the church and nurturing unborn life.

We also need to change our political strategy. We should stop efforts to criminalize abortion.⁷⁶ The focus of the pro-life movement should not be overturning *Roe v. Wade*, crafting more restrictive legislation at the state level, or seeking to defund Planned Parenthood. While the research is speculative, a number of studies have argued that overturning *Roe* is not the most effective strategy in reducing the abortion rate.⁷⁷ If we

⁷² Rudy, *Beyond Pro-Life and Pro-Choice*, 145.

⁷³ Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground*, 161.

⁷⁴ For more on the need to center women’s stories, see Ross and Solinger, *Reproductive Justice*.

⁷⁵ Such liturgies could be developed by building on the work of Project Rachel and other resources already available. Catholic liturgies are too often male-dominated spaces of worship and fail to acknowledge truthfully the reality of women’s embodied experiences, including pregnancy loss and abortion.

⁷⁶ I part ways with Charles Camosy on this point, and significantly so. Camosy argues that even if the US adopted the social supports similar to those found in Western Europe, we would still have about 700,000 abortions every year. He argues that protecting the “civil rights of our prenatal children” is a higher priority and making abortion illegal should be paired with social supports for women. Given my concerns for women’s agency, described above, I part ways here. See Camosy, *Beyond the Abortion Wars*, 143.

⁷⁷ Joseph Wright, “Reducing Abortion in America: Beyond *Roe v. Wade*,” *Catholics United*, August 2008, 4; as quoted by Rubio, *Hope for Common Ground*, 164, n.27. Susan Stabile proposes a realist solution that does not prioritize legal battles to overturn *Roe* in Susan J. Stabile,

follow this action plan, we limit the ways that politicians and their proxies have used abortion as an issue to divide Americans, fostering a toxic political climate. This would be a significant shift for the Catholic Church to adopt, but it would bear fruit in that it will create the possibilities for new alliances across party lines.

I advocate for partnerships with Planned Parenthood in areas where there is legitimate common ground: judgement free response to survivors of sexual assaults, comprehensive sexual education, STD testing, stigma reduction and suicide prevention for LGBTQ+ population, cancer screenings and wellness counseling.⁷⁸ Recognizing different missions and organizational values, there will not be strategic alliance in all areas. But a new pro-life movement will stop demonizing Planned Parenthood, which is one of the largest providers of health care for women in the US.⁷⁹

A Catholic Action Plan for Reproductive Justice would also prioritize structural supports for women and children. We should provide free (or sliding scale) infant day care at every Catholic parish and place of work (including Catholic hospitals and universities). Building a culture of life extends far beyond the maternal delivery room of the hospital. Women discerning whether to continue a pregnancy know well the high costs of caring for infants and the commitment of parenting. Full time infant day care in my community costs \$1200/month, which is even unaffordable for many middle-class families, and is impossible for families living below the poverty line. Catholic parishes would be the ideal spaces for robust sliding scale infant day care facilities nationwide, serving the needs of the local communities and inclusive of children of all creeds, races, and social classes.

“An Effort to Articulate a Catholic Realist Approach to Abortion,” *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 7 (2010): 344-47.

⁷⁸ At the Catholic university where I teach, undergraduate students are forbidden from receiving course credit for internship placements at any clinic that offers comprehensive reproductive health services to women, including Planned Parenthood; meanwhile, there are no similar restrictions for placements at weapons-making facilities, for profit-prisons, or Fortune 500 companies. Julie Hanlon Rubio has called for a “blending of the moral manuals with the theology of social sin” such that Catholics are called to “pay attention to specific forms of cooperation with evil and to develop alternative practices of noncooperation with evil and cooperation with good.” See Rubio, *Hope For Common Ground*, 48. But more can be said about how, in practice, Planned Parenthood is treated differently than other organizations on the basis of the interpretation the principle of cooperation.

⁷⁹ Planned Parenthood is more than an abortion provider, although Catholic pro-life activists often focus exclusively on that aspect of their mission. Planned Parenthood also provides basic reproductive and sexual health care for women and men, seventy-five percent of whom live at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. Services include family planning counseling, pregnancy tests, Pap tests, breast exams, cancer screenings, STI testing and treatment, contraception services, education, outreach and advocacy. See “This is Who We Are” Planned Parenthood Federation of America, January 2019, https://www.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/a0/96/a09686b9-1fb2-4b37-96c7-4a874a44d22b/190117-whoweare-factsheet-v01.pdf. Planned Parenthood reports that direct abortion services account for 3% of their overall services; for analysis of flawed Republican claims that abortions are 94% of Planned Parenthood’s pregnancy services, see D’Angelo Gore, “Planned Parenthood’s Services,” FactCheck.org, September 4, 2015, <https://www.factcheck.org/2015/09/planned-parenhoods-services/>.

And, of course, we must address poverty as constraint to agency. Poor women need to know that the pro-life movement is on their side. Bumper stickers and marches don't go far enough in giving poor women greater agency.⁸⁰ Women with unplanned pregnancies know well that parenting children means providing for their physical, educational, and emotional needs. A renewed pro-life movement must advocate for strengthened government support for poor families. This includes revised tax policies, support for equal pay for equal work laws, nondiscrimination laws, robust support of fair housing, and a solid welfare safety net including food programs and universal health care.⁸¹ There is also a role for "middle axioms" of support here, from parish-based food pantries to Facebook groups for sharing used children's clothing, as well as direct support from family and friends.⁸²

Finally, our plan should aim to nurture and protect all life. We need to join the green revolution. We need to recognize that the oppression of women and the oppression of the natural world go hand-in-hand in patriarchal culture; the green revolution in theological ethics emerges from valuable insights in ecofeminist theology.⁸³ *Laudato Si'* expands our vision of what it means to be pro-life in a renewed pro-life movement; rejecting anthropocentrism, Catholics are called to address the "life" questions that confront us in a world of overconsumption, globalization, militarism, and destruction of the natural world.⁸⁴ Responsible fertility must be discerned in light of this ecological crisis on our planet, which cannot sustain unlimited procreativity.⁸⁵ If the church is to attend to all issues that threaten life, a new pro-life

⁸⁰ According to the Guttmacher Institute, 75% of abortion patients in 2014 were poor or low-income. 26% of patients had incomes of 100-199% of the federal poverty level, and 49% had incomes of less than 100% of the federal poverty level (\$15,730 for a family of two). "Induced Abortion," Guttmacher Institute, 1.

⁸¹ The USCCB did not support the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. It undermines a prolife agenda when Catholic bishops advocate against health care access for all. But when a pregnant woman faces uncertainty regarding health care coverage and costs, and has legitimate concerns that she may face bankruptcy if she has unforeseen complications during labor, her choices are constrained. Instead, a renewed prolife movement would make health care delivery equitable for all and see health care as a human right. I do acknowledge the work of Catholic Charities, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and the Catholic Health Association in this shared mission.

⁸² Rubio, 182.

⁸³ Lois K. Daly, "Ecofeminism, Reverence for Life, and Feminist Theological Ethics" in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 295-314.

⁸⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), 23-26, 203-208, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

⁸⁵ While a larger analysis of sexual education and contraception is beyond the scope of this paper, responsible fertility has received treatment recently in *Amoris Laetitia* as well as in the writings of prominent Catholic theologians such as Margaret Farley, Todd Salzman, and Michael Lawler. Margaret Farley's Presidential Address to the CTSA in 2000 addressed the "credibility gap" that the church faces in efforts to oppose abortion, naming church teaching on contraception and the church's record on women as stumbling blocks. See Margaret A. Farley, "The Church in the Public Forum: Scandal or Prophetic Witness?" *CTSA Proceedings* 55 (2000): 87-101, at

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movement will not stand for the hypocrisy of politicians who say they value life while they carry out state-sanctioned killings in legal capital punishment or who justify the separation of children from their parents in border detention facilities. Neither will we settle for the status quo of maternal and infant mortality rates that disproportionately impact communities of color.

This Catholic Action Plan for Reproductive Justice is rooted in the principle that every human person has inherent human dignity. We must turn the page on the pro-life movement, rejecting a stale and problematic past and moving forward to a more hopeful future. The work will not be easy, but it will be more coherent, and more just. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis acknowledges,

It is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty. Who can remain unmoved before such painful situations?⁸⁶

We can and must do better. *Another pro-life movement is possible.* The pro-life movement must detach from patriarchal power dynamics, reject oversimplified discourse, and refocus our efforts away from making abortion illegal and instead foster a culture and society that empowers pregnant women to choose life. This will be hard and difficult work. It means redirecting funds. It will be expensive. But it is an opportunity to show all women that their lives matter. Tomorrow's pro-life movement will begin by listening to women's complex stories, accompanying them on their journeys, empowering them to make decisions that align with their deepest values, and reorganizing our social structures to resemble the care of those in need. Tomorrow's pro-life movement will transform our parish infrastructure to serve the needs of the smallest among us. Tomorrow's pro-life movement will build bridges of understanding between social service agencies and advocacy groups that are interested, as we are, in rejecting patriarchal power dynamics and fostering women's agency and moral discernment. The time is now. Join me in this new pro-life movement, a movement of hope, a movement of life, a movement of justice.⁸⁷

90. See also, Emily Reimer-Barry, "On Women's Health and Women's Power: A Feminist Appraisal of *Humanae Vitae*," *Theological Studies* 79 (2018): 818-840.

⁸⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 214.

⁸⁷ The author would like to thank Kathryn Lilla-Cox, Meghan Clark, and two colleagues who wish to remain anonymous, for the valuable feedback they gave on an earlier draft of this presentation. The positions taken within this paper are my own, and do not reflect the positions of my department, university, parish community, family members, friends, or trusted colleagues who offered guidance during my writing process.