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## INTRODUCTION

# A Call for Compassionate Engagement

—JEANETTE HAGEN PIFER and JOHN K. GOODRICH—

*Choose life, that you and your offspring may live.*

Deuteronomy 30:19

Haunted.

This is the word many women use to describe their day-to-day experience after having an abortion. Their haunting includes fear, guilt, shame, confusion, but most of all, the memory of the life that was—and could have been.

Countless women bury these memories deep within. One woman, Elizabeth, recalls being young and poor, with two small children. As a single mom, she worked night and day just to feed her little ones. When she found herself with another positive pregnancy test, fear and insecurity welled up within her as she prepared to tell her then-boyfriend. She expected him to show support and to commit to being there, both for her and for their baby. She hoped he

would marry her, that he would father her three children, and that they would live happily ever after. Instead, he rationalized: “Now is not really a good time. I think you should have an abortion.” After seeing her through the procedure, he abruptly ended the relationship. She was devastated and left to mourn her losses.

Another woman, Lydia, shared her story of teenage pregnancy. Lydia’s family was church-going, but not a Christ-centered household. Alcohol consumed her father, and her mother was emotionally absent, so Lydia began looking to young men for love and attention. At sixteen, she found herself pregnant, and thankfully, her son is with her today. But when she became pregnant a second, and then a third time, Lydia’s mother forced her to abort. She still weeps over the loss of her beloved babies.

A third story concerns a woman at a completely different stage of life. This one is about Cynthia, who in her early thirties was seeking to live life to the fullest—at least in the way the world believes a full life ought to be lived. Finding career success by day and an exciting social life by night, Cynthia too found herself unexpectedly pregnant. Mentally unprepared to become a mother and afraid to raise a child alone, she was unsure about what to do. Heeding the popular message that abortion is a decision that involves only a woman and her doctor, Cynthia knew of no other place to turn but to Planned Parenthood. So she made an appointment, drove herself to the clinic, and aborted her unborn child. Afterward, Cynthia was still successful at the office, but sometime later the nightlife ceased to interest her. Now, a single career woman with no husband and no children, Cynthia lies awake at night regretting her abortion.

Each of these women was torn and confused after finding out about her pregnancy and was either pressured or presented no other alternatives to aborting her baby. Often, women in these

circumstances believe the lie that they are not carrying a child. “It’s just a clump of tissue,” the media assures them. In a matter of minutes, their abortion doctor takes the precious life growing within them. However, the memory of their baby lives on.

Stories like these echo the accounts of many of the million or so women in America per year who receive an abortion.<sup>1</sup> Though their backgrounds differ, their cries resound with the same grief, the same remorse, the same guilt and shame. Many hope deep down that someone will affirm what they know to be true in their hearts—that abortion is taking the life of another person. They long for someone to reassure them that there is another way forward. And if they did not feel this way before the abortion, they certainly do afterward.

While political campaigners and lobbyists tout the tagline that a woman has a right to choose to do with her body whatever she wants, arguments abound against such an appeal. Not only is abortion a death sentence for the unborn, it also leaves scars on the woman that last a lifetime—some physical, others emotional. For many women, it takes several years before they are able to tell their stories. Each of the women above has experienced redemption—indeed God forgives *all* things (1 John 1:9). But they openly admit that their pain has remained with them. It never goes away—not entirely. If only we could save the lives of these millions of unborn children. But an equally important mission is to rescue women in crisis, to help prevent the nights of tears and sleeplessness, and to spare them from the path of shame and guilt.

## **The Cultural War**

If abortion is distressing to the lives of individual women, it has wreaked similar havoc on our contemporary public discourse.

Abortion has been and remains a hotly contested issue in American society, such that simply discussing the morality of abortion elicits passionate opinions on all sides of the social and political spectrum. This is due, on the one hand, to the very personal nature of the issue. Freedoms hang in the balance, and people will fight tooth and nail for the lives and liberties they seek to preserve. Still, abortion in America has become far more than a stand-alone issue. Our country is caught up in a contest between ideologies, in what some have called a *culture war*, and the abortion debate lies squarely at the center of the conflict.

Sociologist James Davison Hunter defines a *cultural conflict* as “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.”<sup>2</sup> According to Hunter, “The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others,” and the focus of the current conflict between Americans is over nothing less than the moral vision and values of our country. Battles erupt daily over hot topics—“abortion, child care, funding for the arts, affirmative action and quotas, gay rights, values in public education, or multiculturalism,” to repeat Hunter’s original list—but these are merely manifestations of a deeper ideological divide. The struggle is really a consequence of the incompatibility of our differing worldviews. “They are not merely attitudes that can change on a whim but basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for the people who live by them. It is for precisely this reason that political action rooted in these principles and ideals tends to be so passionate.”<sup>3</sup>

The culture war has persisted in America for decades, with each side becoming gradually polarized and the rhetoric increasingly vicious. For moral conservatives, it is tempting to believe that if only more religious people would show up to vote that a sea



change would occur in the policies and moral fabric of our country. Yet such a view probably attributes too much influence to the realm of politics. Besides that, lines can no longer be neatly drawn between religious and secular communities, as many who identify as religious, even Christian, support what are typically considered to be morally progressive positions and policies, including the right of women to choose to terminate unwanted pregnancies. According to a 2018 Gallup poll, 34 percent of those who identify as Protestant and 39 percent of those who identify as Catholic consider abortion to be “morally acceptable.”<sup>4</sup>

These are sobering statistics. They reveal just how strongly the tide of progressive culture has pulled the church away from its biblical roots. We don't mean to sensationalize the situation in American Christianity, or to oversimplify all the relevant issues involving abortion and the other highly charged discussion points that frequent the media headlines. Of course, contemporary American politics are extremely complex, often requiring the informed Christian voter to weigh what are sometimes competing moral values as they advance their own priorities and at the same time “seek the welfare” of their fellow American image bearers (Jer. 29:7). More than that, the felt needs and suffering of women who face unplanned pregnancies are very real and should not be dismissed.

But with that said, how can Christians who believe that Jesus became human in order to redeem the human species relativize the worth of the most vulnerable of that species to the point where it is “morally acceptable” to terminate unborn lives? How should those who believe the biblical teaching on the sanctity of life answer the

claims of their pro-choice peers? And how should believers in Jesus respond to the overwhelming political and societal pressure that progressive culture is mounting against evangelical Christianity?

### A Call to Action

In a January 31, 2021, *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, Ryan T. Anderson, president of the Ethics & Public Policy Center, issued a simple call to action worth considering. Anderson advised cultural conservatives to respond directly yet intelligently to the pressures of their ideological opponents. “Americans need to figure out how to coexist peacefully on these issues,” Anderson insisted. “But the answer isn’t for our side to forfeit the fight about the truth by pleading only to be left alone. . . . We’ll have the best shot at winning fights over abortion restrictions,” Anderson argued, “when conservatives are willing to assert that their beliefs are true, not merely protected in law.” According to Anderson, what is needed is for morally conservative thinkers to *engage* abortion defenders and other progressive ideologues, and to do so armed with cogent and rational argumentation—that which can’t be easily dismissed on the basis of religion. “If we fail to fight back in the court of public opinion against the claim that our beliefs are ‘bigoted,’ we will ultimately lose even in courts of law, where the soundness of our beliefs is supposedly irrelevant. If basic truths of human nature are redefined as religious bigotry, they will be excised from society, in court and out.”<sup>5</sup>

Anderson’s call for peaceful, intellectual engagement on the matter of abortion is right on target for anyone who shares his convictions about the Bible’s pro-life message and its teachings on how to engage one’s ideological “other.” “For the weapons of our warfare,” announced the apostle Paul, “are not of the flesh but have divine

power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

Yet the manner of our engagement is as equally important as the method. If we wish for American society ever again to respect—much less reflect—our cherished biblical values, then Christians must embody not only the boldness but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must engage, but do so peaceably (Rom. 12:18). We must speak the truth, but do so in love (Eph. 4:15). We must bear with the assaults of our critics, but do so with “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12). This is all the more important when we step out from behind our mobile devices and social media pseudonyms and have real-life, enfleshed conversations with people we know and love. Indeed, if we ever wish to see our sister, daughter, niece, or neighbor choose life in the wake of an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy, we must arm ourselves with answers as well as empathy.

This book seeks to provide such answers, and to do so in a tone that takes seriously the anxiety and concerns of real women, and that models the way Christians ought to engage in public discourse.<sup>6</sup> With twenty essays authored by leading evangelical thinkers and activists, this volume offers Christians an accessible, charitable, yet well-argued resource for addressing the problem of abortion in our current cultural and political moment. By preparing the reader to answer pro-choice claims with confidence and compassion, we aim to equip Christians to defend prenatal life without compromising their gospel witness.

## The Chapters at a Glance

Each of the chapters of this book is directed in response to one of seven common claims of abortion defenders.

*Claim 1: "The courts have already settled the issue."*

In chapter 1, "A More Excellent Way: Moral Decision-Making beyond Government Law," John Goodrich argues that true virtue and morality must operate within a system of ethics that considers morality beyond government legal prescription and proscription. Instead, people in general, but even more so followers of Jesus, must draw on the resources of *reason* to deduce natural law, and of *revelation* to discern biblical principles for decision-making, not least "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2)—the way of living in conformity to Jesus' self-giving and sacrifice motivated by love of others.

In "*Roe v. Wade*: Destined for the Dustbin," chapter 2, attorney Catherine Glenn Foster outlines various reasons why the landmark Supreme Court decision on abortion will inevitably be overturned. Foster reveals how widely criticized *Roe* is even within the legal community as well as how vulnerable it remains to reversal. This she demonstrates on the basis of the current composition of the Supreme Court, as well as the recent opinions the court justices have authored, which together point toward the eventual overturning of the ruling. Along the way, Foster shares her own disturbing story of forced abortion, the medical risks of abortion, and what it is going to take moving forward to make *Roe* a thing of the past.

*Claim 2: "The fetus is not a person."*

Chapter 3, "Made in God's Image: Personhood according to Scripture," examines those passages of Scripture that address prenatal life

in order to answer the questions of whether the fetus is a person and thus whether the command “do not murder” applies to the unborn. Jeanette Hagen Pifer draws on a definition of personhood rooted in the biblical idea of being made in God’s image and concludes that from God’s perspective, there is a continuity of personal identity from inside to outside the womb—and thus the commandment not to murder absolutely applies to taking the life of the unborn.

In chapter 4, “More Than the Sum of Its Parts: Philosophical Reflections on Human Personhood,” Scott Rae argues for a *substance view* of the human being that necessitates taking seriously the personhood and moral status of human embryos and fetuses. While various arguments have been advanced to suggest that the personhood of the human being should be assigned late in the developmental process, Rae demonstrates that each of these arguments relies only on arbitrary criteria for defining or detecting personhood.

“Knit Together in a Mother’s Womb: The Biology of Prenatal Development.” In chapter 5, Tara Sander Lee draws on the insights of recent scientific discovery to demonstrate that a new biological human being is created at the moment of conception. She walks the reader through the entire process of embryonic and fetal development, highlighting landmark moments of growth and effectively showing that a separate organism—indeed, a human person—is what is living and maturing within the pregnant woman.

From a legal standpoint, Joshua Craddock argues for the personhood of unborn humans on the basis of an originalist reading of the US Constitution in chapter 6, “Equal Protection for the Preborn: A Case for Prenatal Personhood according to the Fourteenth Amendment.” Focusing on the Fourteenth Amendment, Craddock explains that the Amendment’s protection of every “person” within the jurisdiction of the United States guarantees the same for the

preborn, since “person” at the time of the Amendment’s ratification was understood to encompass all members of the human species, born and unborn alike. His findings serve as the basis not only for overturning *Roe v. Wade* but also for the federal government’s prohibiting of abortion even in those states that have adopted laws protecting abortion rights.

*Claim 3: “My body, my choice.”*

In chapter 7, “Whose Body? The Illusion of Autonomy,” Joy Riley disassembles the argument that the mother should have the right to abort simply because the fetus occupies *her* body, exposing the lie that abortion only involves the mother. Abortions implicate many others, including the distinct unborn person who is growing inside her, as well as the medical professionals who contribute to the taking of unborn life. Riley also shows that, from a Christian ethical perspective, there are other, more important factors to consider in abortion besides one’s own “self-rule,” namely that believers in Jesus are charged not to make decisions principally for their own good, but for the well-being of others.

In “Marvelously Revealed: The Symphony of a Woman’s Body,” chapter 8, Donna Harrison invites the reader to see afresh the beautiful intricacies of how a woman’s body functions to prepare for and accommodate procreation. The female reproductive anatomy is nothing short of a gift from God. Indeed, a woman’s body undergoes various awesome developments throughout pregnancy and over the course of her life. These changes not only bear God’s fingerprints but demand that the woman’s body be protected from the dangers of abortion, in order to ensure her medical well-being.

*Claim 4: "I should not have to raise an unwanted child."*

Bethany Bomberger responds to the lie propagandized for a century by Planned Parenthood that only "wanted" children should be brought into this world in chapter 9, "The Myth of the Unwanted Child: How Adoption Powerfully Dispels the Lie." Bomberger shows that in fact every child is wanted and has inherent value and purpose. Then after sharing her own family's involvement in adoption, Bomberger calls on all Christians to participate in the mission of adoption while encouraging women with unplanned pregnancies to consider entrusting their child to the care of an adoptive family.

In chapter 10, "Mom, Thank You for Choosing Life: The Perspective of an Abortion Survivor," Sarah Zagorski tells the inspiring yet heart-wrenching story of her own delivery—a failed abortion attempt that resulted in a standoff between her impoverished, immigrant mother and a notorious abortion physician over whether Sarah, a 26-week-old preemie, would live or die. She unpacks the complexities of her mother's story, which have led her to a place of increased empathy for women who consider abortion. Sarah calls Christians to love, not judge, these women in need, while encouraging these women to follow in her mother's steps by taking the courageous step of choosing life.

*Claim 5: "My circumstances justify ending my pregnancy."*

"Embracing Life's Bump: Experiencing God's Grace in Teenage Pregnancy." In chapter 11, Amy Ford invites the reader into her own account of teen pregnancy and of coming within moments of aborting her son. By God's grace, she was able to walk out of the abortion clinic and embrace the gift of motherhood. But her own experience lacked the support she now realizes is essential for teens who face

unplanned pregnancies today. Teenage mothers require love and community, as well as various practical means of support to provide for themselves, to care for their child, and perhaps to finish school. Amy discusses all of this, as well as the possibility of adoption, in order to encourage and empower teen moms to choose life.

In chapter 12, “Hope Is Found in Hard Places: Pregnant during Financial Hardship,” Christina Bennett tells the story of her mother, Andrea, whose providential encounter with a mysterious woman in the halls of the hospital empowered her to walk out of her abortion appointment and choose life—Christina’s life. Andrea would go on to raise Christina and her brother as a single mother with very few resources. Yet Christina’s childhood was full of love, and by perseverance and God’s grace she has accomplished much. Christina uses her story and those of others as well as Scripture to encourage pregnant women with few resources to trust in God to provide for their needs, and never to find their identity in what they lack.

Chapter 13 is titled “But God Intended It for Good: Finding Purpose in Pregnancy from Rape.” Paula Ilari, a woman who was gang raped but chose to carry and love her baby rather than abort, vividly retells the harrowing event that changed her forever. Yet despite the trauma of the experience, Paula has found peace and purpose in her son Caleb. This, she shares, is the outlook of most rape victims who decide to carry their babies. Thus, after narrating her assault and its aftermath, Paula offers a word of encouragement to mothers in similar circumstances. God, she assures us, is working to transform pain into purpose.

In chapter 14, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Reimagining Pregnancy When the Baby Has Disabilities,” Carlynn Fabarez shares the sobering account of being pregnant with her daughter, Stephanie, who was diagnosed during a routine ultrasound appointment with



serious medical conditions. The doctor adamantly advised the couple to abort. But recognizing the sanctity of Stephanie's life regardless of her relative health, Carlynn and Mike courageously chose life and carried Stephanie for the length of the pregnancy, a decision that was made on the basis of scriptural truth. Seeking to provide strength for women facing pregnancies with similar medical complications, Carlynn shares with the reader ten biblically grounded reasons to choose life when fear and uncertainty assault one's heart.

“Are Abortions Ever Medically Necessary? A Life-Affirming Approach to Complex Pregnancies.” In chapter 15, Kendra Kolb makes the case that abortion is never necessary to preserve the health or life of an expectant mother. While various medical conditions can seriously jeopardize a mother's well-being, what such pregnancies require is preterm delivery, not abortion. Not only are certain early delivery methods faster than abortion, but when performed past the point of viability, early deliveries often result in saving the life of not only the mother but the child, thanks to recent advances in medical technology. For this reason and others, Kolb argues that there is not a single maternal or fetal condition that necessitates the direct and intentional termination of preborn life in order to preserve the life of the mother.

*Claim 6: “Abortions are helpful to women and society.”*

Victoria Robinson, author, speaker, and pro-life activist, shares from her own experience of having an abortion, as well as her experience counseling thousands of post-abortive women. In chapter 16, “The Truth about Post-Abortive Trauma: The Personal Account of a Survivor and Activist,” Victoria outlines the devastating effects of abortion on both women and men, concluding that the consequences of abortion far surpass the challenge of an unplanned pregnancy.

In chapter 17, “An Expedient Tool: The Harmful Effects of Abortion on Society,” Patrina Mosley demonstrates how abortion negatively impacts not only women and men, but broader society as well. In particular, Mosley exposes how Planned Parenthood is rooted in eugenics—the elite and powerful have promoted abortion in order to control the population of “those we don’t want too many of.” Often, abortion is touted as a tool for accomplishing good, but in reality it is nothing short of an expedient tool for producing evil.

*Claim 7: “The pro-life movement doesn’t care about social justice.”*

In chapter 18, “The Voices and Values of the New Pro-Life Generation,” Charlotte Pence Bond, author, activist, and daughter of former Vice President Mike Pence, provides a window into the culture and convictions of young people today, arguing that the commitment of millennials and younger generations to upholding social justice has primed them to oppose the practice of elective abortion. Bond demonstrates on numerous counts why the pro-life movement is rightly understood to be a social justice movement, and then profiles several young leaders of the pro-life movement whose varied forms of activism have and will continue to inspire young people to advocate for the protection of the unborn.

Sandy Christiansen, in chapter 19, “The Hands and Feet of Jesus: How Pregnancy Centers Care for Women and Men,” draws on her personal experience with and expert knowledge of pregnancy centers in order to dispel the myth that the pro-life movement cares only about unborn babies and not the others involved. Pregnancy centers stand at the frontlines of the pro-life movement providing a range of valuable services and a depth of care that brings healing to the whole person and the entire family, all free of charge. Local pregnancy centers are a safe place where expecting mothers and

parents of newborns can turn for compassion, hope, and help in the name of Jesus.

“The Pro-Life Movement: A Last Line of Protection for Black Women and Their Babies.” In chapter 20, Catherine Davis powerfully exposes how Planned Parenthood and its supporters have systematically targeted the Black community from the very inception of the abortion industry in America. After surveying the early history of this organization’s attempts to disguise this targeting, Davis examines how Planned Parenthood has rebranded itself in recent years in order to deflect negative publicity, while strategically targeting the pro-life movement and pregnancy resource centers in order to suppress the pro-life message.

## **Our Hope**

Whether the book is read cover to cover, or only selectively in order to grow in one’s understanding of specific issues, we hope this resource will equip the reader with cogent, rational argumentation that is at the same time grace-filled and Christ-honoring. It is our desire to prepare readers to engage in the abortion debate with answers and empathy, reason and understanding, confidence and compassion. In doing so, we hope that more women, like Elizabeth, Lydia, and Cynthia, will find the help they need before making the life-altering decision to abort their babies.

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