

How to Forge a Pro-Life Culture in the Face of Elite Resistance

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ABSTRACT: Building on the arguments of James Davison Hunter's *To Change the World*, this essay suggests that the chances of bringing about a deep transformation of culture in the United States – on the life issues generally, and on the issues of abortion and euthanasia specifically – is unlikely. A more modest, and very important, goal would be to reinforce the pro-life subcultures in America and to make some significant incremental progress in improving American law and mores regarding these and similar life-issues. To this end, I offer some suggestions about resources that the pro-life movement has and various ways in which it might work on forming a more pro-life culture in the face of elite resistance. I conclude by discussing some likely future challenges that the pro-life movement will face in the future.

IN THIS ESSAY I would like to do two things. First, I will discuss the notion of culture. I will do so largely by reference to certain sections of James Davison Hunter's *To Change the World*.¹ Second, I will try to apply Hunter's general framework to pro-life issues, by identifying some of the major reasons why we do not currently have a pro-life culture. Third, I will ask what we ought to do, in light of Hunter's analysis. Fourth, I want to offer some suggestions about resources that we have and various ways in which we might work on forming a more pro-life culture. Fifth, I want to suggest some likely

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¹ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

future challenges the pro-life movement will face and offer some suggestions as a stimulus to discussion.

To Change the World

Anyone who wants to understand the ideal of changing the culture must come to grips with the powerful argument of James Davison Hunter's *To Change the World*. His analysis of culture and cultural change is contained in chapter four ("An Alternative View of Culture and Cultural Change in Eleven Propositions"). The first seven deal primarily with the definition and characteristics of culture.

First, the heart of culture is "a normative order by which we comprehend others, the larger world, and ourselves and through which we individually and collectively order our experience. These norms define what is good and evil, right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, honorable and shameful." These norms are mostly not pre-conscious, but embedded within narratives and myths, and they extend beyond right and wrong to our whole understanding of reality. They are tied up with our language, which provides the most basic system of symbols through which we understand reality.

Second, culture takes form in history as the slow accretions of meaning in society over long periods of time. The interaction of history and culture creates dispositions in society that are a kind of second nature.

Third, culture is intrinsically dialectical. By this term Hunter means two things. First, culture is a complex interaction of both ideas and institutions (led by elites) that organize human activity. These institutions include especially the market, the state, education, the media of mass communications, scientific and technological research, and the family as a means of socialization. Second, individuals have beliefs and values and therefore shape the social order, but that order reflects back on the individuals and shapes the structures of their consciousness. Individuals are important, but institutions have much greater power.

Fourth, culture involves symbols used in the expression of ideas, information, news, wisdom, and knowledge of all kinds, expressed in a multitude of forms. Knowledge, technical know-how, credentials, and cultural accomplishments are all forms of capital. Some individuals, organizations, and objects have more than others (e.g., a Ph.D. more than a car mechanic, *The New York Times* more than *The Dallas Morning News*, Yale more than Bob Jones University, an Oscar more than a Christian Film Award). This capital

translates into power and influence, including credibility and the power of “legitimate naming.” An op ed in *The New York Times* has more value than one in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*.

Fifth, cultural production and symbolic capital are stratified in a fairly rigid structure of “center” and “periphery.” This is a question not so much of quantity (as with money and economic capital) but of quality, and especially the status of cultural credentials and accomplishments. Culture is shaped especially by the individuals, networks, and institutions in the center, where prestige is highest, and not on the periphery, where status is low. Christian books can sell hundreds of thousands of copies but will not be on the best seller list of *The New York Times* or be reviewed in the *New York Review of Books*. You might get a better education at (I would say) the University of Dallas, but going to Harvard will make it much more likely that you will occupy a position of influence.

Sixth, culture is generated within networks. Here Hunter attacks the “Great Man” theory of history. It is not so much great individuals who shape culture and history as networks and the institutions that they create. Great individuals have an impact, but it is mediated to a very great extent by these networks and institutions. There have certainly been many great people in human history – in terms of their personal qualities and talents – who are simply unknown because their circumstances made it impossible to greatly influence others.

Seventh, culture is neither autonomous nor fully coherent. Culture is not autonomous, because it is mixed together in complex ways with all other institutions, especially the market economy and the state. Much of our economy deals with production – not of things, but of symbols. The modern state, likewise, deals to a great extent with knowledge and information (science, regulation, the judiciary, and, above all, education). Culture is also composed of innumerable fields (relatively distinct and often-overlapping regions of meaning, activity, networks, and relationships, as well as rules and interests): religions, ideologies, publishing, entertainment, education, each with its own subfields. Moreover, there are different geographical regions, ethnic groups, and social classes as well as religious traditions and moral communities.

Having laid out these seven propositions on what culture is, Hunter then provides four propositions about cultural change. Ideas have consequences, it is said. More precisely, ideas sometimes have consequences – under specific

conditions and circumstances. What are they?

Eighth, cultures change from the top down, rarely from the bottom up. The work of world-making and world-changing are, by and large, the work of elites: gatekeepers who provide creative direction and management within spheres of social life. The capacity to employ symbols and to define reality is not distributed evenly in society. It is concentrated in certain institutions and among leadership groups, operating in well-developed networks and powerful institutions, with lopsided access to the means of cultural production. Over time, cultural innovation is translated and diffused, moving from the conceptual to the concrete: from theorists to researchers to teachers and educators to popularizers. Cultural change is most enduring when it penetrates the structure of imagination, frameworks of knowledge and discussion, the perception of everyday reality. This rarely arises from grassroots activity; usually it comes from the top down.

Ninth, change is typically initiated by elites who are outside the center-most positions of prestige. Within the center itself, there are gradations of prestige. Between Yale and Wheaton, for instance, there is NYU, which is part of the center, though less prestigious. The *Boston Globe* is in the center, though not as much as the *New York Times*. Innovation generally moves from elites at the outer range of the center. They call into question the ideas and practices of the culture's leading gatekeepers, aiming to infiltrate the center, and to re-define its leading ideas and practices.

Tenth, world-changing is most concentrated when the networks of elites and the institutions that they lead overlap. When networks of elites in overlapping fields of culture and spheres of social life (economics and politics) come together and act with common purpose, cultures do change and change profoundly, though it must persist over time (generations, not a few years).

Eleventh, cultures change, but not without a fight. Culture is a realm in which institutions and their agents seek to defend one understanding of the world against alternatives. This struggle is never fair – in fact, it is unequal – but always contested. When there are challenges to the status quo, those challenges (their discourse, moral demands, institutions, symbols, rituals) must resonate, in some way, with the social setting – closely enough that it is plausible to people.

In sum, ideas are not enough. They have to be grounded in social conditions and circumstances. Nor are individuals. They have to be supported by networks and the new institutions that they create. Nor is changing hearts

and minds enough, for culture is much more complex and it is what tends to shape hearts and minds and individuals.

One important lesson that Hunter draws from this overview is that cultures are profoundly resistant to change. That is because the most profound changes in culture first penetrate into the linguistic and mythic fabric of a social order, thereby penetrating the hierarchy of rewards and privileges and of deprivations and punishments that organize social life, re-organizing the structures of consciousness and character, and re-ordering the organization of impulse and inhibition. This is hard even to see during the process. It is seen largely in retrospect, after it has occurred. He concludes that evangelism, politics, social reform all bring about good ends – changed hearts and minds, laws, social behaviors – but do not influence the moral fabric that makes these changes sustainable over the long term. They do not change the DNA of a civilization. He imagines a new “Great Awakening” where half the population is converted to a deep Christian faith, and then argues that, unless this awakening reaches the cultural gatekeepers and restructures the institutions of culture formation and transmission, it would have a negligible long-term effect on the reconstruction of the culture. This applies, likewise, to movements of social reform (e.g., educational reform and family policy), the election of Christians to major offices, and their appointment to judicial positions. He offers the temperance movement as an example of this kind of apparent success, only to be followed by long-term failure.

The problem is that “the inherited categories derived largely from biblical and classical sources by which we understand the most basic aspects of human life have been and are being transformed by very powerful forces over which individuals and social groups have little control, forces such as consumerism, communications technology, and so on.” So, while calls to renewal of cultural values – through evangelism, politics, and social reform – are welcome, they cannot transform the present cultural order at its most rudimentary level.

I will not continue with Hunter’s account of the current status of Christianity in our culture, but suffice it to say that it is pretty depressing. He acknowledges all the fine work that so many people do, in so many fields, but he concludes that “Christians are absent from the institutions at the center of cultural production.” They operate “exactly in the lower and peripheral areas of cultural production” and so “the collective impact of the Christian community on the nature and direction of the culture itself is negligible.”

Fleshing Out Hunter's Analysis with Respect to Pro-Life Issues

By now it should be clear that one of the major obstacles to establishing a more pro-life culture is the deep and even fierce hostility of our currently dominant elites to pro-life principles. The major forces of what Hunter calls "cultural production" are lined up strongly against pro-life principles. Why? How did we get to where we are today?

Long-Term Cultural Factors

First, we might note that the changes in our culture that have legitimated what some call "the culture of death" have deep roots in ideas. Intellectuals have played a pivotal role. One of the great questions we have to ask is why intellectuals are so reliably *not* pro-life.

This is a long and complex story that goes back at least to the roots of the Enlightenment. Major philosophers and intellectuals at least since the sixteenth century have been on a trajectory of increasing hostility to Judeo-Christianity and the morality associated with it. Intellectual life has been characterized by a deepening philosophical pluralism about human ends and even the very possibility of knowing them with any certainty. This trend accompanied and was caused, at least in part, by the rise of modern science and a scientific rationalism that accompanied it. Trends in ethical and social thought moved toward hedonism and utilitarianism or toward various forms of Kantianism with a heavy emphasis on autonomy.

At the same time, there has been a significant decline in what we might call the social power of Christianity. This came about in part because of the intellectual trends we have mentioned, but it also came from self-inflicted wounds such as the divisions of Christianity since the Reformation, religious intolerance and warfare, and the opposition of Christians to some of the good (as well as the bad) aspects of modernity.

More Recent Historical Factors

Besides the long-term trends, there have been more recent historical tendencies that have undermined a stronger commitment to the sanctity of human life. I want to single out four of them.

First, since World War II, the influence of intellectual elites has grown dramatically because they have been transmitted to non-elites more effectively. At one time, large segments of Americans had little or no contact with intellectual elites, but in the last seventy years that has changed. Two factors,

in particular, have been crucial: the expansion of higher education and the expansion of affluence.

With the GI Bill great growth came about for colleges and universities. As a result, a much larger percentage of our population is directly exposed to the ideas dominant among intellectuals. At the same time, teachers in primary and secondary education are educated in those universities and that magnifies the indirect influence of intellectuals on education at all levels.

The post-World War II era also saw an amazing expansion of affluence, which led to much more time for leisure and entertainment, and therefore a great increase in the influence of the media elites who provide that entertainment. Those media elites have tended to take their intellectual and moral orientation from the dominant intellectual elites. This affluence also contributed to the populace being more vulnerable to hedonistic appeals inconsistent (either explicitly or more subtly) with religion and morality.

A second development concerns the interaction of technology with marriage, family, and sexuality. Hunter sees clearly that a key to culture is the interaction of ideas, institutions, and social circumstances, and nowhere has this been more obvious than the complex of issues involving marriage, family, and sexuality.

The contraceptive revolution that is at the heart of the sexual revolution strikes me as perhaps the greatest revolution in the twentieth century (a century of many revolutions). The widespread availability and use of contraception brought about a dis-integration of cultural attitudes toward sex, children, and marriage. There are three relationships here: sex and children, marriage and children, and sex and marriage. Historically, the close connection between sex and having children was not only a moral proposition but an unavoidable physical fact. Contraception changed that substantially – perhaps even more psychologically than physically. That separation led to a further separation between marriage and children. The nature of marriage was now understood as an especially intense emotional friendship and one in which children played a decidedly subordinate role, or sometimes no role at all. Unsurprisingly, once sex was “freed from” procreation, it became an autonomous activity, not essentially related to marriage.

While marriage is a natural institution – indeed, a pre-political institution – that does not mean that it can thrive or survive without the support of laws and mores. Given that there are powerful elements of human nature that find the bonds of marriage very constricting, the maintenance of marriage as a

social institution has required such support. The sexual revolution undermined that support, and the result has been a dramatic weakening of the institution. This revolution has been a battering ram against the institution of marriage and a powerful factor undermining institutional religion.

A third recent historical factor is what might be called “the Woman Question.” Contraception, abortion, the dramatic expansion of women’s opportunities for education and employment, no-fault divorce, ideological assaults on the idea that there are natural differences between men and women – all of these have contributed to a great uncertainty about what constitutes the fulfillment and happiness of women. In general, there has been an astoundingly quick transformation of expectations about a woman’s life, with work (and the education necessary for it) now dominant, and the importance of children curtailed and widely considered less central (though by no means unimportant). I should indicate, if only parenthetically, that these disruptions regarding the nature of women and their role in society were not just the result of baneful modern trends but were also, in some significant measure, the fruit of genuine difficulties in traditional male-female relations. That is, I do not think that there was any golden age in the past.

A fourth recent historical factor in the decline of pro-life culture is the failure of our own elites, and, most importantly, religious leaders and theologians. This failure includes the infiltration of theology by different forms of modernism and the compromises that many Christian churches have made with the sexual revolution. Protestants have been especially vulnerable to the sexual revolution’s promotion of contraception, given the sparseness of explicit scriptural norms on this subject, but Protestants have also become vulnerable to divorce, despite very explicit norms. One should also note the lack of fortitude on the part of many church leaders and thinkers, and, in some cases, their outright surrender to cultural trends (consider the case of some Catholic bishops during the post-Vatican II confusion), and a great failure within churches of the mechanisms by which they hand on their faith to their children.

In Light of Hunter’s Analysis, What Are We to Do?

I think that, for the most part, Hunter is right in his descriptions of culture, cultural formation, and cultural change. This means that his account can be a starting point for thinking about the future from the perspective of the pro-life movement. What he describes is the cultural context in which we must operate for the foreseeable and very long-term future. Understanding this context will

preserve us from making important mistakes and from being discouraged by the limits of what we can do. But, at the same time, we have to understand also that Hunter's analysis is not a proposal that, because the dominant cultural forces are against us, we should give up. It is not an argument that we can do nothing useful or important.

What, then, should we do? First, we should avoid false aspirations to change the deep culture that he describes. It is a task that exceeds our grasp. This does not mean that we should never think about or hope for long-term change. But what very little we can do in this respect would largely come from the accumulation of undertakings with much more limited goals. It is worthwhile remembering that, while long-term work to change the "deep" culture is far beyond the capacity of individuals, the currently dominant culture can be traced back to the efforts of individuals (eventually, in their networks) long ago in the past. We can be doing the same thing.

Second, we can be aware of the change that can come through circulation of elites in the center. Elites sympathetic to pro-life goals are a distinct minority, but we do have some people in the outer rings of the center – intellectuals, publicists, business leaders, and so on – and they can be working with a view to establishing the conditions for the displacement of currently dominant elites, even if it is unlikely or takes centuries. These efforts, however unlikely to achieve success, serve important functions, especially that of providing resources to maintain our subcultures.

Third, as Hunter acknowledges, there is not just one monolithic culture (even if there is a dominant one). There are many people who are not part of the dominant culture – like us – and we need to protect ourselves and our families, and to make efforts to bring more people into these subcultures. This is, I think, the key objective on which we should focus. But an *essential* element of the struggle to maintain our pro-life subculture is the battle to maintain pro-life principles as much as we can in the more general culture. We will not be able to persuade our children that we really care about these principles unless we show that we are willing to fight for them in the country at large. This is one lesson, I think, of the decision of most American Catholics, including their leaders, not to vigorously defend the Church's teaching on contraception in the public square in the post-Vatican II period. The result has been that this teaching came to be regarded not as a truth about the human person, but as a "rule for Catholics," and this decision helped to make the teaching unconvincing even to people within the Church.

As we think about the need to maintain our efforts to articulate and defend and, where possible enact, pro-life principles, it is worth remembering that the dominant culture has its own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. We need to exploit them. This will not necessarily change the dominant culture anytime in the foreseeable future, but it will help us protect and at times expand our subcultures.

How Do We Forge a Pro-Life Culture in Our Circumstances?

If our goal, then, is to build up the pro-life subculture, what resources are available to support the pro-life cause? I will discuss some general resources, some more specific resources, and adventitious circumstances. Let's begin by mentioning three general resources.

First, we should never forget that there are permanent – I believe, ineradicable – features of human nature that support the pro-life cause. The very will to live and to keep those we love alive is a powerful factor limiting euthanasia and abortion. The desire to love and be loved is a powerful factor working against the trivialization of sex, for which abortion is the handmaid. As Rodney Stark argued in *The Rise of Christianity*,² one of the key reasons for the eventual success of Christianity in Rome was its appeal to women, especially because of its commitment to chastity and the sanctity of life. Against powerful currents of scientism and scientific determinism, there is the seemingly indestructible search of human beings for meaning.

Second, there is modern science. The physical sciences (including embryology and genetics) are often deployed by those hostile to pro-life principles, but in fact they help to provide a convincing case that human life begins at conception. Moreover, social science – again, typically dominated today by those hostile to pro-life principles – can provide evidence supporting pro-life principles, such as a vision of family life that supports the subordination of the sexual impulse to its imperatives and the denial of the necessity of abortion.

Third, religion (despite the hopes and expectations of those who call themselves “the Brights”) will never be eradicated. As Alexis de Tocqueville argues, for example, one powerful ground for religion, rooted in a fixed point of the human heart, is the desire for immortality.³ Science can make assump

² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco CA: HarperCollins, 1997).

³ Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York

tions about what is on the other side of death, but it can prove nothing about that. Fifty years ago, the secularization thesis – the idea that as a society modernizes, religion inevitably declines and ceases to exert power in people’s lives – was very powerful, but it has much less support now, even among intellectuals who wished it were so.

The permanence of religion in human life is important, because religion (especially revealed religions, with their conception of the supernatural or the transcendent) provide powerful support to the natural law. Natural law, on its own account, does not necessarily require the support of religion, but that “necessarily” obscures something important. Natural law is, in principle, knowable without religion, but in practice religion is one of its strongest supports. This is because openness to the natural law is obscured by a distorted orientation of the will, and religion, in most people’s lives, is the strongest factor in rectifying the will.

Turning from these general resources to more specific resources in our world for the support of pro-life principles, I will mention the following four.

First, the pro-life segment of our society has a built-in advantage: we are much more committed to procreating, and so we do it more and better. We have more children than do those who do not share pro-life ideals. That is one reason why education is such a battleground. To keep the culture moving away from pro-life principles, it is necessary to win over at least a considerable portion of each new generation, and these children come disproportionately from pro-life families. The importance of education is also one reason for the extensive contemporary discussion of the so-called “Benedict Option.”⁴

Second, in the area of education, there are encouraging changes in our society, among them the growth and legitimization of home-schooling and the dissatisfaction with public education that has led to a growth in the charter-school movement. These are resources to pro-life families that were not available a generation or so ago.

Third, in the area of the means of social communication, the rise of the internet has had a significant impact, breaking up old media hierarchies (e.g., the old network monopoly) and decentralizing the elaboration and spread of information. While this is a two-edged sword (just think of pornography), it has

NY: Alfred Knopf, 1972) Vol. I, Ch. 17, p. 300.

⁴Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York NY: Sentinel, 2017).

the important benefit of offering to the pro-life movement an opportunity to establish and expand effective networks of communication and education.

Fourth, contemporary society has seen the growth of a movement toward “the natural” in many ways. Concerns about damaging the environment, the movement in favor of organic food and against genetically-modified food, doubts about vaccination, the attraction to “natural” medical remedies are all examples. Irrespective of how much credence you would give to these movements yourself, they constitute a “handle” when dealing with issues of life and sex. Abortion and contraception muck around with the reproductive system, and there are inevitably side effects.

Besides these general and specific resources available to the pro-life movement, there is another factor that needs to be given significant weight, in my opinion: these are the changes in social circumstances that provide a context for the formation of culture and for cultural change. In particular, I am thinking of major social disruptions. These disruptions can “shake up” currently dominant culture in varied and highly unpredictable ways. Examples would be war (including major terrorist acts) and economic upheavals (such as depressions). These cannot be easily anticipated or predicted, but they occur with considerable regularity in human history, and there is no reason to believe that the foreseeable future will be an exception. We would not wish for such disruptions, for they carry with them so many evils and have the potential to degrade the culture further. But we can recognize that they may provide occasions for people to break from unconscious, deeply embedded cultural assumptions.

Likely Future Challenges

The pro-life movement arose primarily as a response to the legalization of surgical abortions, beginning in some states in the 1960s and culminating in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. What the movement has accomplished in the last forty-five years is nothing short of astounding. In the face of overwhelming elite support for abortion rights and their efforts to remove the issue from American life – entirely to privatize it – the pro-life movement has kept the issue very intensely alive here (unlike Europe, for instance).

Rachel McNair argues in her recent *First Things* piece that we have a “Pro-Life Future.”⁵ With respect to surgical abortions, there is some truth in what she has to say. The number of abortions is down significantly in the U.S.,

⁵ Rachel McNair, “Our Pro-Life Future” in *First Things* (June, 2018).

not least because many doctors will not touch a procedure fraught with such controversy. Younger Americans generally identify themselves as more pro-life, perhaps especially because of ultrasound technology that is now routine for pregnancies and that leaves little doubt as to human life in the womb.

But there are complications that should make us less confident about a pro-life future. First, we are in the process of a shift from surgical abortions to pharmaceutical abortions. The means used for these abortions include not only RU-486 but also so-called emergency contraception (such as Plan B) and, in some cases, oral contraceptives.

The medical profession (especially the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) has colluded in the effort deliberately to obscure the difference between abortion and contraception. As a Planned Parenthood website puts it, “according to the general medical definitions of pregnancy that have been endorsed by many organizations – including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the United States Department of Health and Human Services – pregnancy begins when a pre-embryo completes implantation into the lining of the uterus.”⁶ The destruction of a fertilized egg before implantation is counted as contraception, not abortion, though, in fact, it is a species of the latter, not the former.

There is debate as to whether, and to what extent, oral contraceptives may act not just by preventing fertilization but also by preventing implantation of the blastocyst. Given the politicized nature of so-called science today, it is difficult to know which studies to trust. But early descriptions of oral contraceptives seem to have routinely mentioned the possibility of failed implantation as one mechanism of the pill, and so I am strongly inclined to believe that it operates that way in at least some cases.⁷ Even if the number of cases is relatively small, given the widespread use of oral contraceptives, the absolute numbers would be significant.

One of the key features of pharmaceutical abortion is that it can often take place early in a pregnancy, before the embryo looks like a human person. Pictures of children in the womb (and those destroyed by later abortions) have been a powerful weapon for the pro-life movement. If the abortion is occurring very early in pregnancy, before the embryo looks like a human being, this will reduce the emotional impact of one aspect of the pro-life argument. Whether

⁶https://www.plannedparenthood.org/files/3914/6012/8466/Difference_Between_the_Morning-After_Pill_and_the_Abortion_Pill.pdf.

⁷ See, for example, <http://uffl.org/vol10/colliton10.pdf>.

it is rational to make a judgment simply on the basis of what something looks like (how much does a newborn baby look like an adult human being, after all?) may be less important than the fact that people often do it.

Second, as the pro-life movement has increasingly understood over time, abortion is not the only life issue. Prominent among other issues is euthanasia. I use the term euthanasia to include not only direct killing of ill persons, but also physician-assisted suicide and termination of ordinary means of life support, such as food and hydration, with intent to end a life. Euthanasia is destined, I believe, to be a major issue in the future. Intellectual and professional elites are generally sympathetic to it. We have seen it arrive in Europe, especially the Netherlands, where voluntary euthanasia has been extended to involuntary euthanasia, to the point where some old people there are very resistant to entering hospitals. As I argued at the UFL annual meeting two years ago, the Supreme Court decisions on euthanasia in 1996 contained indications that a majority of the Court would support physician-assisted suicide in certain circumstances.⁸ Given that the health costs of the baby-boomer generation are going to be a massive burden on succeeding generations, and that the dominant ideals of the boomers included a very broad moral autonomy, it would be surprising if euthanasia did *not* become a more intense battle.

Third, I continue to believe that in the future oral contraceptives and barrier methods will give way to other methods of birth regulation. In particular, I think it is likely that future technological change will make possible easily reversible sterilization. When this technology is available, it will be possible for adolescents hitting puberty to be routinely sterilized, so that they are free to engage in sex “without complications” for the next ten or fifteen years, then reverse the sterilization to have one or two children, and then be re-sterilized. The question we would have to ask ourselves is whether a society in which this process was routine could be described realistically as a pro-life society.

Conclusion

Hunter ultimately calls for Christians to aim at being “a faithful presence” in the world. He argues that expectations and efforts to “change the world” through politics and social reform actually can make the situation worse. It can end up making politics and social reform the end rather than the means. It can also lead to a kind of negativity, anger, and shrillness that undercut our efforts

⁸ https://www.uffl.org/pdfs/vol26/UFL_2016_Wolfe.pdf.

to improve the situation as best we can, within the substantial limits that constrain us.

This seems to me to be an argument, not about avoiding politics and social reform, but about the way to understand it and go about it. He is not advocating a quietism or withdrawal from public life, but rather a humble understanding of our limits, which will help us to live and work with a greater peace and serenity, which will actually help us in our efforts to deal more effectively with our fellow-citizens.

The importance of maintaining political and social efforts to defend pro-life principles should be clear from recent events. Donald Trump has been an awkward pro-life leader, at best, given his vulgarity and doubts about the depth of his convictions. At the same time, he was the first national leader in memory to understand that opposition to abortion was not a political liability and, in a presidential debate, to take the issue to his opponent rather than going into a defensive crouch.

Trump's election had enormous implications. If Hillary Clinton had become president and had appointed Justice Scalia's replacement, the result almost certainly would have been, not just re-affirmation of *Roe v. Wade*, but also a shift on the Court to requiring public funding of abortion as a medical procedure. I think it would have led to the virtual sidelining of earlier euthanasia decisions (not overruled but "distinguished" out of existence). It would have led to the overturning of the *Hobby-Lobby Case*.⁹ That is, Trump's election had profoundly important results in terms of the number of unborn children who will be aborted and the number of older people who will be permitted (and, realistically, sometimes encouraged) to end their lives. That will not change the general culture, but it will save lives now and into the future. That is a very good thing.

At the same time, given the circumstances we face, we are going to win some and lose some. Those losses will be heart-breaking. But I think there is a good deal of prudence in Hunter's recommendation that we do not make the political results (even results as important as these) the all-consuming end of our activity. We can only do our best, relying (as our Founders did) on Divine Providence and continue to work with serenity and faith. In the long run, in our efforts to support and expand our pro-life subculture, our best weapon is our joy and happiness, from the living out of our ideals.

⁹ *Burwell v. Hobby-Lobby* 573 US _ (2014).