

## ENDORSEMENTS

As a husband, father, and advocate for the preborn, I wholeheartedly recommend *Forsakers of the Fatherless* to the body of Christ. This compelling work not only reveals the failures of the pro-life establishment, it also calls the church to biblically engage in the fight against abortion. The author challenges us to reject worldly pragmatism and cultural conformity, emphasizing that our marching orders come from Scripture, not the shifting sands of public opinion or political expedience.

I am especially grateful for Ben Zeisloft, a brother in the Lord, who stands at the tip of the spear in this battle. His leadership and courage help us reshape our language and align our fight against abortion to the authority of Scripture. This book serves as a sobering reminder that our call as Christians is to seek justice for the most vulnerable immediately and without compromise. It is a bold proclamation that the church, as the bride of Christ, must rise with clarity and conviction to confront the great evil of abortion, not through incrementalism but by declaring the truth of the gospel and wielding the sword of the Spirit. As fathers and leaders, we have a duty to protect the fatherless and ensure that our pursuit of justice aligns with the character and commands of King Jesus.

**Brian Ottinger**  
**National Director of Expansion, Love Life Ministries**

Using his investigative journalistic skills, Zeisloft painstakingly chronicles the different states where bills of abolition were introduced. These bills would treat abortion not only as a sin that needs to be repented of but a crime that needs to be penalized by law. Tragically, these God-honoring bills that pass constitutional and historical muster proved to be a bridge too far for many within the pro-life movement and the Republican Party. This book exposes how the pro-life movement influenced our nation's legislators to deny the self-evident truth that preborn children are made in the image of God and need to be welcomed in life and protected by law. I highly recommend this book to those who seek to end this betrayal against God, His law, and the preborn, and who desire justice for the least of these.

**Rusty Thomas**  
**Former National Director, Operation Save America**

Every Christian needs to understand how the pro-life lobby is opposing God's demand to give justice to the fatherless. Zeisloft's chronicle of the legislative efforts of the abolition movement is a must read.


**Bradley Pierce**  
**President, Foundation to Abolish Abortion**  
**Vice President, Heritage Defense**

Ben Zeisloft's *Forsakers of the Fatherless* is a clarion call to the church and a sobering indictment of our culture's apathy toward the sanctity of life. With the precision of a journalist and the conviction of a theologian, Zeisloft exposes the devastating failures of incrementalism and offers a bold, gospel-centered vision for immediate, uncompromising action to abolish abortion. This book doesn't merely inform: it ignites. Every chapter calls the reader to a deeper commitment to justice, a more profound reliance on Scripture, and an unshakable resolve to defend the defenseless. It is not just a history of a movement; it is a prophetic road map for the church to reclaim its God-ordained role as the pillar and ground of truth. Zeisloft's meticulous research and unflinching truth telling challenge Christians to abandon complacency and embrace their responsibility to protect the fatherless. Read this book, wrestle with its message, and let it compel you to action.

**Virgil Walker**  
**Co-host, *Just Thinking Podcast***  
**Author, *Just Thinking: about the State,***  
***Just Thinking: about Ethnicity***



# **FORSAKERS OF THE FATHERLESS**



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**THE SECRET TREACHERY OF  
THE “PRO-LIFE” ESTABLISHMENT**



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# **BEN ZEISLOFT**

**FOREWORD BY DUSTY DEEVERS**



**FOUNDERS**  
MINISTRIES  
CAPE CORAL, FLORIDA

# FORSAKERS OF THE FATHERLESS

*The Secret Treachery of the Pro-Life Establishment*

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*For my grandmother, Nonna,  
who survived abortion attempts from her mother,  
immigrated from Italy to the United States,  
endured much hardship throughout her life,  
but was sustained in steadfast love by her covenant God  
and who is today the spiritual matriarch of many, myself included.*



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# FOREWORD

*Dusty Deevers*

## INTRODUCTION

From January 22, 1973, when the Supreme Court delivered its opinion on *Roe v. Wade*, until today, Americans have exterminated over ten times more people than Adolf Hitler because we saw a class of people, preborn children, as unfit to live. Whereas Hitler would transport the Jews by train to the gas chambers and concentration camps far away from the German people to avoid public outrage, we civilized Americans put our “murder mills” in shopping centers next to sandwich restaurants and cell phone repair stores and down the street from churches.

In the words of Albert Einstein, who emigrated from Germany shortly before Hitler came to power because of his Jewish heritage, “The world is too dangerous to live in—not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen.”<sup>1</sup>

Apparently the murder of that preborn “clump of cells” in the temple of death is nearly as acceptable as buying groceries, eating a burger, or gathering for worship. While the Germans used carbon monoxide and firearms, we use cutting tools, flesh-eating poison, and vacuums twenty times more powerful than a Dyson for our “final solution” to the “preborn question.”

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kailey Maher, “The Human Heart,” State University of New York, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/items/b9d3d6ea-c9f7-47be-8bc1-2225240ef12e>.

As Francis Schaeffer is reported to have once said: “Every abortion clinic should have a sign in front of it saying, ‘Open by the permission of the church.’”<sup>2</sup> There are thousands of reasons every day, and over sixty-five million reasons in total, as to why our nation deserves judgment.

Let us begin with a few definitions.

*Abortion* is prenatal homicide, which is the unjustified, premeditated murder of a preborn human being. We have allowed and even legally protected preborn murder for over fifty years because we have called abortion something other than murder, and many of us have turned an indifferent heart away from the slaughter of the most helpless among us.

*Abolish* means formally and officially ending or outlawing a system, practice, or institution.

*Abolitionism* is the doctrine that answers the question “How does the bride of Christ address and combat great evil in our society?” The abolitionist answer is, “Cease to do evil immediately, without exception or compromise.”

*Abortion abolitionism* centers on five core tenets represented by the acronym GATES: gospel-centered, aligned providentially, through the church, engaged biblically, and sought immediately without exception or compromise. We will discuss this framework and then examine seven ways incremental legislation trains people to practice sin.

## THE FIVE TENETS OF ABORTION ABOLITIONISM

Abortion abolitionism answers one of the most pressing questions of our day: “How does the bride of Christ address and

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<sup>2</sup> James Silberman, “It’s All About the Church,” Free the States, December 14, 2020, <https://freethestates.org/2020/12/all-about-the-church>.

combat the great evil of the unjustified, premeditated murder of preborn humans in our society?” The abolitionist answer is, “Officially cease murdering the preborn immediately, without exception or compromise.”

### **Gospel-Centered, Not Moralistic**

Abortion abolitionists confront the sin and crime of the slaughter of the preborn. The only solution God has provided this world for rescue from His just wrath is the gospel.

*To be gospel-centered in your conflict with the culture of death, you must make it your highest aim to glorify God through proclaiming the gospel.*

If you are a Christian, you may have asked yourself this question: “Why did God save me and leave me on this planet instead of just extracting me from this world into heaven with Him?” Your brother, the apostle Peter, says this about you: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9a). Why did He choose you and make you kingly priests and a set-apart nation for His own possession? Jesus left you here on this earth so that as kings and priests “you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9b).

The gospel is not one way of dealing with the sins of man. It is the only way, the only message that will succeed against the culture of death that has taken root in our society.

Abortion is the very antithesis of Christianity. Whereas Christ said, “My life for yours,” and bids His followers to be similarly willing to lay down their lives, abortion says, “Your life for mine.” Jesus interposed His precious blood between us and the Father. The gospel, the good news of Jesus laying His

life down in the place of sinners, is the answer to sin provided by God.

Our first and most important message to abortion-minded mothers, postabortive mothers, abusive and spineless boyfriends or husbands, abortion-mill employees, self-interested politicians, and apathetic Christians is “repent and believe the gospel.”

You must never leave the gospel out of the discussion. The gospel is the discussion.

*To be gospel-centered, you must not steal glory from God by boasting in yourself.*

The apostle Paul told the church in Corinth that Jesus Christ sent him and commanded him to preach the gospel in such a way that people would not be awed by the power of the orator but by the power of the cross. He said that Christ had sent him “to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Cor. 1:17). He noted elsewhere that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

God put all of His power in the gospel. Why would you look elsewhere? Where is the power to change the culture? Where is the power to end child sacrifice? Where is the power to convict legislators? “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). We must take to heart this calling: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (2 Cor. 10:17).

The message of Christ is the power, and you must not doubt that power at any point in your efforts. Is the message of Christ crucified the main weapon you use in this fight against abortion, or do you take up the weapons of this world? Is your sling fitted with the smooth stones of the gospel, or are you weighed down with the worldly armor of Saul?

As a priestly king representing Christ, you are not allowed to doubt the power of the cross of Christ to turn this world upside down (Acts 17:6) and to rid creation of all rebellion as far as the curse is found. You are not allowed to preach some other message or wage warfare in some other way. If you do, that is because you do not trust in the power of God to do the will of God by the gospel of God. We must cling to the cross of Christ to establish the crown of Christ.

### **Aligned Providentially, Not Pragmatically**

Abortion abolitionists confront the culture of death while relying on the providence of God, not on worldly wisdom or the carnal weapons of man.

Question 14 of the Baptist Catechism asks: “What are God’s works of providence?” The answer is: “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”<sup>3</sup> The Second London Baptist Confession affirms that “God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, arranges, and governs all creatures and things, from the greatest to the least, by His perfectly wise and holy providence, to the purpose for which they were created. He governs according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchangeable counsel of His own will. His providence leads to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.”<sup>4</sup>

We are told in the Bible of the Ammonite and Syrian armies coming up against King David (2 Sam. 10). Joab, who

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<sup>3</sup> “The Baptist Catechism,” Founders Ministries, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://founders.org/library/the-baptist-catechism>.

<sup>4</sup> Stan Reeves, “Chapter V: Divine Providence,” *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English* (Founders Press, 2021), 19.

commanded the army of David, gave advice to the soldiers that we must heed: “Be of good courage, and let us be courageous for our people, and for the cities of our God, and may the LORD do what seems good to him” (2 Sam. 10:12).

*To align providentially, you must “be of good courage.”*

You must entrust yourself to the sovereign Ruler of all who establishes the dominion of Jesus Christ by His own zealous pleasure (Isa. 9:7).

*To align providentially, you must “be courageous for our people.”*

God says to use the strength that He has graciously given you “for our people and for the cities of our God” (1 Chron. 19:13). Certainly this includes rescuing those being led to death (Prov. 24:10–12) and charging your leaders to not write iniquitous decrees (Isa. 10:1–2).

*To align providentially, you must “let God do what seems good to him.”*

Do you trust the Lord like this? Do you trust God to tear down evil in this world according to His timing, His means, and His purposes? Your duty is obedience to the revealed will of God. He commands that you and I, as His ambassadors, establish the justice of His rule and eradicate injustice that is protected by law (Prov. 18:5).

Since *Roe*, over the past fifty-three years, the prevailing worldly political wisdom is that compromise is the key to progress. At its root, pragmatism is the rot of submitting to some authority other than God and some other means that God has not commanded or approved. There are over sixty-five

million reasons that show how this strategy is an assault against our preborn neighbors and a usurpation of God and His glory.

We must understand that pride, arrogance, and blasphemies from the enemies of God do not cause Him any uneasiness. Even if it seems that Christianity is in real danger of being destroyed from the earth, that would not justify our attempt to assist Christ by worldly political methods, carnal devices, or any means that God has not appointed.

The battle to abolish abortion is not first against flesh and blood, so do not use flesh and blood weapons for warfare. Do not use puny pragmatic worldliness to engage a spiritual enemy.

We must fight the battles of our Lord with the spiritual weapons He has put into our hands and leave the success to Him by writing legislation that proves we trust Him to do what He deems right according to His timing. Commit yourself to do that which God has demanded, regardless of the consequences. “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3).

As evangelical English Bible teacher A. W. Pink said, “All the ingenuity of man, can not and will not extend the gospel one inch beyond the limits which our sovereign God has assigned.”<sup>5</sup>

Are you thinking, “What will work?” or are you thinking, “What does Christ command?” Are you aligned with pragmatism, in which you will get the glory, or with providence, in which God will get the glory? Our triune God is not afraid or shaken by anything occurring in His world, whether political, social, or religious. We must not be either.

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<sup>5</sup> A. W. Pink, “Divine Providence,” *Monergism*, accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.monergism.com/divine-providence>.

## **Through the Church, Not Parachurch or Individualistic Efforts**

Jesus obtained the church “with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). He commissioned her under His sovereign authority to extend His glorious rule on earth by making disciples and teaching them to obey all that He commanded (Matt. 28:19–20). Jesus promised that “the gates of hell shall not prevail” against His church (Matt. 16:18).

The Holy Spirit writes through the apostle Paul that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). God established the church as the “pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15) and ordained that “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10).

The abolition of abortion is an issue of concern to the body of Christ. For far too long, Christians have relegated the plight of the preborn to supposed parachurch ministry experts. Yet the local church is the vehicle God ordained for prophetic reform among the nations. Christians are to “abhor what is evil” and to “hold fast to what is good” (Rom. 12:9), to “expose” evil (Eph. 5:11), and to destroy “every lofty opinion” that defends evil (2 Cor. 10:5).

When you see a society crumbling and justice collapsing, you should look at the gods of the culture and naturally ask, “Where have God’s people, His bride, the church, been complicit? Where have we been apathetic? Where have we celebrated what God hates?” There you will find the battle lines and the Spirit commanding repentance.

Henry Van Til quipped that culture is “religion externalized.”<sup>6</sup> The truth is that every culture has a god at the center. There is always a god of the system. Government flows downstream from culture. Culture flows downstream from the church. The church flows downstream from pulpits. When the pulpits are compromised, the pews are complacent.

Have you shoved off your duty to love your neighbors to a parachurch ministry? Are you pragmatically seeking your own plans rather than the ministry of local churches, which is the plan God has ordained? Since Jesus is King, our politics are His politics to rule over, and Christians are His ambassadors to bring His ministry of peace and justice.

We have exactly two options: Christ is King or chaos is king.

### **Engaged Biblically, Not with Worldly Philosophy**

The marching orders of our King are in His Word, and His Word tells us that the only way to make war on that which is making war on Christ is by His weapons.

*To engage biblically, you must wield the sword of the Spirit to command obedience to Christ.*

His Word alone has “divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Scripture is God-breathed, sufficient, and profitable, “that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Is not the Word of God sufficient for everything we must believe and everything we must do? Is the Word of God not sufficient for abolitionism?

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2001).

This Word is sufficient for accomplishing God's will in God's ways for God's glory.

The posture of Christians must be as follows: "To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn" (Isa. 8:20). We must inquire of God, and if we will not speak according to the Word of God, we have nothing to offer. That is how non-Christians act. True Christians do not say "We are not going to use the Bible."

*To engage biblically, you must reject cunning and preach to the conscience.*

We must not tamper with the Word of God. This charge from the apostle Paul is our direction: "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 4:2–3).

Do you have the sword of the Spirit sheathed in this fight, or do you take out that sword and swing? We unapologetically stand on the Word of God as our final authority.

*To engage biblically, your strategy must be acceptable to God.*

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10 KJV). Peter further told us that we are to offer as a holy priesthood "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). As kings and priests, you are to establish the allegiance to and worship of our King and God on this earth by the power of the Holy Spirit according to the Word of God (Rom. 1:14–16; 2 Tim. 4:2).

Any strategy to rescue the preborn must be worthy of and in alignment with the “everlasting dominion” of Christ and His kingdom, and must endure “from generation to generation” (Dan. 4:34). No strategy our King would not approve or implement is worthy. We must not waste our lives on worldly, sub-Christian strategies that regulate when one can murder a preborn baby.

We are not merely attempting to set up a better worldly king or seek legislators who form slightly better strategies. We are not merely trying to achieve a better earthly government. Our labor as holy priests and kings aligns with the rule of Christ and obedience to Him.

### **Sought Immediately, Without Compromise, Delay, or Exception**

When the blood of the preborn is crying from the ground, we must not take a posture of negotiation with those leading their children to slaughter. We must never approve murder or write laws to murder babies that are iniquitous decrees (Rom. 1:32; Rom. 3:8).

Indeed, pro-life bills approve of murder. Over the past fifty-one years since *Roe*, with over sixty-five million abortions, traditional pro-life laws—though in some cases well-intentioned—have not established equal protection and justice for the preborn, but on the contrary have appallingly established incremental regulatory guidelines for when, where, why, and how to obtain legal abortion of innocent preborn children, thereby legally sanctioning abortion.

Incrementalism is the advocacy of change by degrees. This means advocating for changes perceived to be culturally allowable, such as fifteen-week bans, heartbeat bills, and clinic health code regulations. Immediatism is advocacy for the

immediate abolition of abortion, whether the culture is ready to accept that or not. This means advocating for abolition bills alone.

We understand that in the providence of God and in this fallen, rebellious world, the passage of legislation may come in increments, but those increments should always be understood as prophetic indictments against the hardness of our hearts, not a godly strategy to be pursued. The passage of incremental bills is divine judgments, not strategic victories.

### SEVEN WAYS INCREMENTAL LEGISLATION TRAINS PEOPLE TO SIN

Through the apostle John, our Lord warns us, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning” (1 John 3:8). To practice sinning is to make a habit of turning from God’s standard revealed in Scripture and based on His character.

Scottish theologian Robert Law provides a helpful definition of sinful rebellion: “Sin is fundamentally the denial of the absoluteness of moral obligation—repudiation of the eternal canon of Right and Wrong, upon which all moral life is based. In other words, to sin is to assert one’s own will as the rule of action against the absolutely good Will of God. Thus it is but truth to say that every sin contains in germ the whole infinite of evil.”<sup>7</sup>

Incremental legislation has a corrupting, corrosive effect on a people and trains the culture to practice sinning. These iniquitous decrees accomplish the following negative fruit.

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909), PDF, accessed November 22, 2024, [https://biblicalelearning.org/New\\_Testament\\_Greek/Text/Law-TestsOfLife/Law-TestsOfLife.pdf](https://biblicalelearning.org/New_Testament_Greek/Text/Law-TestsOfLife/Law-TestsOfLife.pdf).

*Incremental bills promote or allow exceptions to the legal protection of our preborn neighbors.*

No bill that makes the fatherless prey is righteous. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, “Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey” (Isa. 10:1–2).

“Iniquitous decrees” protect predators and “make the fatherless their prey.” We must not regulate abortion as though abortion were health care. We must criminalize abortion as homicide.

*Incremental bills compromise the holy standard of justice rather than correct culture.*

Such legislation floods culture with the doctrines of men, thereby enshrining cultural decay and enslavement, not prosperity and liberty in the fear of God. Where would a legislator or a mother learn the ridiculous and evil—but now widely accepted—idea that humans do not have value until their heartbeats can be detected? A heartbeat bill. As the Bible says, the law is a tutor.

In utter dismay, the psalmist asks the people of God how they can partner with “wicked rulers” who “frame injustice by statute” (Ps. 94:20). Incremental bills codify injustice into law. They effectively “band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death” (Ps. 94:21). Scripture expects and demands that we not only write laws that reflect the character of God, but that our laws demand the same treatment of the image-bearers around us.

“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;

maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Ps. 82:2–4).

Some will say that abolition bills are politically feasible in a red state, but that a purple or blue state is not ready yet, so an incrementalist approach seems to be the acceptable path.

This is no way to be faithful to God and His holy character, to remain consistent with His Word, to love the preborn according to the truth, or to shift culture. God hates this kind of thinking.

There is one position to hold regarding preborn life: abolitionism. No matter the political conditions of the state, we strive to abolish abortion by seeking to give equal protection under the law to children in the womb. When we submit that one God-honoring bill of equal protection, if the bill is bastardized through the legislative process, then the rejection of the law and character of God can be on the consciences of others, not yours. They will choose the increments.

Our firm grasp of the law of God must not be loosened for the sake of lawlessness in the culture. We must run on and write bills according to the law of God and refuse to budge. The culture will then have an unflinching judge burning a hole in their conscience, a representative of God before them in truth through a man of prophetic courage, and God will have a human means in you to use for His glory and good pleasure in his world.

Think in these terms: The law and the gospel, the means by which God has chosen to represent Himself until the return of Christ, must be the most dense bodies of gravity in the cosmos. If the Christian makes sinful increments on murder for the sake of trying to pull the culture along, then it is actually the gravitational pull of the law and gospel that is instead lessened. In other words, the density of the character of God is lessened by you and not by God.

These kinds of sinful increments are assaults on the law and the gospel in vain attempts to win the culture, inevitably to something less than the law and the gospel. Do you seriously believe we should relax the law, which is the reflection of God's holy character in this world, so that the culture will approve of a lesser, tainted version of God, and that we should then come and use the gospel to draw people to that cheapened version of Him?

What happens next? The culture gives God relaxed, partial obedience, because Christians disciplined them to do something less than practice full obedience.

We lose with that attitude. We lose before God by robbing Him of His glory in His law and gospel. We lose before men because we validate their resistance to their God-given conscience and the law written on their hearts. Get rid of this mentality of compromising the law and the gospel anywhere in your life that God allows you to see this dynamic at play.

“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).

*Incremental bills promote God-hating partiality.*

God hates partiality, and we must too. Because incremental legislation codifies God-hating partiality into law, we must hate incremental legislation that says when, where, how, why, and who may commit prenatal homicide under the protection of law. We must not write legislation that treats the wicked murderer of the preborn as though they are innocent under the law and treats the innocent preborn child as though he or she deserves punishment unto death. Incremental legislation is an abomination to God. “He who justifies the wicked and he who

condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15).

Incremental legislation is a self-inflicted indictment upon the authors for writing and showing God-hating partiality. James, the brother of Jesus, commanded, “Show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (James 2:1). He added, “If you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9).

*Incremental bills challenge the lordship of Christ over the heart and contend with the conscience instead of cooperating with the conscience.*

Incrementalism stands in the position of tempting the conscience like Satan. “Did God actually say?” (Gen. 3:1). Through the apostle Paul, God tells us how the law written on the heart and the conscience are to properly function together to bear witness as “their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (Rom. 2:14–15). Laws that permit the practice of unrighteousness, which in this case are laws that allow for *some* murder, both contend with and corrupt the conscience instead of cooperating with it to point our culture to the holy God before whom we all must stand in judgment.

*Incremental bills reject the command to repent of sin completely and immediately.*

Incremental legislation does not command abortionists or their staff, mothers or fathers, parents or friends, to “repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Such bills do not command them to perform “deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20). Immediatism is simply the call to repent, believe, and “bear fruit in keeping with

repentance” (Matt. 3:8). The call to repent in Scripture is never a call to gradual repentance.

King Jesus has a strong word to legislators who will not stop writing laws to murder babies: “Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16). Incremental bills undermine repentance.

There is a never-ending stream of increments that could be passed in order to delay the full abolition of abortion. “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13). Will we obey God and govern according to His moral law, or compromise and write laws more palatable to our flesh?

*Incremental bills close their eyes to some child sacrifice.*

While millions of preborn children are slaughtered, incremental laws teach the culture to close their eyes to the holocaust around them. God firmly condemns those who themselves sacrifice their children (Lev. 20:1–3). But God also has an incredibly strong word for those who close their eyes to child sacrifice: “And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech” (Lev. 20:4–5).

*Incremental bills encourage guilt rather than direct people to Christ for forgiveness.*

Any legislation that teaches people they need not listen to their consciences that are condemning them is from the pits of hell. Such legislation piles on guilt and condemnation without pointing them to the one who can take away guilt and condemnation.

These are tactics of manipulators and cult leaders, not Christians. When a culture is flooded with guilt and condemnation by laws that do not point to the character of God, that culture becomes hopeless and despairing. Then that culture becomes desperate for a way out and invents solutions that are destructive.

## CONCLUSION

Have you made deals with the devil? Have you compromised God's standard of justice, which requires that all image-bearers receive equal protection? King Jesus will abolish abortion. He will use His bride, the church, to bring this about as He brings every enemy under His feet. But this will not happen without repentance. Our methods matter to God, so they must matter to us. The apostle Paul told Timothy to "wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). What kind of warfare is that? It is "holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:19).

As the Southern Baptist Convention Resolution on Abolishing Abortion states, "abolishing abortion is a Great Commission issue" that demands for us to "call upon governing authorities at all levels to repent ... exhorting them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance by faithfully executing their responsibilities as God's servants of justice," as well as to work "with all urgency to enact legislation using the full weight of their office to interpose on behalf of the preborn, abolishing abortion immediately, without exception or compromise."<sup>8</sup>

We must establish justice for preborn children immediately. Simply put, abortion is murder, and we must never embrace an incremental approach to ending murder. We must abolish abortion.

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<sup>8</sup> "On Abolishing Abortion," resolution at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting (approved), June 21, 2021, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-abolishing-abortion>.

# INTRODUCTION

For nearly five decades, the Supreme Court decision in the landmark case *Roe v. Wade* was treated by both the pro-life and pro-abortion movements as holy writ. The decision, which posited that the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution sanctioned abortion under a right to privacy, was finally overturned in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision in 2022, marking what was called a generational triumph for the pro-life movement.

Yet the three years since the *Dobbs* decision have been defined by simultaneous pro-life victory laps and pro-life retreats. On the one hand, major national organizations called the decision “an historic human rights victory for unborn children and their mothers.”<sup>1</sup> Conservative media outlets friendly to the pro-life movement reported that as many as fourteen states had banned abortion as a result of various pro-life laws enacted in the immediate aftermath of *Dobbs*.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the pro-life movement has met backlash from voters as they have lost almost every state ballot referendum related to abortion since the overturn of *Roe*, causing some consultants and other operatives in the Republican Party to pivot away from the abortion issue during the 2024 election.

One of the most noteworthy phenomena in the era after *Roe* is the increase rather than decrease in national abortion

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<sup>1</sup> Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, “Historic Victory: *Roe* Overturned, Ending Half a Century of Abortion on Demand,” June 24, 2022, <https://sbaprolife.org/home/historic-victory-roe-overturned-ending-half-a-century-of-abortion-on-demand>.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Ertelt, “14 States Protect Babies from Abortions Now, More States Will Ban Abortions in 2023,” *LifeNews.com*, December 23, 2022, <https://www.lifenews.com/2022/12/23/14-states-protect-babies-from-abortions-now-more-states-will-ban-abortions-in-2023>.

rates.<sup>3</sup> Data released at the end of 2023 by the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute showed that 511,000 preborn babies were murdered between January and June of that year, an increase from 465,000 during a comparable period in 2020.<sup>4</sup> States such as Illinois, Kansas, and Colorado, which are located near other states with stricter abortion regulations, saw some of the largest rises in abortion levels. But that national increase in abortions also came from a higher reliance on abortion pills—more than half of abortions in the nation had already occurred by means of the drugs before *Dobbs*,<sup>5</sup> yet the use of abortion pills increased to encompass nearly two-thirds of abortions in 2023 as new state laws and campaigns from activists led more women to order the substances through the mail.<sup>6</sup>

Those who self-manage their abortions also increasingly rely on methods beyond the abortion pill to murder their children, such as taking herbal mixtures and even ingesting significant quantities of alcohol or other substances. One study from the University of California San Francisco found that the share of American females of reproductive age who have attempted a

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<sup>3</sup> See Ben Zeisloft, “Abortion rate soars even after overturn of *Roe*,” *The Republic Sentinel*, September 8, 2023, <https://republicsentinel.com/articles/abortion-rate-sees-massive-rise-even-after-overturn-of-roe>.

<sup>4</sup> Amy Schoenfeld Walker and Allison McCann, “Abortions Rose in Most States This Year, New Data Shows,” *The New York Times*, September 7, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/09/07/us/abortion-data-bans-laws.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Rachel K. Jones et al., “Medication Abortion Now Accounts for More Than Half of All US Abortions,” Guttmacher Institute, December 1, 2022, <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/02/medication-abortion-now-accounts-more-half-all-us-abortions>.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel K. Jones and Amy Friedrich-Karnik, “Medication Abortion Accounted for 63% of All US Abortions in 2023—An Increase from 53% in 2020,” Guttmacher Institute, March 2024, <https://www.guttmacher.org/2024/03/medication-abortion-accounted-63-all-us-abortions-2023-increase-53-2020>. See also Ben Zeisloft, “Use of abortion pills skyrockets to compose vast majority of abortions,” *The Republic Sentinel*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.republicsentinel.com/articles/use-of-abortion-pills-skyrockets-to-compose-vast-majority-of-abortions>.

self-managed abortion rose from 2.4 percent in 2022 before the overturn of *Roe* to levels of 3.3 percent in 2023.<sup>7</sup>

Many pro-life conservative Americans may not be surprised to hear that abortions increased as women traveled to less restrictive states for the procedure, or even as women more often ordered abortion pills. Yet they may be surprised to hear that *abortion continues even in the pro-life and predominantly Republican states that purport to have already banned abortion.*

Another study from the University of Texas at Austin showed that the most conservative states, which enacted what their political leaders claimed were aggressively pro-life laws that prohibited abortion, witnessed the most sizable increases for self-managed abortion in the entire nation immediately after *Roe* was overturned.<sup>8</sup> The study, which was based on data from the online abortion pill provider Aid Access, found that between the leak of the *Dobbs* draft decision and the period immediately after the formal decision, the states with the most rapid increase in abortion pill orders were Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Oklahoma.

An analysis from the Foundation to Abolish Abortion, which noted that Aid Access represents 46 percent of the self-managed abortion market and that 88 percent of the women who order pills from the entity follow through with murdering their children, estimated that some 62,000 babies

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<sup>7</sup> Lauren Ralph et al., “Self-Managed Abortion Attempts Before vs After Changes in Federal Abortion Protections in the US,” JAMA Network, July 30, 2024, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2821654>.

<sup>8</sup> Abigail R. A. Aiken et al., “Requests for Self-managed Medication Abortion Provided Using Online Telemedicine in 30 US States Before and After the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* Decision,” JAMA Network, November 1, 2022, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2797883>.

were murdered in the states with purported bans in the twelve months after *Dobbs*.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, *the very states that insist they are the safest in the nation for preborn children have by no means ended abortion* and have likely seen some of the most alarmingly rapid increases in abortion levels. Most surgical abortion mills may have closed in these states, but those who want to murder their babies can simply order substances through the internet rather than visit a paid medical assassin. Meanwhile, pro-life entities continue to assert that abortion is banned, taking victory laps as they suffer monumental loss after monumental loss.

All of the aforementioned aspects of the battle against abortion after *Roe* are virtually absent from conservative media outlets and the broader national conversation. But the other neglected aspect of this battle is the fact that Christians have been striving for years to end the bloodshed, only to be opposed by the same pro-life movement that claims to desire an end to abortion.

Those Christians, who generally use the term *abolitionism* to distinguish themselves from the *pro-life movement*, indeed consider themselves a separate coalition. They believe in an *immediatist* approach to ending abortion, seeking to criminalize all forms of child sacrifice under existing statutes that protect born people from murder, rather than adopting an *incrementalist* approach of gradually eroding the circumstances in which abortion can occur, as perceived political conditions allow. They reject the notion that women are second victims of abortion, contending that mothers who elect to participate in abortions should face the same penalties as other murderers

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<sup>9</sup> “Babies Unprotected,” Foundation to Abolish Abortion, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://faa.life/sma>.

after due process, yet affirm that mothers truly forced into abortion under duress should be exempt from such penalties. The abolitionists also emphasize the Christian foundations of their movement over against the big-tent philosophy of the pro-life movement, leveraging theological arguments even as the latter prefer more secularized appeals.

This book does not exist to argue for abolitionism, but the author is partial to the framework. The foreword of this book, written by Oklahoma Republican State Senator Dusty Deever, offers the tenets of abolitionism and an ideological critique of the pro-life movement.

Throughout this book, a handful of evident patterns will emerge. Readers will see a variety of Christians, from pastors and ministers to college students and professional athletes, receive newfound conviction from their Lord to defend the rights of their preborn neighbors, specifically by becoming involved in the public policy process. They find lawmakers to sponsor abolition bills, only for those lawmakers to be opposed by none other than the veteran pro-life lobbyists in their states. Those lobbyists soon champion alternative bills with lesser increments that seek to regulate abortion in a way that falls far short of the first proposal. The pro-life lawmakers who spearhead efforts to oppose the abolition bills are then offered awards, campaign endorsements, and higher pro-life legislative ratings. The lawmaker who submits the abolition bill is meanwhile publicly derided and punished in their next primary race by the Republican establishment.

The states featured in this book are Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas, North Carolina, Louisiana, South Carolina, Missouri, and Kentucky. Two are swing states, while the rest are firmly dominated by Republicans and the pro-life establishment. Yet the evident pattern of *opposition followed by compromise* has

occurred in almost exactly this fashion in each of these states, many of which have seen the most alarming increases in self-managed abortion throughout the entire nation.

The reader will observe that pro-life establishment lobbyists and lawmakers have at least three main justifications for their hesitance toward enacting equal protection for the preborn.

**The first justification is submission to *Roe* and other federal court decisions or statutes.**

Multiple equal protection bills and entire stand-alone proposals from abolitionists would have formalized the intention of these states to defy the Supreme Court on prenatal homicide. Yet these bills were unceremoniously denounced by the pro-life establishment under the insistence that the Supreme Court must be unconditionally obeyed, ignoring two millennia of Christian political theory that instructs lesser magistrates to lawfully resist tyrannical higher magistrates.

Such tactics are not without precedent in our history: Some states righteously nullified Supreme Court decisions approving of chattel slavery and violating their state sovereignty, such as those that required Northern states to return escaped slaves to Southern masters. The fact that *Roe* was never defied by any state, and that every state meekly submitted to legalized abortion, will forever be a stain on our history. In any case, this first justification for not abolishing abortion was removed with *Dobbs*, which told states to make their own abortion laws, for better or worse.

**The second justification is political pragmatism and the desire to win elections.**

Countless pro-life lawmakers and lobbyists, both before and after the overturn of *Roe*, claim that equally protecting preborn

babies under the law would result in massive electoral defeats for Republicans, even in deeply Republican states. Instead of displaying bold leadership to their constituents, relying on providence to reward their efforts, and leveraging the didactic nature of the law to reshape public opinion, these leaders have *submitted to their voters rather than God* in their duty as civil authorities, washing their hands as untold millions of babies are murdered.

Meanwhile the culture has only become increasingly favorable toward abortion. The persistence of legalized abortion for decades on end has made the practice of murdering babies in the womb a blood sacrament on which our country now relies. In the absence of civil leaders who fear God and obey His commandments in office, practices such as child sacrifice—not to mention homosexuality, transgenderism, and other perversions—have become indispensable features of our national culture and sacred religious rites protected by our legal system.

**The third justification is opposition to criminalizing mothers who have abortions.**

Perhaps the most politically and emotionally charged rationale from the pro-life establishment for resisting equal protection for the preborn is the equal justice that would necessarily follow. Because abolition bills involve simply applying preexistent homicide codes to protect the preborn, a mother who decides to take the life of her child in the womb could be convicted of homicide and penalized accordingly. Even as mothers increasingly use self-managed abortion to murder their children, pro-life establishment leaders have codified immunity and impunity for women who obtain abortions into several state laws, insisting that these mothers are nothing

but victims of a predatory abortion industry, coercive male partners, or unsupportive families.

But the abolitionists have been the first to note that only mothers who *willfully* pursue abortions would be penalized under their introduced bills. As with any other homicide case, participating in an abortion under true duress or with a true lack of knowledge would remain acceptable legal defenses. Yet in a nation where women increasingly *shout their abortions* and commit prenatal homicide in the privacy of their own homes, with no malicious abortionist or abusive boyfriend impacting her decision, enshrined immunity and impunity for women who have abortions merely allows for child sacrifice to persist, even in the states with more restrictive abortion laws.

The implication of this book and the inevitable conclusion that the reader will reach from the presented accounts herein is the reality that *the institutional pro-life movement is the primary enemy to ending abortion, especially in the states that falsely claim to have banned abortion.*

In other words, the leaders of the pro-life establishment are *Forsakers of the Fatherless.*

The vast majority of children who are murdered via abortion are indeed fatherless children. Whether their biological fathers abandon them after a one-night stand or pay for their murder via forceps or pharmaceuticals, fatherless children are forsaken by the men whom God ordained to be their protectors. Yet God details His special care for fatherless children on countless occasions in the Scriptures. He consistently reveals Himself as “father of the fatherless and protector of widows” (Ps. 68:5) and says that He “upholds the widow and the fatherless” (Ps. 146:9).

The reality of adoption, which every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ experiences, also reflects the heart of God

for the fatherless. Even in their depraved condition of sin and wickedness, repentant sinners are adopted by God into His family. God forgives their sins in Christ and grants the full privileges of sonship to those who were once His enemies. God has “predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5). Christians forgiven of their sins and adopted by their heavenly Father have thus been moved through the centuries to care for fatherless children left vulnerable to infanticide and abortion.

But perhaps most significantly for the context of this book, the civil law revealed in the Old Testament repeatedly warns against the judgment incurred when the fatherless are forsaken: “You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless” (Ex. 22:22–24). The general equity of the civil laws in the judicial system of Israel reveals the very character of God. Because He is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), His hatred of injustice has by no means diminished. God hates the murder of children today as much as in prior centuries. His expectations for justice are not limited to ancient Israel, but are requirements that the ascended and enthroned King Jesus, the “ruler of kings on earth” (Rev. 1:5), maintains to this day for all nations. These are therefore expectations that Christians must not neglect as they fulfill the task of teaching the nations “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20).

When pro-life lawmakers attain civil authority and fail to operate as “ministers of God” (Rom. 13:6) who protect the fatherless as they “bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4) against evildoers, they misuse their delegated authority and render themselves *Forsakers of the Fatherless*.

As previously mentioned, this book does not exist to present a case for abortion abolitionism, nor is it a theological treatise, even as the author adheres to distinctly Reformed Christian convictions. Above all else, this book is a journalistic enterprise and historical account presenting conservative American Christians with the reality facing those who truly desire to abolish abortion at this hour in our history: that the pro-life entities frequently entrusted with the time, treasure, and talents of believers are not using those resources to end the plight of the preborn but to suppress those who are truly seeking to establish justice for the fatherless.

When this book uses the terms *pro-life movement* or *pro-life establishment*, the choice of words is therefore not meant as an indictment against well-intentioned Christians who call themselves pro-life, but is primarily a descriptor of the activists, lobbyists, and politicians who attempt to regulate abortion but, in the process, deny or delay equal protection for the preborn.

This book discusses the recent past, but it also examines the present stances of pro-life leaders after the overturn of *Roe*.

And this book looks into the future as the blood of innocent image-bearers of God cries out from the ground for justice and as God awakens His church to pursue justice on their behalf.

May this book hasten the day on which that justice is finally established in our land.

# OKLAHOMA

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil, learn to do good;  
seek justice, correct oppression;  
bring justice to the fatherless,  
plead the widow's cause.*  
— *Isaiah 1:16–17*

**T. Russell Hunter** was studying for a degree in the history of science at the University of Oklahoma when his research led him to encounter the abolitionists of slavery. Yet that research revealed obvious differences between the modern pro-life movement, which was the most prevalent mode of opposing abortion in the United States, and the abolitionist movement that ended chattel slavery in the United States and the British Empire in the nineteenth century. Those differences prompted Hunter to critically examine the theological and political foundations of the pro-life movement and therefore to launch the first efforts to abolish abortion in Oklahoma.

Hunter was raised in a nominally Christian home. He recalled that the large black Bible that belonged to his father sat untouched on a desk throughout the week except when his father would take the Bible to church with the family on Sundays. When he was ten years old, Hunter heard the gospel at a summer camp and was struck by the truth that “you’re going to stand before God, and if you’re not putting your faith in Christ, you’re not going to be with Him.”

Throughout his adolescence, Hunter said that he was “worried about girls and basketball” until he was seventeen

years old, when a pastor at his church recommended that he read *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis. At that point, Hunter learned there was a need for “actually following Christ in my day-to-day life.” He thoroughly studied the New Testament while still in high school and continued to follow the Lord, becoming “more serious about Christ” in college.

From his undergraduate years to his doctoral studies, Hunter noticed a continual progression in his life away from acting as a “keep-my-head-down Christian,” who was only bold around fellow believers, to a Christian who also represented his commitment to Jesus before unbelievers. His simultaneous interests in art, philosophy, and history synthesized with a natural affinity for Christian apologetics, all of which likewise shaped his pursuit of a history of science degree.

Hunter eventually found himself working on a dissertation challenging the questionable idea that Charles Darwin proposed his theories on evolution to effect the end of slavery. While reading the works written by and examining the lives of the actual slavery abolitionists, such as William Wilberforce, Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison, Hunter quickly noticed their distinctively Christian approach toward addressing the national sins prevalent in their day.

“They were theological in their approach. They weren’t secular,” Hunter described. “They didn’t leave out the judgment of God, what God wanted them to do, or what the Bible says. They went about trying to rectify that their nations were at odds with God and His law, they were oppressing their neighbors, and they were not being Christian, so I had been convinced that sentiment is right.”

At the same time, Hunter happened to be part of a roundtable group at Trinity Baptist Church in Norman, Oklahoma, in which the members were assigned various

discussion topics to research and defend. He was given the task of defending the modern pro-life movement, but he was left unimpressed while comparing that movement to the slavery abolitionists he was studying.

“When I looked at the pro-life movement, I was seeing that yes, they say they’re Christian, and they’re raising money from churches, so they want the support of Christians,” Hunter continued. “But they have this ‘leave the theological stuff on the back burner’ kind of mindset.”

Hunter was meanwhile increasingly convicted over his own apathy toward abortion. In his personal life, Hunter and his sister had an opportunity to minister to a woman who was thinking about having an abortion but eventually chose life through their influence. Within Hunter was kindled a newfound and deepening desire to “be like these abolitionists of slavery” and sacrifice his life for the sake of “those who are being oppressed and dehumanized and destroyed.”

“Holding that baby wasn’t some kind of intellectual activity. That was something God did. I saw what’s intellectually and biblically and theologically correct, but I also felt it. I realized that I needed to love God, and I needed to love my neighbor. I repented of my abortion apathy.”

Though he was challenged to compare the pro-life movement to the slavery abolitionists, Hunter never delivered his presentation in defense of the pro-life movement. He instead contended before the roundtable group that the broader pro-life movement was “actually wrong and off-kilter.”

Hunter articulated five ways in which the abolitionists and the modern pro-life movement significantly deviated, and where the former “stood out as exemplary types of Christians of their era dealing with evil.” He was forced to conclude that the pro-life establishment entrusted with the task of

abolishing abortion was akin to the historical foils of the slavery abolitionists: the antislavery gradualists who professed to desire the abolition of slavery and the slave trade but who insisted that regulations and compromises were needed before reaching such a goal.

Those five tenets of abolition included gospel centrality rather than moralism, alignment with divine providence rather than human pragmatism, emphasis on the church rather than individualism, reliance on biblical truth rather than worldly philosophy, and immediatism rather than delay.

Animated by these new convictions, Hunter launched an “abolitionist society” in 2011, modeled after the organizations once started by the slavery abolitionists to coordinate their efforts. He said that the small band of newly minted abortion abolitionists, which included men such as Josh Malone, Aaron Hoffman, and Jeremy Brown, was largely the half-dozen fellow Christians he met in a class about Charles Darwin for which he served as the teaching assistant.

“It was very nerdy. I mean, we were a bunch of grad students, PhD candidates, and young, nerdy guys interested in theology,” Hunter fondly remembered. “It’s that small group of Christians in the church who are reading Puritan paperbacks for fun. That kind of group.”

The organization started spreading their assertions by means of online Facebook discussion channels, with four or five other ideologically aligned abolitionist societies appearing in other cities between 2011 and 2012. The groups were temporarily accepted by the broader pro-life movement until they started to criticize Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney for running commercials in which he denounced bans on abortion

in the cases of rape and incest. Most pro-life entities were endorsing Romney, a devout Mormon, in his candidacy.<sup>1</sup>

“By the end of 2012, because we followed those theological principles, people were angry with us because it had become clear to them that we weren’t just going to play the game,” Hunter recounted about that time. “That had the effect of alerting other people to the reality of—wait a second—the pro-life movement isn’t working for biblical principles. The abolitionist movement didn’t have any actual political impact at that point, but it had the sort of impact of making people notice that what these abolitionists are saying is different, so let me look into it.”

Hunter noted that the movement at first was growing “without any sort of direction or plan,” leading to skirmishes within local churches as adherents tried to convince others that “pro-life isn’t the way to go.” The abolitionists were opposing the pro-abortion movement for their open support of abortion, but they were indeed starting to oppose the pro-life movement for their patterns of compromise. Over the next three years, the abolitionists drew more attention and started to direct their efforts toward influencing their elected officials to abolish abortion.

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The first such effort in Oklahoma was a state initiative petition that would have allowed residents to cast their ballots in favor of abolishing abortion as murder. Hunter said that he was “trying to accelerate the shift” away from incrementalism with the

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., “National Right to Life Endorses Governor Mitt Romney,” press release, National Right to Life, April 12, 2012, <https://nrlc.org/communications/releases/2012/release041212>.

petition by demonstrating to the broadly pro-life voting base that they could, in fact, move to immediately abolish abortion.

The original plan was to recruit the three hundred attendees of the first Abolish Abortion Oklahoma conference to collect petition signatures in the state over the course of a week, but the American Civil Liberties Union successfully asked the Oklahoma Supreme Court in early 2016 to toss the petition since *Roe v. Wade* was in effect.<sup>2</sup> In their decision, members of the Oklahoma Supreme Court said, “This court is duty bound by the United States and the Oklahoma Constitution to follow the mandates of the United States Supreme Court on matters of federal constitutional law.”

Hunter said that the conference was placed in a bind over “what to do with the three hundred people that have decided to come to Oklahoma to collect these signatures.” Beyond sidewalk ministry at abortion mills and evangelism in the community, the attendees traveled to the Oklahoma State Capitol and tried to recruit legislators willing to sponsor an abortion abolition bill, only for those lawmakers to brandish their pro-life credentials while remaining largely uninterested.

“The abolitionists were going into every single office talking to each legislator and being told that they were ‘one-hundred percent pro-life’ or that they had an ‘A+ pro-life rating.’ They said that they were ‘totally with us’ but didn’t see the need for adopting a bill of abolition,” Hunter observed. “They had this other pro-life bill all about taking away the license of doctors who performed abortions.”

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<sup>2</sup> “State Supreme Court Stops Anti-Abortion Petition,” American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma, March 22, 2016, <https://www.acluok.org/en/news/state-supreme-court-stops-anti-abortion-petition>.

The one exception was now-former Oklahoma Republican State Senator Joseph Silk, who at the time was the sponsor of a bill purporting to ban abortion for any preborn baby observed with a heartbeat.<sup>3</sup> Hunter recalled that he and Malone successfully persuaded Silk that the approach was flawed “within fifteen or twenty minutes.” Silk then filed a floor amendment to his own heartbeat bill with the language from the defunct petition, thereby proposing to his colleagues that Oklahoma should criminalize all abortion under existing homicide statutes.<sup>4</sup>

Hunter remembered, however, that Silk was “having a whole lot of trouble” convincing fellow lawmakers to support his new legislation. The attendees of the abolitionist conference spent two more days attempting to lobby lawmakers, who said they would not support the bill but would instead support other pro-life legislation that fell short of abolishing abortion.

One of the lawmakers admitted that he would oppose the amendment from Silk because of the fact that Oklahomans for Life chairman Tony Lauinger, one of the most influential pro-life lobbyists in the state, was advocating against the measure. Hunter secured a copy of a letter that Lauinger wrote to a member of the Oklahoma Senate saying that Oklahomans for Life, a state affiliate of the National Right to Life Committee, was indeed opposing the amendment on the basis that the legislation would reverse previous pro-life laws, such as the Heartbeat Informed Consent Act enacted in 2012 and the

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<sup>3</sup> Heartbeat Informed Consent Act, S. B. 1118, Oklahoma State Legislature (2016), accessed July 19, 2024, [http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf\\_pdf/2015-16%20FLR/SFLR/SB1118%20SFLR.PDF](http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2015-16%20FLR/SFLR/SB1118%20SFLR.PDF).

<sup>4</sup> Amendment to Heartbeat Informed Consent Act, S. B. 1118, Oklahoma State Legislature (2016) (floor substitute), accessed July 19, 2024, [http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf\\_pdf/2015-16%20FLOOR%20AMENDMENTS/Senate/SB1118%20\(3-02-16\)%20\(SILK\)%20FS%20FA1.PDF](http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2015-16%20FLOOR%20AMENDMENTS/Senate/SB1118%20(3-02-16)%20(SILK)%20FS%20FA1.PDF).

Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act enacted in 2011.<sup>5</sup> Lauinger claimed to the lawmaker that both statutes “have saved the lives of unborn children in the past and will continue to do so in the future,” meaning that the amendment filed by Silk would “be a step backward in the fight to protect unborn children.”

Hunter said the letter changed the minds of many who had at first been skeptical of the claim that the pro-life establishment was the main opponent to ending abortion in Oklahoma. He published a copy of the letter, as well as a video in which he and Rusty Thomas, the now-retired leader of Operation Rescue and Operation Save America, confronted Lauinger about the document.<sup>6</sup>

When Hunter called abortion “murder,” Lauinger corrected him by insisting that abortion is “killing” and repeatedly contended that Oklahoma was powerless to challenge *Roe*.

“It’s very shifty and clever,” Hunter said of the letter in the video. “You’re saying that if we abolish abortion as murder, it’ll repeal the pro-life work that you’ve done to regulate abortion.”

Lauinger responded negatively to the notion that the Fourteenth Amendment, which says that no state can deprive citizens of equal protection of the laws, should be honored by Oklahoma despite the decision from the United States Supreme Court. “I personally have been working since 1973 to reverse the *Roe v. Wade* decision,” Lauinger insisted. “But these aren’t reversing the *Roe v. Wade* decision,” Hunter said of the pro-life laws, countering that they fit within the regulatory

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<sup>5</sup> Alex Myers, “Abortion abolitionists tack to the right of pro-life, pressure GOP lawmakers,” *Oklahoma City Free Press*, February 14, 2021, <https://freepressokc.com/abortion-abolitionists-tack-to-the-right-of-pro-life-pressure-gop-lawmakers>.

<sup>6</sup> T. Russell Hunter, “Abolitionist engages National Right To Life Leader (Part 1),” posted March 9, 2016, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPld6TSsJjU>.

paradigm established by the opinion rather than meaningfully challenging the opinion.

“The reason you can pass the Informed Consent Act is because it’s a pro-choice one,” Hunter told the veteran lobbyist. “It’s just saying before you kill your baby, you have the option to choose to listen to the heartbeat, if the abortionist will facilitate it. This is a pro-choice law.”

Lauinger has since opposed every abolition bill filed in Oklahoma. Even in the winter of 2023, well over one year after *Roe* was overturned, he contended in an article for the National Right to Life newsletter that Oklahoma should once more legalize abortion after rape and incest out of a “practical need for incrementalism and prudence” so that the laws more closely reflect “public sentiment” on abortion.<sup>7</sup> He admitted that “the pro-life movement’s best efforts have failed to ‘move the needle’ even a little regarding public attitudes toward abortion following rape.”

Lauinger was contacted for this book to discuss strategies to end abortion, especially given rising self-managed abortion levels in Oklahoma after the overturn of *Roe*. No response was received.

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Beyond the attempts to pass an abolition bill, however, the energy surrounding the issue fueled the 2018 gubernatorial campaign

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Lauinger, “Hypocrisy, Reality, and Lessons to be Learned,” National Right to Life, December 11, 2023, <https://nrlc.org/nrlnewstoday/2023/12/hypocrisy-reality-and-lessons-to-be-learned>. I responded to Lauinger’s comments in an article for *The Republic Sentinel*, “Oklahoma pro-life lobbyist pushes for abortion in cases of rape and incest to be legalized again,” December 21, 2023, <https://www.republicsentinel.com/articles/oklahoma-pro-life-lobbyist-pushes-for-abortion-in-cases-of-rape-and-incest-to-be-legalized-again>.

of now-former Oklahoma Republican State Representative Dan Fisher, who was also a pastor at Trinity Baptist Church in Yukon, Oklahoma. Fisher emphasized abortion abolition in his campaign, even featuring the issue before all others on his website, and stressed the need to assert state sovereignty over against the federal government.<sup>8</sup>

“Abortion is murder. Yet pro-life politicians continue to regulate abortion as health care,” the campaign website observed. “I am not a pro-life politician. I am an abolitionist.”

Fisher finished with 7.9 percent of the Republican primary vote, placing fourth in a ten-person race that eventually saw Republican Kevin Stitt ascend to the office of governor.

The campaign nevertheless drew more attention to abortion abolition in Oklahoma. Hunter and other abolitionists used existing infrastructure from the campaign to launch Free the States, a political advocacy organization that became the primary mechanism for supporting abortion abolition bills. The model was mimicked across the country as state-level abolitionist groups started to emerge with the specific goals of lobbying officials and electing candidates.

Silk, who supported the Fisher campaign as well, vowed that he would continue introducing abolition bills every year he was elected. That is exactly what he did until he left office in 2021.

Silk proposed another bill in 2017 that would have criminalized abortion as first-degree murder.<sup>9</sup> The bill

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<sup>8</sup> Dan Fisher for Governor, “Dan’s Platform,” archived on November 22, 2018, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181122181519/http://fisherforgovernor.com/dans-platform>.

<sup>9</sup> An Act Relating to Abortion, Amending 21 O.S. 2011, S. B. 817, Oklahoma State Legislature (2017), accessed July 19, 2024, [http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf\\_pdf/2017-18%20INT/SB/SB817%20INT.PDF](http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2017-18%20INT/SB/SB817%20INT.PDF).

was referred to the Oklahoma Senate Health and Human Services Committee but never received a vote, meaning that the legislation died without advancing to the floor. Hunter described that the abolitionists, preoccupied with running the Fisher campaign through the end of 2018 and helping other Christians in neighboring Texas mimic the petition project to amend their state Republican Party platform, were largely unavailable to lobby for the bill.

In 2019, however, Silk introduced the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act, which was once more referred to the Oklahoma Senate Health and Human Services Committee.<sup>10</sup> Silk managed to convince four members of the Oklahoma Senate to coauthor the legislation. Yet mere days after his four colleagues were added as backers, and as the legislation continued to draw attention from the press, the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma stunned proponents of the bill by issuing an open letter to fellow Southern Baptists in the state condemning the effort.

The letter outlined “several concerns,” including the notion that the bill would be “invalidated immediately by the courts,” and repeated the earlier claims from Lauinger that the legislation would “unnecessarily and purposely” repeal many “hard-earned pro-life laws that have helped significantly reduce Oklahoma’s abortion rate.”<sup>11</sup> The letter asserted that “there are more proven and plausible life-saving policies Oklahoma could enact en route to ending the tragic practice of abortion,

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<sup>10</sup> Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act, S. B. 13, Oklahoma State Legislature (2019), accessed August 16, 2024, [http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf\\_pdf/2019-20%20INT/SB/SB13%20INT.PDF](http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2019-20%20INT/SB/SB13%20INT.PDF).

<sup>11</sup> “An open letter to Oklahoma Baptists regarding abortion and protecting human life,” *The Baptist Messenger*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.baptistmessenger.com/an-open-letter-to-oklahoma-baptists-regarding-abortion-and-protecting-human-life>.

while simultaneously offering support and help for abortion-vulnerable mothers.”

Silk responded to the letter, which was published in *Tulsa World*,<sup>12</sup> one of the primary news outlets in Oklahoma, by saying that he was “appalled by the reasoning” of the document.<sup>13</sup>

He observed that the pro-life laws that the Oklahoma Baptists were attempting to support were “the very legislation that is keeping abortion legal in Oklahoma.” He also cautioned the Southern Baptists that “we are either an abortion-free state or a state that simply regulates abortion.”

The letter was signed by Blake Gideon, the now-former president of the Oklahoma Baptists and a pastor at First Baptist Church of Edmond; Hance Dilbeck, the now-former director-treasurer of the Oklahoma Baptists; and Brian Hobbs, the editor of the *Baptist Messenger*. Two Roman Catholic bishops from the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City also publicly rebuked the bill with identical arguments.<sup>14</sup>

Gideon later repented for his role in opposing the legislation. He said in comments for this book that he has since been “convinced immediate abolition” is the biblical doctrine for ending abortion.

In an emotional interview for the 2022 documentary *A Storm Comes Rolling Down the Plain*, Gideon said he had

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Hoberock, “Baptist leaders oppose bill to criminalize abortion; proponent ‘flabbergasted,’” *Tulsa World*, February 22, 2019, [https://tulsaworld.com/news/state-and-regional/baptist-leaders-oppose-bill-to-criminalize-abortion-proponent-flabbergasted/article\\_3e77c563-bb84-5376-9dc7-a4d31ba23b71.html](https://tulsaworld.com/news/state-and-regional/baptist-leaders-oppose-bill-to-criminalize-abortion-proponent-flabbergasted/article_3e77c563-bb84-5376-9dc7-a4d31ba23b71.html).

<sup>13</sup> Oklahoma Senate, “Sen. Silk responds to Baptist Convention letter opposing abortion bill,” press release, February 22, 2019, <https://oksenate.gov/press-releases/sen-silk-responds-baptist-convention-letter-opposing-abortion-bill>.

<sup>14</sup> Paul S. Coakley and David Konderla, “Abortion Abolition bill poses serious problems,” Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, February 26, 2019, <https://archokc.org/news/abortion-abolition-bill-poses-serious-problems>.

“always preached boldly from the pulpit against abortion” and, when he was initially elected president, even “made a goal to myself that I’m going to lead Oklahoma Baptists to implement the strictest policies that we’ve ever had against abortion.”<sup>15</sup> He confirmed in the comments for this book that he was told the bill had “potential to do more harm than good.”

In the months after the letter was released, Gideon instead poured himself into lobbying for legislation that would revoke the medical licenses of abortionists if they murdered a preborn baby. Despite his labors, however, senior Republican leadership and the pro-life establishment suddenly decided to shelve the legislation, at which point “everything changed” for him.

“When they did nothing with it, I realized then that everything the abolitionists had been saying was correct,” Gideon recalled in the documentary. “I realized then that legislators aren’t going to do anything of significance to abolish abortion unless the people rise up and say we demand it.”

Beyond his realization that the pro-life establishment was not serious about ending abortion, Gideon said that deepening conviction about his position led to his repentance. Countless believers from across the country called and emailed Gideon about the letter. Some of the messages were “not so nice,” but a meeting with Hunter and several pastors changed his mind.

“I was fighting against my own conscience. I was fighting against the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I can’t tell you how many times I prayed, ‘Lord, if I’m on the wrong side of this, show me, because all I want to do is obey your will.’ I prayed that probably fifteen times,” Gideon commented. “You know

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<sup>15</sup> “A Storm Comes Rolling Down the Plain Full Documentary,” documentary, posted by Brightrider on May 16, 2022, YouTube, starting at 00:54:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPu59scsBA8>.

why I kept praying that? Because I knew I was on the wrong side.”

Even as two of the four coauthors removed their names from the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act in the days after the Oklahoma Baptists released their letter, the publication of the document caused widespread confusion from Southern Baptist ministers in Oklahoma as to why their own denomination was urging them to oppose the abolition of abortion. Several of those ministers, such as Bill Ascol, Sam Ketcher, Dusty Deevers, Kelly Greene, and Brett Baggett, openly repudiated the pro-life establishment as a result of the letter.

Gideon himself, for the first time in his ministry, started to preach at a nearby abortion mill on a regular basis, calling on mothers and fathers to have mercy on their children and turn to Jesus. He now lobbies for abolition bills and remains a fixture at abolitionist conferences and rallies. At one such event, he publicly repented for writing the letter on behalf of the Oklahoma Baptists.

As with previous bills, the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act received neither a hearing nor a vote in the Oklahoma Senate Health and Human Services Committee, which was chaired by now-former Oklahoma Republican State Senator Jason Smalley, nor was it permitted to advance to the floor. Silk released a statement rebuking Oklahoma Senate leaders for instead introducing another “alternative bill” that would only enter into effect if *Roe* were overturned.<sup>16</sup>

Even after leadership refused to consider the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act, Silk was punished with removal

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<sup>16</sup> Oklahoma Senate, “Sen. Silk releases statement on Senate abortion bills,” press release, February 25, 2019, <https://oksenate.gov/press-releases/sen-silk-releases-statement-senate-abortion-bills>.

from a committee vice-chairmanship by Senate Republican President Pro Tempore Greg Treat, a clear act of retaliation for his efforts. Silk contended in a letter sent to his colleagues that the Oklahoma Senate had “never seen a more authoritarian leadership.”<sup>17</sup>

Treat said that Silk was removed after Free the States sponsored billboards that drew attention to Smalley and his refusal to hear the bill. “When you are a chair or vice chair of a Senate committee, I put you there,” Treat emphasized in an interview with *Tulsa World*.<sup>18</sup>

Treat, like other members of Republican establishment in Oklahoma, campaigned on a “100 percent pro-life” platform with endorsements from Lauinger and various pro-life organizations.<sup>19</sup>

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The nationwide controversy generated by the failure of the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act also reverberated among staffers at pro-life groups, leading some to reconsider their tactics.

James Silberman was an employee at Created Equal, a pro-life ministry based in Ohio, because he was impressed with their distinctly Christian approach to apologetics and advocacy for the preborn. The group encourages their interns and staff

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<sup>17</sup> Barbara Hoberock, “Senator says leadership retaliated against him for controversial abortion bill,” *Tulsa World*, April 5, 2019, [https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/government-and-politics/senator-says-leadership-retaliated-against-him-for-controversial-abortion-bill/article\\_83825d6d-d848-53bf-ab25-4113666332be.html](https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/government-and-politics/senator-says-leadership-retaliated-against-him-for-controversial-abortion-bill/article_83825d6d-d848-53bf-ab25-4113666332be.html).

<sup>18</sup> Hoberock, “Senator says leadership retaliated.”

<sup>19</sup> Vote Greg Treat (@VoteGregTreat), “The reason I got into public service was the issue of life,” Instagram, October 25, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGybUKSHYhC>.

members to hold victim imagery depicting murdered preborn babies in public and otherwise pursue direct engagement with the culture.

Silberman later shared in an episode of *The Liberator*, a podcast from Free the States named after the periodical launched by slavery abolitionists, that he heard about the 2016 letter from Lauinger and was so shocked that he did not at first believe that level of compromise was real.<sup>20</sup>

He started contending for abolition efforts within Created Equal, but his appeals were rejected by leadership. At the time, he was writing for conservative news outlets such as *The Federalist* and *The Resurgent*, and in addition to an interview with Fisher,<sup>21</sup> he wrote an article entitled “The Three Pro-Life Men Keeping Abortion Legal in Oklahoma” specifically naming Lauinger, Smalley, and Treat for their opposition to the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act.<sup>22</sup> The article contributed to his ouster at Created Equal and his hiring as communications director at Free the States, which was renamed Abolitionists Rising after the overturn of *Roe*. Today Silberman serves as the executive assistant for Dusty Deever in his work as a member of the Oklahoma Senate.

Sam Riley, who was the roommate of Silberman during his time at Created Equal, as well as fellow staffers Rachel Burkey and Austin Beigel, left the organization in subsequent months

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<sup>20</sup> “Sam and James Leave the Pro-Life Movement: The Liberator Podcast #2,” Abolitionists Rising, August 20, 2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rz4MWodH7LI>.

<sup>21</sup> James Silberman, “Meet The Abortion ‘Abolitionist’ Running For Oklahoma Governor,” *The Federalist*, April 13, 2018, <https://thefederalist.com/2018/04/13/meet-abortion-abolitionist-running-oklahoma-governor>.

<sup>22</sup> James Silberman, “The Three Pro-Life Men Keeping Abortion Legal in Oklahoma,” Free the States, February 17, 2019, <https://freethestates.org/2019/02/the-three-pro-life-men-keeping-abortion-legal-in-oklahoma>.

as they likewise developed in conviction over the flaws in the pro-life strategy.<sup>23</sup> All four staffers were drawn to Created Equal over their appreciation for Christian apologetics, but all four left out of what they concurred was a desire to obey God in their methodology toward ending abortion.

Riley and Burkey started working at Free the States after their departure and continue to work for Abolitionists Rising, while Beigel serves as the president of End Abortion Ohio.

Silberman knows of more staffers from Created Equal, as well as at least one from both Live Action and Students for Life, who left the groups over their convictions on abolitionism. He remarked in comments for this book that younger staffers are more likely than their older pro-life mentors to assess the abolitionist movement “honestly and dispassionately.”

“It’s not easy to admit that you have been going about saving babies wrongly for all these years. Such an admission is not for the faint of heart. It takes a rare amount of courage and humility to do so. Many pro-lifers are not able to make it,” Silberman described. “I hadn’t been around long enough to develop deep connections to the pro-life leaders, accumulate access to influential pro-life politicians, or develop a sense of identity and pride in decades of pro-life work. The non-ideological reasons to be a pro-lifer didn’t apply to me. I was able to come to the obvious conclusion that abolitionism was more biblical and powerful to change culture and politics.”

Beyond their political advocacy in Oklahoma and across the nation, Free the States started to conduct what they

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<sup>23</sup> “Rachel Burkey Left the Pro-Life Movement Because of Scripture: The Liberator Podcast #27,” posted by Abolitionists Rising on February 25, 2021, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tn7MUUnWE4Qg>.

described as “agitation” campaigns featuring Hunter and his artistic talents.

In 2016, which was two years before their formal incarnation as Free the States, Hunter and several volunteers spent months publicly distributing custom dollar bills featuring the likenesses of both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump alongside cryptic imagery with conspiratorial themes. The design was specifically intended to capture the attention of conspiracy theorists on the internet, who were directed to a website with nothing but a countdown implying a catastrophic world event. The conspiracy community spent months theorizing about what would occur.

Rather than learning of a financial meltdown or political assassination, however, members of the community were greeted with a video of Hunter telling them that a true conspiracy was happening all around them: the murder of preborn babies for selfish reasons by everyday people and not merely by globalist elites seeking political or economic influence.<sup>24</sup> Hunter shared the gospel of Jesus Christ in the video and exhorted viewers to save preborn babies from death.

In 2021, another cultural “agitation” project centered around the historical figure of Harriet Tubman and promises from the Obama administration to place her likeness on the twenty-dollar bill. Free the States staff members and volunteers distributed custom twenty-dollar bills featuring Tubman holding a lantern and pistol, as well as inviting recipients of the bills to a rally in Philadelphia.

The rally occurred outside the site of Pennsylvania Hall, the former headquarters of the slavery abolition movement

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<sup>24</sup> “Bad Self Eater Countdown Timer Revealed,” posted by Finale Video on September 14, 2016, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oOVR7-s1iM>.

that was torched by an angry mob. Hunter told predominately liberal attendees that Tubman was driven by her Christian faith to end the state-sanctioned evil of slavery, only revealing later in the rally that the attendees should likewise oppose the state-sanctioned evil of abortion.<sup>25</sup>

After the overturn of *Roe*, Free the States indeed formally reconstituted themselves to become Abolitionists Rising, a nonprofit organization designed to educate the public about the inefficacy of the pro-life establishment. They swiftly expanded their presence on social media, garnering more than 185,000 followers on TikTok and 265,000 followers on YouTube by the start of 2025. Abolitionists Rising believes they are now the most-watched anti-abortion organization on the internet.

Riley said in an interview for this book that the TikTok channel was the first to become a viral sensation due to their “combination of street activism and a bold, unapologetic abolitionist perspective in a culture full of milquetoast pro-life and wicked pro-choice rhetoric.”

“People were hungry for a more honest dialogue unencumbered by conversational tricks and slow-spoken, faux-compassionate, emotionally manipulative anecdotery replete in pro-life videos similar in category to our own,” Riley added. “Despite being underfunded, we quickly overtook all the pro-life channels and began dwarfing popular Christian channels in views.”

The robust presence of Abolitionists Rising on social media has assisted with new “agitation” efforts in recent years. At the end of 2023, for instance, they brought a sign emblazoned with “Anthony Edwards Is A Murderer” to a Minnesota

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<sup>25</sup> “Will The Real Harriet Tubman Please Stand Up Rally,” Tubman20, video posted August 1, 2021, <https://tubman20.com>.

Timberwolves game, drawing attention to the fact that the basketball player had recently instructed a model to abort his own child and appeared to pay her \$100,000 for the murder.<sup>26</sup> They also posted a twelve-minute exposé of Oklahoma Republican Representative Marcus McEntire, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary,<sup>27</sup> admitting that he does not necessarily believe the state should limit abortion even as he boasted about his pro-life credentials to Hunter throughout the video.<sup>28</sup>

Riley noted that he had “anticipated people changing from pro-life to abolitionist” through the social media presence of Abolitionists Rising but was pleasantly surprised by “the number of commenters saying they began attending church or repented of their sins and came to Christ.”

“Our videos contain many instances of sharing the gospel with unbelievers, but a bold gospel proclamation in the face of sometimes violent, usually vile opposition showed the contrast between darkness and light in a new way,” he continued. “A day has not gone by without a comment informing us about the worldview-shifting impact of our videos. To God be the glory.”

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<sup>26</sup> Abolitionists Rising (@AbolitionRising), “All-Star shooting guard Anthony Edwards murdered his preborn son or daughter,” Twitter (now X), December 26, 2023, <https://x.com/AbolitionRising/status/1739867829946757315>.

<sup>27</sup> “Representative Marcus McEntire,” State of Oklahoma House of Representatives, accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.okhouse.gov/representatives/Marcus-mcentire>.

<sup>28</sup> Abolitionists Rising (@AbolitionRising), “Everything we say about Pro-Lifers is true,” Twitter, February 14, 2024, <https://x.com/AbolitionRising/status/1757917644336808204>.

Free the States and other abolitionist groups consistently heard that running on a more intense anti-abortion platform than the conventional pro-life movement would only be a liability in elections. Yet there have been several candidates in Oklahoma who have won positions while publicly backing abortion abolition, thereby making the movement a meaningful bulwark in Oklahoma politics even as they drew backlash from the Republican establishment in the state.

Republican State Senator Warren Hamilton defeated the incumbent Larry Boggs in a 2020 runoff, earning 52.3 percent of the vote. Hamilton then defeated his Democratic general election challenger Jerry Donathan with 74.8 percent of the vote, outperforming the 55.8 percent earned by Boggs against the Democrat four years earlier.

Hamilton identified “abolishing abortion” as his top priority before the election<sup>29</sup> and featured his sponsorship of the Abolition of Abortion in Oklahoma Act on his campaign website.<sup>30</sup>

Republican State Senator Dusty Deever likewise won a four-way 2023 special primary election with 37.1 percent of the vote, defeating Jean Hausheer, the preferred candidate of the Republican establishment. Deever then defeated Democratic general election challenger Larry Bush with 55.5 percent of the vote, a margin comparable to prior elections in the district.

Deever emphasized the “abolition of abortion” during interviews with local and national news outlets, as well as in

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<sup>29</sup> Adrian O’Hanlon III, “District 7 State Senate candidates talk issues,” *McAlester News-Capital*, October 16, 2020, [https://www.mcalesternews.com/news/local\\_news/district-7-state-senate-candidates-talk-issues/article\\_7d50d435-3810-5037-84a7-88b55da9147e.html](https://www.mcalesternews.com/news/local_news/district-7-state-senate-candidates-talk-issues/article_7d50d435-3810-5037-84a7-88b55da9147e.html).

<sup>30</sup> “Hamilton’s Platform and Proven Record,” Warren Hamilton for State Senate, accessed July 19, 2024, <https://www.votehamilton.org/platform>.

viral advertisements that drew nationwide attention to his campaign.<sup>31</sup> He also advocated for other assertive Christian policy positions, such as a full ban on pornography.

Upon his victory, Deevers noted that he was “outspent by special interests” at a ten-to-one rate, but that he won thanks to his “volunteer-driven campaign.”<sup>32</sup> The victory came even as friends of Larry Bush sent campaign mail to voters featuring criticism of Deevers from now-former Southern Baptist Convention President Bart Barber, who rejects abortion abolitionism. Barber, a pastor at First Baptist Church of Farmersville, Texas, also donated \$100 to Hausheer as she campaigned against Deevers in the primary. He claimed in a statement that he believed the donation showed his “honest commitment not to participate in negative politics.”<sup>33</sup>

Similar victories from abolitionists openly campaigning on equal protection for the preborn have occurred throughout the United States, even amid opposition from establishment Republicans. The abolitionists have benefited from a dissatisfaction with establishment lawmakers. Republican State Senate Majority Floor Leader Greg McCortney, a frequent opponent of abortion abolition who was selected by his colleagues to succeed Republican Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat in that role, and who was endorsed by

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<sup>31</sup> Ben Zeisloft, “Interview: Why this pastor is running for office,” *The Republic Sentinel*, September 5, 2023, <https://republicsentinel.com/articles/interview-why-this-pastor-is-running-for-office>.

<sup>32</sup> Michael McNutt, “Lawton area: Dusty Deevers elected in SD 32 special,” *NonDoc*, December 12, 2023, <https://nondoc.com/2023/12/12/dusty-deevers-elected-sd-32-special-election>.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Zeisloft, “SBC President Bart Barber donated to primary opponent of fellow SBC pastor Dusty Deevers,” *The Republic Sentinel*, November 11, 2023, <https://republicsentinel.com/articles/sbc-president-bart-barber-donated-to-primary-opponent-of-fellow-sbc-pastor-dusty-deevers>.

National Right to Life and Oklahomans for Life,<sup>34</sup> nevertheless lost his 2024 primary race with 48.2 percent of the vote.<sup>35</sup>

Treat and McCortney were both contacted for this book and asked for comment on how Republicans will address self-managed abortion after the end of *Roe*. No response was received.

Hamilton and Deever both introduced abolition bills in the months after their elections. The bill proposed by Hamilton in 2021 was referred to the Oklahoma Senate Health and Human Services Committee and failed to receive a favorable recommendation.<sup>36</sup> The bill introduced by Deever and cosponsored by Hamilton in 2024, nearly two years after the overturn of *Roe*, was referred to the Oklahoma Senate Judiciary Committee and failed to receive a vote.<sup>37</sup>

As leadership continued refusing to hear the legislation, Deever proposed an interim study to formally examine the severity of self-managed abortion in Oklahoma.<sup>38</sup> “A handful of my Senate colleagues and I have warned about the continuing reality of self-managed abortion in Oklahoma and the need

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<sup>34</sup> James Silberman, “National Right to Life Endorses Greg McCortney, the Senator Who Kept Abortion Legal in Oklahoma,” *Free the States*, May 6, 2020, <https://freestates.org/2020/05/national-right-to-life-endorses-greg-mccortney>.

<sup>35</sup> “McCortney loses reelection bid,” *The Ada News*, June 20, 2024, [https://www.theadanews.com/news/local\\_news/mccortney-loses-reelection-bid/article\\_a1ca09b0-2e51-11ef-95b0-a35180913472.html](https://www.theadanews.com/news/local_news/mccortney-loses-reelection-bid/article_a1ca09b0-2e51-11ef-95b0-a35180913472.html).

<sup>36</sup> Prenatal Equal Protection Act, S. B. 402, Oklahoma 1st Session of the 59th Legislature (2023), accessed July 19, 2024, [http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf\\_pdf/2023-24%20INT/SB/SB402%20INT.PDF](http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2023-24%20INT/SB/SB402%20INT.PDF).

<sup>37</sup> Abolition of Abortion Act, S. B. 1729, Oklahoma 2nd Session of the 59th Legislature (2024), accessed July 19, 2024, [http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf\\_pdf/2023-24%20INT/SB/SB1729%20INT.PDF](http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/cf_pdf/2023-24%20INT/SB/SB1729%20INT.PDF).

<sup>38</sup> Oklahoma Senate, “Dobbs Anniversary: Abortion Pill Billboards Pop Up Around Oklahoma, Deever Calls for Interim Study,” press release, June 24, 2024, <https://oksenate.gov/press-releases/dobbs-anniversary-abortion-pill-billboards-pop-around-oklahoma-deever-calls-interim?back=/senator-press-releases/dusty-deever>.

to close the self-managed abortion loophole,” he said in a press release. “We cannot simply bury our heads in the sand as preborn children are murdered on our watch.”

That effort was one of very few that tried to address the self-managed abortion phenomenon. On the same day *Roe* was overturned, now-former Oklahoma Republican Attorney General John O’Connor indeed announced that the development was “a victory for unborn children,” yet he emphasized that the purported ban on abortion that entered into effect that day had neither “criminal punishment” nor “civil exposure” for a mother who murders her preborn child.<sup>39</sup>

Christians in the state of Oklahoma devoted to abolishing abortion and establishing equal protection of the laws for preborn babies, despite the continual setbacks imposed by the pro-life establishment, are optimistic that their message is advancing and that their influence is growing.

Riley observed that nearly one decade after the abolitionist movement started to challenge the pro-life establishment in Oklahoma, the legislators and lobbyists who opposed their efforts “have been shaken on numerous occasions,” allowing the abolitionists to swiftly build influence.

“They now know that it is not only possible to win as an abolitionist, but that it is a hard battle to win as a pro-lifer,” he said. “The establishment of Oklahoma knows they need to dump unholy sums of money into the campaigns of any of their candidates with an abolitionist challenger. The time is coming in Oklahoma where pro-life Republicans will be totally unelectable.”

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<sup>39</sup> “Governor Kevin Stitt and AG John O’Connor Celebrate Oklahoma Becoming a Pro-Life State,” streamed live by Governor Kevin Stitt on June 24, 2022, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-CECfWWTc>.