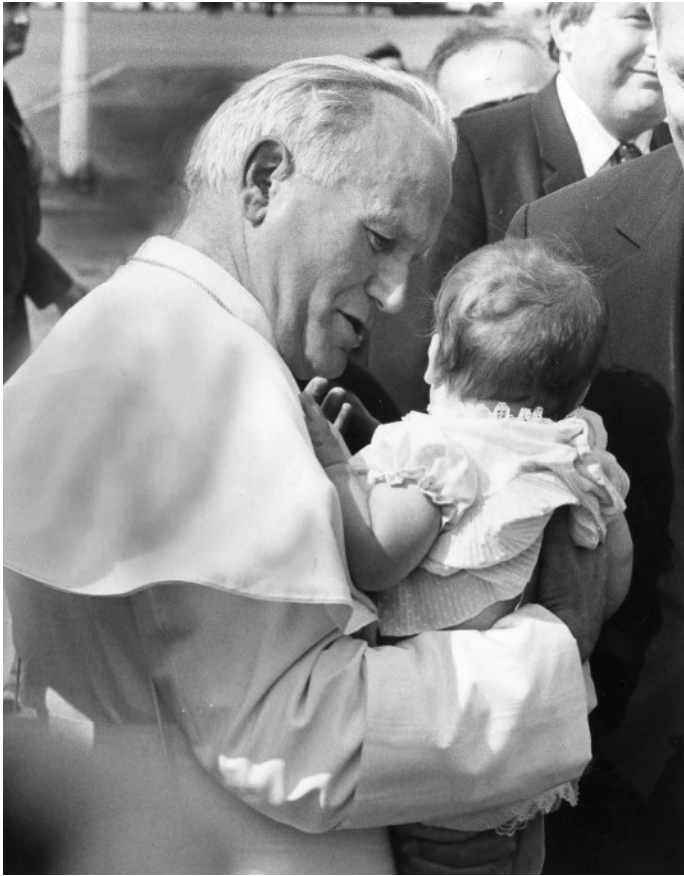


CULTURE AND ABORTION



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ABORTION

EDWARD SHORT

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For
Sophia Thérèse Mariana

Διά τὸ θαυμάζειν ἢ σοφία

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Charles Dickens (late 1850s) by John and Charles Watkins (Public Domain)

G. K. Chesterton and his Wife Frances (1922) (Courtesy of G. K. Chesterton Library Trust)

Pope John Paul II, New York City (1979) (Public Domain)

PREFACE

MANY GENEROUS PEOPLE gave me critical support while I was writing *Culture and Abortion*. First and foremost, I should like to thank Mr. Tom Longford of Gracewing for his belief in the project when it was still evolving and his persevering good counsel once it began to take shape. Sister Mary Joseph, OSB, Librarian of the Venerable English College in Rome, kindly gave me the benefit of her crack editorial smarts, as did Rev. Dr. Paul Haffner, Theological and Editorial Director of Gracewing. Mrs. Anne Conlon and Mrs. Maria McFadden of the *Human Life Review* were also forthcoming with their kind assistance. I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Conlon for urging me to take my melancholy theme and fashion it into a book. Then, again, I am pleased to express my abounding thanks to Prof. and Mrs. J. J. Scarisbrick, who shared with me the good work of their far-flung pro-life organization, LIFE, which has pregnancy care centers, fertility clinics, hospices, and education offices throughout the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Nigeria. There are many others to whom I am indebted. Prof. Jo Anne Sylva was unstinting in her sympathetic support. Mrs. Stella Becker gave me the grace of her prayers and best wishes. Miss Kaitlin Walter kept me abreast of the younger generation. Father Dermot Fenlon of Newman's Oratory gave me his keen critical support. Father Aquinas Guilbeau, OP, introduced me not only to Mother Mary Francis and the Hawthorne Sisters but to Sister Sylvia Enriquez and the Servants of Mary, all of whom helped me to understand the culture of life and love. Dr. Tracey Rowland once again came to my rescue from occasionally sunny Melbourne. Robert Crotty, Esq. gave me the benefit

of his good counsel and good company. John Forry, Esq. was another source of vital support. Miss Madeleine Beard pointed out to me that the mother of Margot Fonteyn had sought to have the great ballerina aborted. Monsignor Austin Bennett of the Church of St. Rita was another source of great support, as were Mr. and Mrs. William Law from faraway Wisconsin. Prof. Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School impressed upon me how the evil of euthanasia now threatens America's public health system. Monsignor George Bardes inspired me with his stalwart pro-life witness, as did Mrs. Frances O'C. Hardart. The Right Honorable William Hague sharpened my understanding of the parallels between the pro-life movement and William Wilberforce's campaign to abolish slavery. Mrs. Charlotte Allen of *The Weekly Standard* helped me to understand the full evil of Planned Parenthood. And Miss Caroline Van Horn of Line Designs gave me brilliant help with the images that grace my cover and chapters.

Lastly, I am grateful to my wife Karina and our obstreperous newborn Sophia, both of whom have helped me to understand the preciousness of life, which makes the Golgotha at the core of this book all the more distressing.

Edward Short

Feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem

18 March 2013

Astoria, New York

“Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of this earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which has its full realization in eternity.”

Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995)

“The supreme adventure is being born.”

G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (1905)

“Man’s life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life; man cannot do with it as he wills.”

Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995)



Matthew Arnold

INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE people I had in mind when I was writing *Culture and Abortion* was Matthew Arnold (1822–88), whose *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) continues to generate keen interest in a society where we seem to have so much of the latter and so little of the former. Yet if Arnold believed that culture could somehow enable his combustible society to prevent anarchy, I wished to argue in my book that false notions of culture could actually foment anarchy, not only the sort that leads people to engage in street fighting and the like, but the rather more consequential sort that prevents people from distinguishing good from evil. That so much of what constitutes the culture of our own social order promotes abortion turns Arnold’s original contention on its head. Whether we choose to see the wreck of our culture as stemming from the noisome influence of the State or the universities or the chattering classes, or what Cardinal Newman once called “the great *apostasia*,” many of those who set themselves up as custodians of culture now uniformly subscribe to the notion that killing babies in the womb redounds to the well-being and indeed the dignity of women. As Nathaniel Hawthorne had his narrator remind his readers in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851): “the influential classes ... those who take upon themselves to be leaders of the people are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob.”¹

What I sought to do in *Culture and Abortion* was to see if some aspects of culture—which is to say works of poetry, history, criticism, fiction, and the encyclicals of popes—

¹ N. Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Folio Society, 2012), p. 5.

could help make sense of this life-destroying notion, though another and perhaps more important purpose was to argue that in order to end the evil of abortion we need a revival of culture, true culture, not the travesty of culture that Arnold recommends.

Having said this, I must also say that in many ways Arnold is a sympathetic figure. He had a delicious sense of humor, derived in large measure from growing up with his father, the famous headmaster of Rugby, who seems to have had no sense of the ridiculous whatsoever. We can get a good example of the son's humor in *Friendship's Garland* (1867), where Arnold describes showing his imaginary Prussian hero Arminius the English legal system in action. When they arrive at the magistrate's court where a poacher is being tried, Arminius asks whether the two justices in attendance, Lord Lumpington and Mr. Hittal, gained anything from their time at Oxford, to which Arnold replies:

Well ... during their three years at Oxford they were so much occupied with Bullingdon and hunting that there was no great opportunity to judge. But for my part I have always thought that their both getting their degrees at last with flying colours, after three weeks of a famous coach for fast men, four nights without going to bed, and an incredible consumption of wet towels, strong cigars, and brandy-and-water, was one of the most astonishing feats of mental gymnastics I ever heard of.²

In addition to his charming sense of fun, Arnold was a dutiful husband and a doting papa. He wrote an elegant, bantering, ironical English. He could be an inspired poet and an insightful critic. Towards the end of his life, when London society began to lionize him, he wrote scoffingly to one of his friends, "People think I can teach them style.

² M. Arnold, *Friendship's Garland* (London, 1903), p. 50.

What stuff it all is! Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style.”³

These were the winning aspects of the man. But when he proceeded to lecture his contemporaries on culture he showed what mischief ensues when trifling men—George Meredith called Arnold “a dandy Isaiah”—take it into their heads to conceive of culture in terms that have nothing to do with God or man’s longing for God.⁴ It also has to be said that elitism played a certain part in the formation of Arnold’s notions of culture, as it does in so many of those who adopted these notions after him. He was something of what Thackeray might have called a “literary snob.” Convinced that his own extensive reading put him at the center of the universe, he tended to look down his nose at anyone outside this blessed plot. Indeed, in discussing the requirements of culture, he turned the thing itself into a most unsympathetic snob.

Culture says: “Consider these people, then, their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice; look at them attentively; observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the words which come forth out of their mouths, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds; would any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?” And thus culture begets a dissatisfaction which is the best possible value in stemming the common tide of men’s thoughts in a wealthy and industrial community, and which saves the future, one may hope, from being vulgarized, even if it cannot save the present.⁵

³ G. W. E. Russell, *Collections and Recollections* (London, 1903), p. 136.

⁴ G. Meredith, *Fortnightly Review* (July 1909).

⁵ M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London, 1903), p. 16.

By contrast, Shakespeare, Johnson and Chesterton, the most egalitarian of our writers, positively rejoiced in concurring with this “common tide of men’s thoughts,” especially when it accorded with ancient, unfashionable, unbiddable truth. Arnold could only bring himself to deplore the thoughts of ordinary men. Indeed, the nihilist in him could be strangely impatient with life itself.

There is a striking example of this in the preface to his first series of critical essays, where he notes how “the *Saturday Review* maintains that our epoch of transformation is finished; that we have found our philosophy; that the British nation has searched all anchorages for the spirit, and has finally anchored itself, in the fullness of perfected knowledge, on Benthamism.

This idea at first made a great impression on me; not only because it is so consoling in itself, but also because it explained a phenomenon which in the summer of last year had, I confess, a good deal troubled me. At that time my avocations led me to travel almost daily on one of the Great Eastern Lines,—the Woodford Branch. Every one knows that the murderer, Müller, perpetrated his detestable act on the North London Railway, close by.⁶ The English middle class, of which I am myself a feeble unit, travel on the Woodford Branch in large numbers. Well, the demoralisation of our class,—the class which (the newspapers are constantly saying it, so I may repeat it without vanity) has done all the great things which have ever been done in England,—the demoralisation, I say, of our class,

⁶ On July 9, 1864, Thomas Briggs, a bank clerk, was murdered in his first-class compartment by Max Müller, a German tailor, while traveling on the North London Railway between Bow and Hackney-wick. Müller murdered Briggs for his gold watch and chain. See *The Illustrated London News* (16 July 1864).

caused by the Bow tragedy, was something bewildering. Myself a transcendentalist (as the *Saturday Review* knows), I escaped the infection; and, day after day, I used to ply my agitated fellow travellers with all the consolations which my transcendentalism would naturally suggest to me.

Of course, the reference here to his “transcendentalism” was facetious. Arnold had no transcendentalism of any stripe. His definition of religion could have been borrowed from Julian the Apostate: “The true meaning of religion is ... not simply morality, but morality touched by emotion.”⁷ It was G. K. Chesterton who first called attention to the pagan statism to which Arnold’s views on religion and culture incline.

He seems to have believed that a “Historic Church,” that is, some established organisation with ceremonies and sacred books, etc., could be perpetually preserved as a sort of vessel to contain the spiritual ideas of the age, whatever those ideas might happen to be. He clearly seems to have contemplated a melting away of the doctrines of the Church and even of the meaning of the words: but he thought a certain need in man would always be best satisfied by public worship and especially by the great religious literatures of the past. He would embalm the body that it might often be revisited by the soul—or souls ... But while Arnold would loosen the theological bonds of the Church, he would not loosen the official bonds of the State. You must not disestablish the Church: you must not even leave the Church: you must stop inside it and think what you choose. Enemies might say that he was simply trying to establish and endow Agnosticism. It is fairer and truer to say that

⁷ M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (London, 1873), p. 21.

unconsciously he was trying to restore Paganism: for this State Ritualism without theology, and without much belief, actually was the practice of the ancient world. Arnold may have thought that he was building an altar to the Unknown God; but he was really building it to Divus Caesar.⁸

In an essay called “Democracy” in his *Mixed Essays* (1879), Arnold elaborates on his statist views of culture by claiming how, “the very framework and exterior order of the State ... is sacred ... because of the great hopes and designs for the State which culture teaches us to nourish.” As to exactly what these “great hopes and designs” are, Arnold is not altogether clear, though he is convinced that they bind us to the State in profound ways, for “believing,” as he says, “in right reason, and having faith in the progress of humanity towards perfection, and ever labouring for this end, we grow to have clearer sight of the ideas of right reason, and of the elements and helps of perfection, and come gradually to fill the framework of the State with them, to fashion its internal composition and all its laws and institutions conformably to them, and to make the State more and more the expression, as we say, of our best self, which is not manifold, and vulgar, and unstable, and contentious, and ever-varying, but one, and noble, and secure, and peaceful, and the same for all mankind ...”⁹ Now that our own State culture insists on regarding abortion as a form of healthcare and calls for a redefinition of marriage that will not only degrade marriage but corrupt and abuse children on an unprecedented scale, Arnold’s confidence in the ability of the State to embody right reason looks distinctly delusional.

⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works: Chesterton on Dickens* (San Francisco, 1989), XV, pp. 453–454.

⁹ M. Arnold, *Mixed Essays* (New York, 1903), p. 43.

Moreover, Arnold's pseudo-religion led him to take a view of his fellows that could be strikingly callous. The "consolations" that he relates sharing with his fellow train travelers are tell-tale.

I reminded them how Caesar refused to take precautions against assassination, because life was not worth having at the price of an ignoble solicitude for it. I reminded them what insignificant atoms we all are in the life of the world. "Suppose the worst to happen," I said, addressing a portly jeweler from Cheapside; "suppose even yourself to be the victim; *il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire*. We should miss you for a day or two upon the Woodford Branch; but the great mundane movement would still go on, the gravel walks of your villa would still be rolled, dividends would still be paid at the Bank, omnibuses would still run, there would still be the old crush at the corner of Fenchurch Street." All was of no avail. Nothing could moderate, in the bosom of the great English middle-class, their passionate, absorbing, almost blood-thirsty clinging to life. At the moment I thought this over-concern a little unworthy; but the *Saturday Review* suggests a touching explanation of it. What I took for the ignoble clinging to life of a comfortable worldling, was, perhaps, only the ardent longing of a faithful Benthamite, traversing an age still dimmed by the last mists of transcendentalism, to be spared long enough to see his religion in the full and final blaze of its triumph. This respectable man, whom I imagined to be going up to London to serve his shop, or to buy shares, or to attend an Exeter Hall meeting, or to assist at the deliberations of the Marylebone Vestry, was even, perhaps, in real truth, on a pious pilgrimage, to

obtain from Mr. Bentham's executors a secret bone of his great, dissected master.¹⁰

This shows Arnold at his most playfully witty and yet if we attend to what he is actually saying we can see that there is something like real despair beneath the playfulness.

First, Arnold's view of life did not significantly differ from that of the Utilitarians. Of course, he wanted his contemporaries to pay more attention to the literature of the Continent and less to English newspapers; he wanted the new industrial middle-classes to acquire better manners and less objectionable tastes; he certainly wished the Catholics in his midst to leave off insisting that the Humpty-Dumpty of orthodox Christianity be put back on his wall; but other than that his own brand of secularism had more in common with Benthamism than he cared to admit. After all, he might gently mock the fact that Benthamism nears "the full and final blaze of its triumph," but he does not take issue with it. On the contrary, he shared Bentham's view that "perfected knowledge" should be the object of culture. As he claims in *Culture and Anarchy* "culture is, or ought to be, the study and pursuit of perfection ..." Moreover, he was convinced that when it came to the "perfection as pursued by culture ... sweetness and light are the main characters."¹¹ This is an abstract, impersonal idea of culture, fit perhaps for Empedocles, whom Arnold describes in his laboriously despondent poem as "Nothing but a devouring flame of thought ... a naked, eternally restless mind" but not for human beings with hearts as well as minds.¹²

¹⁰ M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: First Series* (London, 1920), p. 3.

¹¹ *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 40.

¹² M. Arnold, "Empedocles on Aetna," *The Poems of Matthew Arnold 1840-1867*, ed. A. T. Quiller-Couch (Oxford, 1913), p. 122.

Secondly, there is something a little chilling in this otherwise jocular passage. He is saying that the middle-class passengers on the train should not worry whether the train murderer returns and kills them because “*il n’y a pas d’homme nécessaire*.” Coming from any one else this would sound a banal enough jest. But Arnold took his nihilism seriously; he really did believe that we are all “insignificant atoms in the life of the world.” When he tells his companions that they should be reconciled to the prospect of their own extinction he is giving a foretaste of that contempt for life which was not separate from his views on culture. After all, he borrowed his very definition of culture from one of Swift’s satires, *The Battle of the Books* (1704) in which the Dean has his ancients defend their culture against the moderns by likening it to that of bees, for, “Instead of dirt and poison we have rather chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax; thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest things, which are sweetness and light.” How the rhetorician in Arnold could have thought that such an allusion strengthened his case is baffling; but then in likening men to bees he was keeping true to his pagan, denigratory view of human life. After all, Arnold really did not care for people. His inadequate definition of culture stemmed from an inadequate understanding of the *caritas* on which true culture must be based. One can see his distaste for his fellows in a famous piece that he wrote in defense of Lord Byron.

As the inevitable break-up of the old order comes, as the English middle-class slowly awakens from its intellectual sleep of two centuries, as our actual present world, to which this sleep condemned us, shows itself more clearly—our world of an aristocracy materialised and null, a middle-class purblind and hideous, a lower class crude and brutal—we shall turn our eyes again, and to more purpose,

upon this passionate and dauntless soldier of a
forlorn hope ...¹³

Needless to say, anyone who had somehow convinced himself that the only person worth paying any mind to in early nineteenth-century Britain was Byron, had hardly the wide-ranging sympathies necessary to pronounce on something as necessarily catholic as culture. It is also worth noting that most of the literary Modernists who shared Arnold's cultural elitism, including Pound, Eliot and Yeats, also shared this low view of ordinary men. Eliot was particularly saturnine on this score, writing his brother after his father's death, "I feel that both he and mother in spite of their affection were lonely people, and that he was the more lonely of the two—he hardly knew himself ... in my experience everyone except the fools seem ... warped or stunted."¹⁴

Lord Annan, the sybaritic don and intellectual historian, also betrayed the hollowness of Arnold's idea of culture when he noted how "Matthew Arnold was the first modern critic ... to declare that people could be consoled, healed, and changed by reading literature and therefore that their awakening depended on understanding which was the finest literature. He was the first to argue that the spiritual health of a society such as England depended on there being a sufficient number of civilized human beings devoted to the ideal of spreading Culture."¹⁵ Newman's

¹³ M. Arnold, "Byron," *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London, 1888), p. 202.

¹⁴ T. S. Eliot to Henry Eliot (27 February 1919), *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Hugh Haughton and Valerie Eliot (London, 2011), I, p. 324.

¹⁵ N. Annan, Introduction to *Matthew Arnold: Selected Essays* (Oxford, 1964), p. vii. Of Lord Annan, David Cannadine wrote in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: "As the foremost spokesman of his generation he cared passionately about education, culture, and the intellect, 'everything else was secondary.'"

response to this sort of mandarin culture, of which both Arnold and Annan were such ardent proponents, was unsparing: "If we attempt to effect a moral improvement by means of poetry, we shall but mature into a mawkish, frivolous and fastidious sentimentalism."¹⁶ Then, again, twenty-eight years before the publication of *Culture and Anarchy*, Newman had argued against the strictly secular view of culture in a series of letters to *The Times* which he later collected in a brilliant piece called "The Tamworth Reading Room" (1841). In one of the letters, he wrote how

It does not require many words, then, to determine that, taking human nature as it is actually found, and assuming that there is an Art of life, to say that it consists, or in any essential manner is placed, in the cultivation of Knowledge, that the mind is changed by a discovery, or saved by a diversion, and can thus be amused into immortality,—that grief, anger, cowardice, self-conceit, pride, or passion, can be subdued by an examination of shells or grasses, or inhaling of gases, or chipping of rocks, or calculating the longitude, is the veriest of pretences which sophist or mountebank ever professed to a gaping auditory. If virtue be a mastery over the mind, if its end be action, if its perfection be inward order, harmony, and peace, we must seek it in graver and holier places than in Libraries and Reading-rooms.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Arnold was unpersuaded. He wrote *Culture and Anarchy*, as he said, "to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which

¹⁶ J. H. Newman, "Tamworth Reading Room," *Discussions and Arguments* (London, 1872), p. 275.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.”¹⁸ If anyone should object that this was rather a narrow prospectus for any cultural agenda, Arnold was prepared to supplement it with afflatus of a higher order. “More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us,” he declared in a famous essay. “Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”¹⁹

This was the culture of knowledge for which Arnold intended poetry to act as a kind of surrogate religion. A variation of this culture continues to wield great influence, particularly among our political, educational and cultural elites, though now the knowledge on which it is based is technocratic rather than literary and the pantheism of the environmentalists supplies the necessary surrogate religion. What should be of interest to anyone interested in protecting vulnerable life is that the culture of knowledge spurns conscience and regards the weak, the dying and those struggling to be born with a utilitarian ruthlessness on which Bentham himself could hardly improve. Set this idea of culture up in any society and sooner or later abortion on demand will follow; euthanasia will follow. This is what happened in England in 1967; this is what happened in America in 1973; and this is what has happened nearly everywhere else in the world since. Hats off

¹⁸ *Culture and Anarchy*, p. viii.

¹⁹ M. Arnold, “The Study of Poetry,” *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London, 1888), p. 3.

to the Maltese for bucking this atrocious trend but they are in a very distinct minority.

My book is not only a criticism of abortion: it is a criticism of the false notions of culture that make abortion possible. In this regard, I do not believe that the culture of knowledge and all its death-dealing variations can remedy abortion any more than it can remedy anarchy. The great tragic irony with respect to Arnold is that, although he might have set out to extol culture, in trying to base culture on the conviction that God and the heart's desire for God were somehow obsolete he actually put in place a culture that is profoundly antagonistic to culture. To defend life—and to bring about that culture of love which Pope John Paul II so prized—we must renounce this false Arnoldian notion of culture and reaffirm true culture, which is necessarily based on the Source of Life, the Giver of Life, the God of Life.

In *Culture and Abortion* I celebrate the Creator of Life by celebrating the work of some of His most life-affirming creatures. Hence, there is a chapter on the marvelous poet Anne Ridler, who still has not received her proper due. There is a chapter on the work of Prof. John J. Scarisbrick and his worldwide pro-life organization, LIFE, which is bringing the Gospel of Life to those who need it most. There is a chapter on the writer and critic Walker Percy, who tells his readers in his mock self-help book, *Lost in the Cosmos*, of the identity crisis that is at the heart of my chapter as well, “You live in a deranged age, more deranged than usual, because in spite of great scientific and technological advances, [you have] not the faintest idea of who [man] is or what he is doing.”

The pages that follow also include a brief chapter on a magnificent short story by Penelope Fitzgerald, the niece of Ronald Knox, who had something of her uncle's genius for precise and witty prose. They include a chapter on the

great prophet Pope Paul VI and one on the great liberator William Wilberforce. They include interrelated chapters on Dickens and Chesterton, both in their own ways staunch defenders of life. For Dickens, it was being condemned to Warren's blacking factory at 30 Hungerford Stairs, just off the Strand, when he was scarcely twelve years old, after the imprisonment of his father in the Marshalsea for debt that made him so appreciative of the vulnerability of children.²⁰ And it was largely the champion of children in Dickens that inspired Chesterton's great love of the man and his work, which he expressed so brilliantly in his incomparable critical essays. Dickens rarely spoke of his harrowing experience at the factory, though he made an exception with his first biographer, John Forster, with whom he shared an autobiographical fragment towards the end of his life in which he confessed how:

It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me, that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school ... The blacking warehouse was the last house on the left-hand, the blacking side of the way at old Hungerford-stairs. It was a crazy, tumble-down old house, abutting of course on the river and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscotted rooms, and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats

²⁰ According to Michael Slater, the greatest of living Dickensians, Dickens was in the blacking factory for thirteen or fourteen months—"an eternity for a twelve-year-old." See M. Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven, 2009), p. 24.

swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again ... My work was to cover the pots of paste-blackening; first with a poor little piece of oil-paper, and then with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat, all round, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop. When a certain number of grosses of pots had attained this pitch of perfection, I was to paste on each a printed label; and then go on again with more pots. Two or three other boys were kept at similar duty down stairs on similar wages. One of them came up, in a ragged apron and a paper cap, on the first Monday morning, to show me the trick of using the string and tying the knot. His name was Bob Fagin; and I took the liberty of using his name, long afterwards, in *Oliver Twist*.²¹

Here, it is essential to compare Dickens' "pitch of perfection" with the perfection that so beguiled Bentham and Arnold because it bespeaks an understanding of the realities of our imperfection, without which culture is vain and superficial.

My book also includes a chapter on Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, Rose, later Mother Alphonsa, who is destined to have a greater impact on American culture than all the sages of New England put together, even though many in America, let alone the world beyond, scarcely know who she is. Then, again, there is a chapter on some little-known, though superb poets of the eighteenth century whose philoprogenitive verse is a welcome rebuke to the manifold distortions of that most ahistorical thing, feminist history.

²¹ John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens* (New York, 1899), I, pp. 25–26.

Finally, I have a chapter on how certain historians have handled the subject of abortion and in this I quote some lively passages from Henry James' great travelogue, *The American Scene* (1905) to try to put the mad unreality of abortionism into some historical context. Much more work needs to be done to share with readers just how remiss our historians have been with respect to this issue which, in its way, dominates the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as tragically as slavery dominated the nineteenth. In his life of Addison, Dr. Johnson noted how "It was [Addison's] practice when he found any man invincibly wrong to flatter his opinions by acquiescence, and sink him yet deeper in absurdity."²² When it comes to abortion, many of our historians have been doing something similar to this for decades, the only difference being that they do not regard the pro-abortion authorities as "invincibly wrong" and the deeper these authorities sink in absurdity the more sincere becomes our historians' flattery. It is a piece of folly that would have provoked unmerciful scorn from Swift, who related the anecdote about Addison to his dear friend Stella.

What do all of these chapters add up to? What is my conclusion? If false culture led us into this shambles, true culture can help extricate us from it. And the grounds for that new culture must be humility, without which true respect for life is not possible. And that is why we must share with others the wisdom of Pope John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae*, in which he wrote of the scourge of abortion with such consummate charity. Here, in closing, is a passage from that encyclical in which the great pope addresses "a special word to women who have had an

²² S. Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford, 1935), II, p. 124.

abortion,” though obviously what he has to say applies to men who have connived in abortion as well.

The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone’s right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.²³

This is the sort of practical humility that we must exemplify if we are to revive our culture. What we need is not Matthew Arnold’s “pursuit of perfection” but the gift of contrition.

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 57.