

JOHN IRVING'S FICTIONAL ACCOUNT OF ABORTION

John Irving can't stop writing fiction, even when he ventures into the world of non-fiction. His op-ed on the history of abortion in the June 24 edition of the *New York Times* is a classic example.

"The Anti-Abortion Crusade's Cruel History" is the title of this rambling, inaccurate portrait of the pro-life movement. Irving says abortion was not illegal in the United States until the 1840s. Wrong. He's off by two decades—it was in the 1820s that states such as Connecticut and New York passed restrictive legislation on abortion.

Irving says that self-interested male doctors were responsible for the anti-abortion campaign. Wrong. Feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were strongly opposed to abortion, calling it "child murder."

"I respect your personal reasons not to have an abortion—no one is forcing you to have one," Irving says. Wrong. He needed to read that same day's *New York Times* article. It had a story titled, "Mentally Disabled Woman Must Have an Abortion, a British Court Rules."

Irving writes that "*no one is pro-abortion*" (his italics). Wrong. He needs to read the book *Abortion Is A Blessing* by atheist Anne Nicol Gaylor (it was endorsed by Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem). In 2009, an Episcopalian priest, Rev. Katherine Ragsdale, also proclaimed that "abortion is a blessing." In 2018, Michelle Wolf dressed up in red, white, and blue and marched across a stage in honor of her "Salute to Abortion!"

Irving dates the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion to Pope Pius XII. In 1951, he used the term "right to life." So?

Less than a hundred years after the birth of Jesus, the Christian document called the Didache exclaimed, "do not murder a child by abortion or kill a new-born infant."

Irving is upset that Catholics are leading the pro-life cause, and he cites the First Amendment provision on the establishment of religion as support for his argument that we are acting unconstitutionally. He should read the First Amendment again—it says something about freedom of speech.

Irving ends by chiding the pro-life community for not caring about children once they are born. This tired refrain carries no weight whatsoever. All the data on charitable giving and voluntarism show that the most generous Americans are people of faith; the least generous are secularists (their idea of generosity is raising taxes and redistributing income—they are the least likely to give of themselves).

John Irving's foray into non-fiction is an utter failure. But he proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is a master fiction writer.