Is Rescuing Right?

by Pastor Randy Alcorn

"Rescuing" is a united action in which people peacefully place their bodies in front of the entrances of an abortion clinic. The purpose is to prevent access to the clinic, and to thereby save the lives of unborn children who would otherwise be killed shortly after their mothers enter the building.

Scripture says we are to "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter" (Prov. 24:11) We are to "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 82:3-4). We are commanded to intervene for the fatherless and poor, those deprived of their basic human rights (Deut. 10:18; 14:29; Ps. 10:14; Is. 1:17; 58:6-7; Jer. 49:11).

If Proverbs 24:11 applies to all innocent people—and there's no indication it does not—then either the unborn are not innocent people, or it does in fact apply to them. By the time their mothers reach the abortion clinic, the unborn are within minutes of being literally slaughtered, and are clearly in need of physical rescue.

Civil disobedience and the consequences of imprisonment and confiscation of property were common among New Testament Christians (Acts 17:6-7; Heb. 10:32-36). Tens of thousands of early Christians were put to death because they refused to obey the laws requiring them to do homage to Caesar. Such well-known leaders as William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and John Bunyan all practiced civil disobedience. So did thousands of American Christians who participated in the Underground Railroad to save the lives of slaves, and thousands more in Occupied Europe who rescued Jews from slaughter.

A few of the biblical examples of civil disobedience relate to the matters of worship or evangelism, as in the cases of Daniel's three friends (Dan. 3:16-18), and the apostles (Acts 5:29). The majority, however, focus directly on the issue of the sanctity of human life and the consequent attempts of believers to deliver innocent human beings from being killed.

The Hebrew midwives disobeyed the king's command to kill the children, and Moses parents also violated the law to save his life (Ex. 1:17; 2:1-4). Both received God's explicit commendation for doing so (Es. 1:20-21; Heb. 11:23).

The prohibition from saving innocent human lives was disobeyed by Rahab who rescued the spies from the authorities of Jericho (Josh. 2; James 2:25), the men of Israel who rescued Jonathan from King Saul (I Sam. 14:24-45), Obadiah who rescued the prophets from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18), Jehosheba who rescued the infant Joash from Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1-3), Esther who trespassed in the king's court to rescue the Jews (Est. 4), the Magi who disobeyed Herod to protect the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:7-8), and the angel who rescued Peter from execution at the hands of Herod Antipas (Acts 12).

We might also include Jeremiah who betrayed his government by advocating surrender to save the lives of Israelites (Jer. 38:1-6), the angel who warned the wise men to disobey Herod, as well as Joseph himself who fled from Herod with Mary and Jesus. There is also the angel who rescued Peter from execution at the hands of Herod Antipas (Acts 12). We could add David who fled for his life from King Saul, Elijah who fled for his life from Ahab, and Peter who fled for his life from the prison opened by the angel. In each case the motive for civil disobedience was to save an innocent life, either another's or one's own.

In each case the people rescued from death were innocent, and in each case the person they were rescued from had legal authority to kill them. In almost every case those rescuing did so through direct nonviolent intervention on behalf of the one about to be killed.

Jesus himself violated the law by clearing out the temple (John 2:13-16). He often violated the Jewish laws related to the sabbath, in the higher interest of rescuing needy people from death or disease (Luke 6:9; 13:15; 14:5; Mark 2:27). Jesus placed the commands to love God and to love one's neighbor above other laws (Matt. 22:37-40). He illustrated the meaning of neighbor-love by the physical life-saving intervention of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Christ extended the law of love in the form of the golden rule: "In everything, do for others as you would have them do for you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). We are to ask ourselves the question, if we were being taken to a brutal death, what would we like someone to do for us at that moment? This is what we should then do for the unborn children.

In cases where helping victims is illegal, there are two conflicting ethical demands, one of which will be met and one unmet no matter what we do. One demand is to love your neighbor by saving his life. The other demand is to obey civil law. One of these ethical demands must be placed over the other. The

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question, then, is not should we disobey an authority, but which authority should we disobey—man's or God's?

If the lake is clearly posted "no swimming," but I see a child drowning in it, I do not debate the ethics of violating the "no swimming" law. The law of love tells me to jump in, swim to the child, and save his life. By jumping in I am not saying that the "no swimming" law is bad. I am saying that in this case it is transcended by a higher law, the king of laws, what James calls the "royal law of love" (James 2:8).

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for getting caught up in good but secondary legal points—"But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness...You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:23-24). We must be careful not to strain out the gnat of trespassing while swallowing the camel of slaughtered children.

Suppose you heard that I drove a car ninety miles an hour down a freeway. Was I right or wrong? I was wrong, of course. After all, I broke the law. If you heard that a policeman had pulled me over and cited me, you'd say, "Fine, he deserved it—he was guilty."

But suppose you found out later that lying in the back of the car was my little daughter, who had a ruptured appendix. She could have died any minute, and the reason I broke the law was to get her to the hospital to save her life. Would this additional factor affect your opinion about whether my action was right or wrong? Of course it would. As long as you focus on the law, on the speed limit, on why Christians must always obey such laws, you will condemn my action. But when you remember the little child in the back seat, it changes everything. The child about to die makes all the difference. ■

Randy Alcorn is a pastor, writer and speaker. This is an excerpt from his book, Is Rescuing Right?, to be published by InterVarsity Press in August 1990.

L E T T E R S

Dear Mr. deParrie:

Enclosed is my $50 check to support the work of Advocates for Life. Your magazine has become the flagship of the rescue movement. I congratulate you on the full-documented, well-written stories and the incisive editorial analyses. I draw on both often in my letters to the editor, etc.

My prayers are with you.

Terence J. Hughes

Dear Advocate,

Kenny Sacht (February, p.3) said that he hadn't found a pastor yet who disapproved of the way Corrie ten Boom helped the Jews. I found one. I had lunch with this pastor in December of 1989. He had graciously agreed to meet with me so that we could discuss his opposition to rescues.

I specifically asked him about Miss ten Boom.

Unfortunately, the members of his church have such great respect for their pastor-teacher that they didn't question him when he said that Christians in Nazi Germany had a duty to help those who were condemned to die. Most members would have assumed that he approved of "The Hiding Place." Quite to the contrary.

And when I asked him if rescuing is a sin, at first he said it isn't. He later changed it to—it is.

Such confusion. In an attitude of forgiveness, let us pray for him.

Douglas Gwinn
Canoga Park, CA

Our Lord was sold for thirty pieces of silver. One time, I read that the ACLU held a fundraising auction in Louisiana, and an abortion went for $30. When Illinois representative Henry Hyde heard of it, he said, "Well, I hope they paid in silver dollars; that would stabilize the price of silver for nearly two thousand years."

Angie Bell

Dear Advocates for Life,

My name is R___B____ and I am twenty-one years old. I would like to share a little of my testimony with you in hopes that it may help someone knowing they aren't alone.

When I was fourteen I became pregnant by a nineteen year old boy I hardly knew. Like many other teens I didn't thank it could happen to me.

My high school counselor along with many other people told me the wisest thing I could do was to get an abortion. My counselor told me that I would ruin my life along with my baby's if I kept the child. He also told me chances are I would end up on welfare and abusing my child.

In spite of all of this the Lord sheltered me and my baby even though at the time I wasn't a Christian.

I dropped out of school and hid in my room until my baby was born. During that time the Lord drew me very close to Him. He showed me how precious life is and how it belongs to Him, not me.

After my baby was born I started attending a school for teen moms where our children go to school with us. While attending the school, I got married and had another baby.

In 1988 I finally graduated after five years of high school. Without God I couldn't have done any of it. Children are truly a gift from God.

I know there are so many girls out there in the same situation I was in, but they feel like they are all alone, just as I did.

With God's help, I would like to do what I can to help others. If you feel there is anything I can do please let me know.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this letter. God bless you and keep you.

R_____B_____

Dear Sir,

Having just seen your magazine, I'm really keen to be put on your mailing list for 1 year's subscription. I am involved with "Operation Rescue" and would like to be kept up to date of what is happening in U.S.A. It was good to also see articles from Mary O'Neill, on what is happening in N.Z.

I remain yours faithfully,

Hazel Pouter

Dear Mr. deParrie,

The Advocate is a much needed, wonderful magazine. At a time when you can believe nothing of what you read or hear it is so important to keep in touch with our brothers and sisters activities around the country—reported by people that are truthful!

In His service,

Katherine Keopp

Dear Paul and Judy (and Angela!!),

Greetings from France. Thanks for putting the Paris rescue in the Advocate. We had another rescue March 20, in Lille (a big city in the north). Because of the Police tactics (smashing the place up) there were no abortions that day. Praise God!

You will find $50 enclosed with this to cover that cost and any others that you want to cover.

We love you and appreciate your sacrificial work.

Because He lives,

Steve Baughman, France

Friends:

I was deeply moved by the photo on the cover of your May 1990 issue. It summed up so much of the rescue movement, so simply.

The picture showed exactly what I want to do at a rescue. There are a few superficial differences: woman in your photo was in the parking lot holding her baby, and I have been at doors wanting to hold the baby. But the heart of our work was shown there, clear and pure and simple and complete.

At a rescue, what I want to do is worship my Father. In a time when babies are being slaughtered at an unimaginable rate, I do not know how to praise my Father unless I try to protect His babies. In a society powerfully devoted to death, I do not know how to protect babies except by turning to our Father.

At a rescue, I want to be worthy of the trust shown by the baby in your photo. At a rescue, I want to obey the Father who has conferred such a great dignity on us, inviting us to protect His children.

Thanks for putting out such a great magazine. It has been a tremendous service to many and an inspiration to me. And what a great photo!

John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe
Human Life International
Laytonsville, Maryland

Editor's Note: Just so you don't think it is all rave reviews here at The Advocate. This one, as usual, was unsigned.

The true test, of whether one's actions follow the teachings of Jesus, the justice and compassion, for life as a whole, that results. The world, life, is better with abortions. All of God's creatures are benefited. "For Jesus so loved the world..." Jesus is pro-choice. ■

Colson: Give Love

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"We wanted to show the demonstrators that we cared about them, that we weren't afraid to talk to them, and that we were willing to answer any question they might have,says Ann. "We wanted to respond in love rather than in fear or anger."

It would be lovely to end the story by reporting that as a result of dialogue the camera crews came to Christ and the pickets renounced their pro-abortion views, but that didn't happen. This time. "I doubt we changed anyone's mind, but I think we succeeded, by the grace of God, to love the opposition," Ann concludes.

But, I believe, in that act those homosexual pickets could not help seeing in that group of Ann Arbor Christians, perhaps for the first time in their lives, the love of Jesus Christ.

Two attitudes, two strategies. We can shout, "Murderer!" or we can serve coffee. These are symbols of the choice before us, and our choice determines our witness. A broken world will see either our faces twisted in hate and anger or the face of Christ, listening, serving, speaking the truth in love. ■

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