

Where is the outcry? Why is the church silent?

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As I edit this article today (23rd April 2007), Graham Preston is once again in court in Brisbane Queensland, after having been remanded in prison since late February, on some charges relating to his sitting in front of the doorway of an abortion clinic in an act of non-violent protest and with the hope of saving an unborn child from being murdered by a qualified Medical Practitioner. This act of protest has been labeled 'rescuing'. In this brief article I would like to discuss the issue.

Some have seriously argued that rescuing is disrespectful of police authority and have said they cannot imagine Jesus acting in such a way.

Why is it unimaginable that Jesus would Rescue?

Because it is not status quo? Because it would have been disapproved by the religious leaders? Because it requires boldness? Jesus was not status quo, seemed to care little for the approval of the religious leaders, and was very bold in his actions.

If we cannot imagine Jesus rescuing, can we imagine him creating a public scene by overturning the tables of the moneychangers, throwing their coins to the floor, and making a whip out of cords and driving men and beasts out of the temple? (John 2:14-16). Can we imagine him standing before the mighty tetrarch Herod and refusing to speak when spoken to? (Luke 23:9). Can we imagine him deliberately and repeatedly violating Jewish rabbinical law (but not Torah) by putting human life above dogma and ordinances and healing on the Sabbath, knowing it would infuriate the religious leaders?

The Roman government granted the Jewish Sanhedrin full authority in religious matters (with some limitations such as the death sentence). They were able to arrest people and put them in jail. (Acts 5:19).

You can read in Acts 4 how they forbade Peter, John and the other apostles to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John disobeyed and were imprisoned. Then some angels broke the Roman law in freeing them.

Jesus broke rabbinical ordinances as well. In whipping and chasing the money-changers out of the temple and in allowing the stone to be rolled away from his tomb, Jesus broke, or allowed to be broken, Roman and Rabbinical law.

There is a principle in Jesus' statement "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The principle is that "law is made for human welfare not human welfare for the law". All good law is for the protection of people; not to deprive them of protection.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for over-emphasising, the secondary points of law rather than the primary points of justice, mercy and faithfulness. "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Mat 23:23-24).

We must be careful not to strain out the gnat of trespassing while swallowing the camel of murdering children.

There is much that Jesus did that many of us cannot imagine Him doing. **Our lack of imagination, however, did not stop Him from doing it!**

Some may say "*But Jesus never broke the law to save infants from destruction.*" This is an argument from silence. Scripture doesn't record most of the things Jesus said and did (John 21:25). Jesus was a Jew and lived with Jews, among whom abortion was virtually unheard of. In other places Roman women used abortion-inducing drugs privately. Jesus probably never came near the equivalent of an abortion clinic in His earthly life.

What do we suppose Jesus would have done if He came across an infant abandoned outside the gates? Would He turn His back and look the other way? Would He leave the child to suffer and die if the law forbade intervention?

You may reply: "*One cannot imagine Jesus acting that way.*" If we cannot imagine Jesus being involved in rescuing at an abortion clinic, perhaps the problem is not with Jesus, but with who we imagine Him to be.

While society was shocked at the dramatic rise in child abuse that began in the 70s, it really should have come as no surprise to thinking people. If it's all right to kill your child up to the day of birth, why isn't it all right to "just" beat up your child a few months or years later?

Why is all this happening? What has caused this fundamental shift in morality, and what will it take to reverse it?

Francis Schaeffer skillfully diagnosed the condition of the Western church, and how it has led to the loss of the sanctity of human life in society:

Accommodation, accommodation. How the mindset of accommodation grows and expands. The last sixty years have given birth to a moral disaster, and what have we done? Sadly we must say that the evangelical world has been part of the disaster. More than this, the evangelical response itself has been a disaster. Where is the clear voice speaking to the crucial issues of the day with distinctively biblical, Christian answers?¹

We must not see the lives of unborn children as an isolated issue. How we respond to the unborn's desperate struggle for survival will have sweeping implications not just for the future of millions of babies (60-70 million surgical abortions occur worldwide every year with untold millions more dying from chemical abortions), but for the future of us all.

What is our response? Our tendency may be to go on with business as usual, to occasionally say a word or write a letter on behalf of the unborn or simply and sadly to 'forget' and turn our backs on it.

Somehow we may believe this is enough. But day after day the innocent blood keeps spilling and these precious children keep dying. As long as our own rights aren't threatened, as long as our own lifestyles aren't interfered with, as long as no one is killing our **own** children, we will let them kill others. Or will we?

In a documentary on the holocaust, one German who lived near a death camp was asked whether it bothered people to hear the screams. He responded, "*At first it was unbearable; then you get used to it*". As Scott Peck puts it, "*It is a simple sort of thing. The horrible becomes normal, and we simply tune it out*"³

The unspeakably horrible practice of child-killing has become normal in our country. Though the church may decry the practice, it has accommodated and adjusted to it.

What is it that allows most Christians to go on day after day knowing abortion is killing an innocent child, but not making substantial efforts to save these precious lives? The key is denial. Denial is the simple refusal to recognize reality, or the deliberate choice to not think about what one concedes to be reality.

Our coping mechanism of denying the reality of the horrible is demonstrated every time we turn away from the picture of a mother and child starving in Mozambique, or a picture of a child who has been killed by abortion.

In the early 1940s, when the pictures of the death camps were circulated to the Western world, many people refused to believe what they saw. They turned from the pictures in disgust. They said it was a trick. People said it wasn't real, or if they suspected it was real, they turned away in revulsion and went back to their normal lives.

Why are we afraid to show pictures of aborted unborn children? If we are going to honestly discuss abortion, what could possibly be wrong with showing an actual picture of it?

If a fetus is merely a blob of tissue, why not show that mere blob of tissue? Is a blob of tissue really so offensive? Why is any other piece of evidence admissible, except the one that actually shows what we are talking about? Pastor Dr. John Piper states, "*If all America could be made to watch the shredding of a three month old pre-born baby, the debate would shift dramatically.*"⁴

It is for this reason that I urge - do not turn away from the pictures of the unborn. Much as we may hate to, we need to watch *The Silent Scream* or *Baby Choice* and similar movies. They will likely cause us to weep and may literally cause us to vomit. But we need to watch them anyway.

¹ Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 1983, p 141

² Documentary: Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust (1985) Director: Claude Lanzmann

³ Mark Belz, *Suffer the Little Children* (Crossway Books, 1989), p 32

⁴ John Piper, "Civil Disobedience, Abortion and the Bible," *The Berean Statesman*, Nov 88 p 1

Why? For the same reason that the world needed to see the horrible pictures coming out of Auschwitz and Buchenwald during the 2nd World War. These images compel us to believe this is really happening and help force us to deal with it.

Even if we don't look at the aborted babies, we can look with wonder at the magnificent intrauterine 4D Ultrasounds that show live unborn children. Can we really gaze at these creations of God and then go right on without trying to save their precious lives?

Holocausts happen. Stalin killed at least four times more than Hitler, Mao Tse-Tung more than Stalin. Many wide-scale holocausts have occurred over the centuries. **But the holocaust of the unborn is happening today and every day.**

After the command to rescue those being led away to slaughter, Proverbs 24 anticipates our excuse for not doing so:

If you say, 'but we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? (Proverbs 24:12 NIV)

God tells us we cannot plead ignorance. We know who the unborn are, and we know (or could if we choose to) how, when and where they are being killed. For example, here in Brisbane, at Greenslopes, at Bowen Hills, and so on. You need only ask Graham Preston.

God also reminds us that we will one day be held accountable for whether or not we tried to rescue those being led away to death. In that day, the Judge, will repay each person according to what he has done or not done for innocent victims about to die.

That society's values have come to a place where child-killing has been legalized and accepted, is hard to believe. That the Christian Church by and large has chosen to ignore this incredible violence in our own backyard is even more difficult to understand. Statistics indicate that at least 20% of our 'born-again' Christian women have had abortions!

That anyone who has participated in the act of abortion needs to repent and experience the amazing forgiveness and mercy of Christ Jesus is beyond question. Of even greater concern are those who have had abortions *after* accepting Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Perhaps the church and particularly her leaders, have really failed them in allowing them to remain in such ignorance of God's way, by not speaking out God's Word on the sanctity of human life – regularly, repeatedly, graphically.

After an agonizing process of studying the Scriptures and praying over whether the action of rescuing is biblical, I have often prayed, and still do, that God would show me if I am wrong. In fact I have specifically prayed *that* He would show me that I *am* wrong!

Cowardice is a sin (Rev 21:8). I do not for a moment believe that someone is cowardly because he chooses not to rescue. However, like any difficult activity - including evangelism - there is a tendency to build one's opinions and actions about rescuing upon a base of cowardice. If we individually look full face into Scripture and prayerfully and honestly conclude civil disobedience to save the lives of unborn children is wrong, then fair enough. If our conclusion stems from the fear that God may call us to be involved in rescuing, and that the price or cost may be too high, then we have a problem.

If, apart from the idea of breaking civil law, there were no negative consequences of violating trespassing laws to save innocent children, would we really oppose it? Isn't it the conflict, the ridicule, the suffering, the jail time, the possible loss of money and possessions that we really fear?

Mark Belz says of rescuing:

This crossing of a line that is done with such fear and trepidation, and which is criticized and condemned outright by so many Christians, **is an act which lends credibility to everything else which we are saying and doing in the pro-life movement**'. ... **Just as it is essential for each of us to demonstrate solidarity with the unborn, so it is essential for us to demonstrate solidarity with each other.**⁵

Nearly 400 times Scripture tells us not to fear. Our natural tendency is to be afraid to stand up for Jesus and for innocent victims. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the determination to obey God despite our fears.

Matthew 25:36 and Hebrews 10:34 tell us what our response should be to our brothers and sisters in Christ who violate the law for the cause of righteousness. We are to visit them in jail, sympathize with them, and stand up for them.

As long as the children remain unseen and nameless, it is easy to forget them.

⁵ Mark Belz, *Suffer the Little Children* (Crossway Books, 1989), p 130

Imagine you have a young child who has been kidnapped and is about to be abused and killed. You have discovered the house where your child has been taken and you need to break-in to the house, to trespass and disobey the law to save him/her from death. I seriously doubt that you would waste your time contemplating your decision to break the law.

So perhaps our real problem is not with civil disobedience but with the value of unborn children. If we would break the law to save *older* children, if we would break the law to save our children no matter what their age, why would we treat these children differently?

Is it because the womb has no window? This is no longer an excuse. 4D Ultrasounds give us a remarkable window on the world of the unborn.

Yes, rescuing may be very costly but look to the example our Messiah set us when He gave His life as a ransom for us.

Support our rescuers today. They need your informed support, your prayers; your time, your love for Jesus and for our brothers and sisters, Christ's bride. The women (and families) with unplanned pregnancies need you before they kill their own child(ren) and suffer the terrible physical, emotional and psychological consequences of this act.

May God reveal something of His heart for His most innocent children, created in His image.

*"The greatest gift of God, I would think, is the gift of life,
The greatest sin of man, it would seem,
is to return that gift ungrateful and unopened ..."* John Donne

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Past President (2003-2006), ProLife Media Inc has been heavily involved with ProLife issues for many years, including picketing of Abortion Clinics and 'rescuing'; first as a member of the State Council for Right To Life in Tasmania (1986-87) and more recently as President of ProLife Media for a number of years. This article contains his personal thoughts and opinions of the situation involving Graham Preston's arrest and internment (see the article on Graham's latest arrest in this magazine). For an in-depth analysis of rescuing and the issue of Civil Disobedience Paul recommends: "Is Rescuing Right" by Randy Alcorn (www.epm.org) ISBN: 0-6308-1301-2; and William Carey's (Father of modern Missions) example in his successful fight to end wife-burning in India. An e-book is viewable at:- <http://www.infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/etext00/wmcry10.htm>

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