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**OPERATION
RESCUE**
**A CHALLENGE TO THE
NATION'S CONSCIENCE**
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This Is Not a Demonstration!

HUNDREDS OF blockades have occurred, thousands of newspaper stories have been written, and still only a tiny fraction of the American public has even begun to understand Operation Rescue. Through years of experience in covering protest movements, journalists have acquired certain fixed reporting habits. Whether the protests are directed against military recruiters, nuclear power plants, or cuts in government welfare programs, reporters apply a formula to their coverage. Their stories will invariably list the number of demonstrators, describe their actions, and explain the political point they sought to dramatize.

When applied to OR, however, that formula provides inaccurate results. When they block entry to an abortion mill, pro-life activists are *not* trying to make a political point; they are *not* asking for government action; they are *not* seeking publicity for their cause. A successful Rescue might bring about all those effects, but they are secondary to the real Rescue mission. The goal of a Rescue is to stop abortions — not by influencing legislation, or swaying the courts, but by preventing the *particular* killings that were scheduled on that *specific* day at that *specific* facility.

When media reports speak of “anti-abortion demonstrations,” therefore, they miss the point entirely. OR does not hope to “demonstrate” anything. A Rescue is not a demonstration.

The tactics of a Rescue operation are determined by the ultimate goal. In ordinary political demonstrations, protestors might picket or rally to gain attention for their cause. Once they have done that, they go home. Or to underscore their point and guarantee headline coverage, they might take concrete action that results in their arrest — climbing over fences onto a controversial construction site, perhaps, or pouring animals’ blood over Selective Service records. In those high-profile cases, the demonstrators are giving a dramatic form to their beliefs, but the primary objective still is the same: to generate public attention and consideration for their point of view.

After they are arrested, the demonstrators can happily pay bail, hold a press conference, and go home.

Rescuers take to the sidewalks with a different objective. Yes, they want to dramatize the horror of abortion, and they might even choose targets with an eye to their public visibility. But their primary goal is to stop abortions. It would not be enough — in fact it would be completely self-defeating — to gather outside an abortion clinic, chant slogans, and then disperse when the police arrived. The abortion business would still continue, and the babies would still die. To stop the slaughter, Rescuers blockade the entries, physically intervening between the unborn babies and their executioners.

If and when police arrive to break the blockade, Rescuers do their best to continue the blockade without using or inciting violence. If they are thrown away from the abortuary doors, they pick themselves up and rush back, striving to regain their blocking position. If they are arrested, they drop into a limp posture, forcing the police to carry them bodily away from the scene. Even then, when they are handcuffed, they might crawl back toward the scene if they are left unattended. On rare occasions, when police agree to let them walk to the arresting vehicles on their own power, Rescuers will take “baby steps” — walking with a tiny, painfully slow, two-inch stride to prolong the process. Some ambitious Rescuers bring along bicycle locks, and lock themselves to each other or to the doors. These “lockdown” or “Kryptonite” (a popular brand of bike locks) tactics make the process of removing Rescuers especially slow, because the locks cannot be picked with skeleton keys, and only special equipment can remove the bolt without literally breaking the Rescuer’s neck. As soon as the police finish their work, and the abortuary doors open, the killing can begin. So Rescuers use every available means to delay the clinic’s opening, to buy even a few more minutes of life for the unborn children.

While the Rescuers bar the doors, a few other designated members of the Rescue movement act as “sidewalk counselors.” These counselors, who are usually women, intervene with woman who are approaching the clinic. They offer literature on fetal development, tell them about the resources available to help with crisis pregnancies, and plead with them to spare their babies’ lives. This sort of counseling can take place with or without a blockade, of

course, and many devoted pro-lifers spend several hours every week pacing the sidewalks outside local abortion clinic. But if the blockade is successful in clogging up the entry, naturally the sidewalk counselors have more time to strike up a conversation with the pregnant women and make their arguments calmly. Abortion-clinic workers deeply resent sidewalk counselors, and "clinic escorts" do their best to hustle women through the doors before they have a chance to hear the pro-life pleas. In fact some of the first "Rescue" efforts came when sidewalk counselors worked in tandem, with one approaching the women on the sidewalk while they other blocked the door, giving her partner a few more precious moments to use her persuasive powers. Some pregnant women listen carefully to what the sidewalk counselors tell them, others brush quickly past them, and a determined few respond with a burst of invective. But any experienced sidewalk counselor knows that her angriest foes will be the clinic escorts, who shoulder her brusquely aside, and the young men who bring their girlfriends to the abortionist. These men — presumably the fathers of the unborn children — are almost invariably very hostile, sometimes violent in their determination to make sure that the abortion takes place. Ideally, sidewalk counselors will have escorts of their own — preferably large young men — to deter any ugly outbursts.

If a Rescue bears fruit, sidewalk counselors reap the harvest. Even if the blockade is ultimately broken, many women will turn away from the clinic when they see a hubbub of activity at the door. Some of them, unfortunately, will reschedule their abortions for a different day. Others may decide against abortion, but the Rescue movement might never hear of those successes. Still a precious few women will stop, speak at length with the sidewalk counselors, and leave the scene determined to continue their pregnancies and bear their children. If a woman promises to reconsider her plans for abortion, the sidewalk counselors report a "possible save." If she agrees to accept help and decides firmly to continue her pregnancy, then the counselors can announce the most welcome news available at any rescue: a "confirmed save."

Between the sidewalk counselors at the curbside and the Rescuers at the clinic door, OR sets up a line of people whose sole function is to pray for the success of the Rescue operation. These

“prayer supporters” do not defy the law or risk arrest, but they remain an integral part of the Rescue team. Whether or not the blockade succeeds, they will remain on the scene, singing hymns and praying for God’s intervention to stop abortion, until the facility closes for the day.

Operation Rescue operates within a tight framework of self-discipline. Every member of the OR team — including prayer supporters, sidewalk counselors, and the rescuers risking arrest — is asked to take a strict pledge of commitment to nonviolence “in word and in deed.” OR leaders appoint marshals to control their crowd and public spokesmen to address the press. All other participants are expected to focus their attention exclusively on their assigned tasks. Except for hymns, prayers, and instructions from the leaders, OR strives to maintain a prayerful silence on the scene. Even within the pro-life movement, some critics of OR question whether the movement takes a strong stand against violence. The answer is quite straightforward: it does. To become a part of the movement, before joining in any Rescue operation, a new recruit must sign a pledge. The exact wording varies slightly from city to city, but the pledge signed by the thousands of participants in the Wichita “Summer of Mercy” campaign is typical:

I understand the critical importance of the Mission being unified, peaceful, and free of any actions or words that would appear violent or hateful to any witnesses of the event.

I realize that some pro-abortion elements in the media would love to discredit this event and focus on a side issue in order to avoid the central issue at hand — murdered children and exploited women.

Hence, I understand that for the children’s sake, this gathering must be orderly and above reproach. Therefore:

- As an invited guest, I will cooperate with the spirit and goals of the Mission as explained in [the OR campaign’s recruiting brochure].
- I commit to be peaceful, prayerful, and non-violent in both word and deed.
- Should I be arrested, I will not struggle with police in any

way (whether deed or word), but remain polite and passively limp, remembering that mercy triumphs over judgment.

- I will listen and follow the instructions of the Mission's leadership and crowd-control marshals.

- I understand that certain individuals will be appointed to speak to the media, the police and the women seeking abortion. I will not take it upon myself to yell out to anyone, but will continue singing and praying with the main group, as directed.

I sign this pledge, having seriously considered what I do, with the determination and will to persevere by the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

OR is a Christian movement, dedicated to spiritual struggle. Anyone who joins the movement will soon find himself caught in an emotional maelstrom. Pro-abortion demonstrators will scream and jostle on the sidewalks outside the clinic. Police will threaten and curse and perhaps deliberately injure Rescuers. There may be arrests, lawsuits, fines, injunctions, long prison terms. There is always the prospect of bodily injury. The media will misrepresent the Rescuers; "respectable" civil leaders will condemn them; friends and neighbors will question their sanity. Worst of all, when the blockade is broken and the abortuary doors are opened, OR participants will experience the emotional devastation of watching troubled young women enter, knowing that their unborn children are doomed, while the triumphant war-whoops of the pro-abortion demonstrators echo in their ears. This is a serious battle, not a Saturday-morning diversion.

Even while he exhorts Christians to join the front lines of pro-life activism, in his book *Operation Rescue* Randall Terry warns that some people should steer clear of the battle. "Are you a praying person? If not, stop!" he warns. "Satan will not give up this stronghold without a fight to the very end. Anyone who enters this conflict must be prepared for the spiritual battle of his or her life."

During the epochal struggle in Wichita, Catholic Bishop Eugene Gerber vividly sensed the spiritual forces engaged in the battle, as he explained to the Hope for the Heartland rally:

"The first time I arrived near the site of a local abortuary I had a feeling that I have never had before. It is the feeling that

comes from being in a place that is at one and the same time the most sacred and the most horrible. The sacred is the innocent unborn children; the horrible is the killing of them one by one. Only now am I beginning to associate the feeling. I imagine it to be the same as standing at Calvary where the most sacred and the most horrible came together."

For thousands of unborn children every day, the abortion clinic is their own personal Calvary. (Thousands of exploited women, too, will feel the trauma of abortion in their own lives, although the pain might not hit them until months or even years after the fact.) These babies are dying *right now*, not in some abstract formulation, but in a harsh, bloody, painful reality. For them the injustice of abortion is not a theoretical question, but a personal agony. Americans know (or can easily learn) when and where the babies will die, OR leaders point out. Why not take action to save them?

If abortion is the deliberate destruction of human life, if four thousand humans are surgically butchered every day, then the abortion industry's death toll surpasses any of history's most savage persecutions. Even the Nazi death camps claimed only twelve million victims, roughly *half* the total killed to date in our own nation's continuing Holocaust. Yet today we honor the courageous Christians who resisted Hitler's regime, and wonder why so many other Christians remained passive in the face of the horror. The noted Protestant theologian Martin Niemöller was one who resisted. When a friend asked him why he was in prison, Niemöller replied with a challenge: "And brother, why are you not in prison?"

(American history has its own version of Niemöller's pointed remark; Henry David Thoreau gave essentially the same answer to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau wrote: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also in prison.")

OR applies the same moral logic to contemporary America. "Christians have a tendency to fantasize about helping Corrie ten Boom or the Underground Railroad," Randall Terry cautions in *Accessory to Murder*. "What makes us think we would have aided them, when it might have cost us years in prison or even death?

Today you can save a life, and all it costs is maybe your reputation, a small fine, or a few hours or days in jail.”

When OR leaders echo the challenge of Niemöller and Thoreau, they hasten to add that no American should be self-satisfied about his role in fighting abortion. For eighteen years since *Roe v. Wade* the casualties have piled up, and the Christian community has not made the sacrifices necessary to stop the bloodshed. No one — no pro-life activist, no OR leader — has the right to blame others for the American Holocaust. We *all* share the blame: for our failure to take action, for our passivity, for our lack of faith in invoking God’s help to end the killing. Abortion could not have become an accepted part of our culture, OR argues, if the American Christian community had been on its guard. We failed — we *all* failed — and if we act now we should act in a spirit of repentance.

Intentionally or not, by taking that approach OR has satisfied the test of another great Protestant theologian, the American Reinhold Niebuhr, who instructed his students on the crucial difference between preaching righteousness and self-righteousness. A century ago, the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison condemned all slaveholders as sinners. By that sweeping denunciation, Niebuhr argues, Garrison succeeded only in uniting the Southern slaveholders against self-righteous Northern preachers. If a preacher urges his congregation on a moral crusade, he must carefully avoid any air of moral superiority. Any such airs will invite resentment, and the point of the crusade is to stimulate resentment against injustice, not against the crusaders themselves.

Since we all share the blood-guilt of abortion, OR cautions Rescuers on the sidewalk to avoid thinking of the police, or the clinic escorts, or the women entering to abort their babies, as the enemy. The enemy is the moral evil of abortion, which has crept into so many souls because Christians failed to check its spread. Even the abortionists themselves are not the enemy. They may be sinners, but so are we all. If we have received the grace to recognize the evil of abortion, then we have an obligation to guide others toward by that same moral light. When Joan Andrews spoke to a group of former abortionists, she told them, “You don’t owe us an apology. We owe you one because we didn’t try to convert you sooner.”

Constantly chastened by that call to humility, OR adapts its

tactics to serve its moral goals. The need for a spirit of repentance is a constant theme of preachers at OR rallies, and acts of repentance are staples in the OR spiritual regimen. Even on the sidewalk OR manifests its commitment to humility. During the siege of Atlanta, when police blocked Rescuers from reaching the doors of an abortion clinic, OR looked for a way to press forward. If they marched up and confronted the police, the Rescuers might appear violent; they could risk losing their moral advantage, not to mention serious legal charges for assaulting an officer. So a dozen policemen, patrolling a street on foot, could hold off a battalion of nonviolent Rescuers. Just by posting a few guards, the abortion clinics could stop OR in its tracks.

Then Joseph Foreman, a prominent OR leader, made a happy discovery. If they crawled toward the abortuary on their hands and knees, the Rescuers could not be considered aggressive; there is absolutely nothing aggressive about someone in that posture. Moreover, if the police officers are standing upright, they must bend over into an awkward position in order to stop someone crawling toward them. When a police officer leaned down to put his hands on one Rescuer, another would quickly scuttle forward beside him. When the police touched any individual Rescuer, he would immediately fall to the ground, limp — but a colleague beside him would surge forward to the door. “The Atlanta Crawl” quickly spread to Rescuers across the country, proving enormously popular and effective. And Joseph Foreman cherished the posture for another reason: “It’s about time we Christians were on our knees!”

Watching the growing sophistication of the Rescue movement, the abortion industry saw a need to hone its own techniques. From the earliest days of OR, abortionists insisted that their business would not be affected. No matter how thoroughly OR blocked access to an abortuary, the clinic officials would insist that abortions had proceeded on schedule.

In June 1988, the National Abortion Federation issued guidelines to clinics on how to cope with Rescues in the Philadelphia area. Since the public-relations impact was uppermost in the abortionists’ minds, Alice Kirkman, the group’s director of public relations, suggested that the clinics rehearse a few key phrases to use in press interviews. To squelch the impression that pro-life forces were

rallying greater support, she recommended that the clinics announce that their forces were rallying by telling the press, "Actually, the experience has brought us more support." Remember, she made these suggestions *before* the blockades. The press duly reported those comments, however, treating the clinics' prepackaged, face-saving press statements as if they were citing objective facts.

Kirkman also advised the clinic operators to be sure that at least one employee was on the premises — even if it meant sleeping overnight in the building to be there before the blockade began. The purpose, of course, was simply to influence the press: "Even if there are no patient procedures on a demonstration day, the presence and continued work of their staffers can show that a clinic is 'open.' "

Once the blockade is in place, militant feminists can be counted upon to organize a counter-demonstration, aiming to discredit and demoralize the pro-lifers. In 1990 the National Organization for Women published a manual for such demonstrations, entitled "Project Stand Up for Women NOW." The manual advocated heckling the Rescuers, and mocking their hymns by singing parodies; the suggested titles included "Amazing Choice," "Jesus Loves Reproductive Freedom," and for the holiday season, "We Wish You a Safe Abortion."

Mary Meehan, writing on the abortion struggle for the *National Catholic Register*, unearthed an even more extreme pro-abortion effort in San Francisco. The Bay Area Coalition Against Operation Rescue (BAOCOR) advocated physically confronting the Rescuers even before the police removed them: "We are prepared to pick 'em up and move 'em out." BAOCOR pointed out that men involved in OR "have an inordinate sense of modesty and 'honor' about being accused of touching women. There are innumerable instances of clinic defenders neutralizing male ORs by shouting 'Get your hands off me; don't you dare touch me,' all the while they are tugging or pushing OR out of the line." Finally, BAOCOR recommended "sexual or religious baiting," blasphemous songs, and outright violence against the Rescuers.

When they employ such aggressive tactics, of course, the pro-abortion militants risk turning the police against them. And even the more subtle approach dictated by NOW has its strategic drawbacks. If hundreds of feminists gather on the streets outside the

clinics, as NOW encourages them to do, many pregnant women see the commotion and turn away without waiting to learn exactly what is happening. So the abortion clinic loses business. In November 1991, NOW organized a massive demonstration of support for abortion in the Boston area, in response to reports that OR would stage a blockade there. The Rescuers foiled that effort by moving their blockade to a clinic in nearby Rhode Island instead. But the hundreds of feminists who had congregated in the Boston area stood their vigil, arms locked together in front of the abortuary doors, until they were sure the "danger" had passed. They did, indeed, prevent any pro-life activists from reaching the clinic doors. But they also prevented any abortionists, or any pregnant women, from entering the building! The clinics were effectively closed for the day — not by OR but by NOW!

OR tactics pose a puzzling challenge to pro-abortion activists. If Rescuers are arrested, they win some sympathy for their cause. So the strategy suggested in the 1990 NOW manual is "to avoid mass arrest of OR participants whenever possible." But if police do not make arrests, the blockade will remain intact. Since some Rescuers welcome the prospect of a jail sentence — as an opportunity to offer up suffering as a spiritual sacrifice on behalf of the unborn children — a few militant pro-abortion strategists suggest that the best way to penalize these people is by *refusing* to jail them. But if they are not jailed, they will soon be back at the clinic doors!

The battle of wits has produced a trove of wisdom within the Rescue movement. Rescue newsletters and OR veterans can offer advice on a host of arcane subjects. Lawyers connected with the movement can help Rescuers avoid damaging lawsuits, becoming "judgment-proof" by yielding control of their financial resources. Veterans of the movement advise newcomers on how to dress for a Rescue. (In cold weather, dress in warm layers. Do not wear restrictive garments. For modesty's sake, women might want to wear a body stocking or one-piece bathing suit, in case their outer clothes are pulled apart when they are dragged.) Rescuers learn that they cannot drink fluids before a rescue; the next chance at a restroom might be hours away. They learn to store personal items on their bodies for use in jail; toothbrushes and miniaturized Bibles are in special demand. Rescuers who have served longer jail terms can

provide counsel on how to make prison life bearable. And a computer software package, Res-Q-Ware, has been written especially to help busy Rescuers keep track of their court appearances!

The steady progress of these new developments and the constant tactical cat-and-mouse game between Rescuers and police, or Rescuers and abortionists, lend their own excitement to Operation Rescue activities. No Rescue leader could deny the exhilaration that comes from thwarting efforts to infiltrate the movement, keeping the site of the Rescue secret, guessing the strategy of the police force, finding a ruse that will convince abortionists to open their doors, and finally arranging all the logistics of a blockade that will shut down an abortion mill for the day.

Still, the final measure of a Rescue's success is not the brilliance of the leaders' tactics, or the bewilderment of the opposition, or the emotional impact on spectators, or the number of people arrested. The one all-important index is the number of "saves."

Every save is a triumph; every save is dramatic. ("Unto us a child is born!") Every save is a miracle — the miracle of life — and sometimes the guiding hand of divine inspiration leaves clear fingerprints. In an East Coast city, a woman of American Indian extraction is literally lying on the table, ready to face the abortionist's knife, when she hears Rescuers singing hymns on the street below. Something touches her heart. She leaps off the table, rushes out the door, and asks for help bringing her baby to term.

Months later the same woman is sedated in preparation for a Caesarean delivery. A friendly attendant asks what she will name the baby, but her reply is unclear; her mind is already clouded by the anesthetic. Groggily she repeats a single half-remembered sound from her own Indian language: "Rasheem . . . Rasheem." In minutes a beautiful baby boy comes out into the world, and in their understandable confusion doctors announce the birth of "Rasheem". Only later do they learn the Indian meaning of that name: Rasheem, "the rescued one."

No, a Rescue is not a demonstration. When a weary novice Rescuer comes home from his first day in jail, and at the dinner table his own wide-eyed children ask for an explanation of why Papa was arrested (and why he missed their soccer games), he does not talk

about the need for new legislation or the importance of making a bold social comment. He has an explanation that even a four-year-old child can readily comprehend.

"I was trying to save babies."

Still my daughter is troubled, and the next question flows naturally: "Did you save any?"

Thank God I can give the right answer: "Yes; three."

In a flash the furrows disappear from her forehead, and she attacks a hot dog with gusto. Breaking the household rule about talking with one's mouth full, she turns back to me with a triumphant smile. "That's great!"

5

Breaking the Law

WHAT SHOULD we say to our children — and to their children after them? That question furnishes the bottom-line challenge for Randall Terry's recruiting pleas. He asks the members of his audience to imagine that years have passed and their grandchildren are asking questions about the "old days" when Americans were killing unborn children. You can be sure, he points out, that those grandchildren will ask the same time-honored question that so many other generations of curious children have asked: "What did you do in the war, Grandpa?"

What can we tell our children and grandchildren? The thought of looking into those innocent young eyes, and then confessing that we did nothing, is downright frightening — more frightening than a jail term. That fear becomes a powerful motivation to join the pro-life crusade.

However, making a commitment to pro-life work does not necessarily mean joining OR, much less risking arrest. Hundreds of groups fill other essential roles: lobbying for political change, conducting research and issuing reports, setting up shelters for unwed mothers, furnishing homes for needy children — to say nothing of the age-old works of mercy: feeding, clothing, counseling, comforting, and educating those in need. All these works are good works; all these tasks are essential. So why should a busy pro-life activist take on yet another burden, and a risky one at that?

Part of the answer is purely practical. While thousands of people can protect life in hundreds of different ways, *someone* must take a direct stand at the point where the forces of death are strongest. The task of Christians in the world is to shed light. But while so many Christians raise their own candles, *someone* must keep things in perspective by pointing toward the darkness. Anyone who encourages respect for human life is doing God's work, but that work is incomplete unless someone makes the choice abundantly clear by revealing how far *contempt* for human life has filtered into

our culture. The abortion industry marks Satan's deepest thrust into American life, the most powerful advance of the forces of death. While many Christians fight valiantly on the flanks, someone must stem that frontal assault.

Lobbying, political campaigning, and legal challenges are certainly essential; without them the pro-life movement cannot expect to change the laws that permit unrestricted abortion on demand. But political work is at best an inexact science. Every pro-life initiative must go into the meat-grinder of debate, deliberation, and amendment before it finally emerges as legislation. Even if the legislation finally passes, and even if the law survives the inevitable court challenges, it might be badly weakened by amendments and compromises; it might be entirely unrecognizable. Again, someone must maintain the perspective of the pro-life movement, reminding lobbyists and political candidates that despite their victories, the slaughter of innocents still continues.

Politics is the art of the possible. Pro-life legislators take small victories wherever they can find them, working at the margins to slow the abortion machinery: restricting government funding for abortion, requiring teenagers to seek their parents' consent, offering information about fetal development, regulating late-term abortions. When those proposals are enacted, the pro-life movement can truly claim important victories; those measures save lives. But they do not address the fundamental question of whether unborn children deserve protection.

On Capitol Hill and in state legislatures around the country, politicians often confuse the issue intentionally to serve their own ambitions. The artificial distinction between someone who is "pro-abortion" and one who is "pro-choice" — a propaganda masterpiece of the abortion industry — has enshrined the confusion. To support "pro-choice" legislation is to ensure that abortion will occur. Pro-choice means pro-abortion. But in the hurly-burly of political campaign rhetoric, that simple logic is elusive. Randall Terry sees a parallel with the campaign against slavery: "Someone who was anti-slavery could believe that slavery was morally wrong, but felt others should be able to own slaves if they wanted," he writes. "On the other hand, what the abolitionists wanted was simple and clear: the immediate, unconditional release of all slaves." OR

represents the twentieth-century analog for the abolitionist movement.

Shortly after his presidential inauguration in 1981, President Ronald Reagan called together some of the most influential conservative thinkers in Washington. The conservative movement had been harshly critical of the White House under President Jimmy Carter and was delighted by Reagan's ascendancy. But the new President surprised his old allies by asking them *not* to temper their criticism during his administration. He knew that he would face constant criticism from the political Left, and steady pressure to compromise in that direction. To balance the scales, he explained, "I need pressure from the Right."

On the abortion front, OR provides that unrelenting pressure. Rescuers may not soon win the legislation they seek, but their highly visible actions keep the abortion issue alive in the public debate, forcing politicians to confront the slaughter. OR will accept nothing less than the end to legalized abortion. Knowing that — knowing that a small but determined group will keep fighting for change despite all costs — politicians can never completely forget the unborn. The campaign may take years, but if the pressure is unrelenting, the results are inevitable. Again Randall Terry has recognized the political reality and written of it in *Operation Rescue*: "Whether for good or bad, political change comes after a group of Americans bring enough tension in the nation and pressure on the politicians that the laws are changed."

Does that logic work in the practical world of politics? Historians in future generations will look back and decide which American pressure groups contributed most forcefully to the fight against abortion. But even today, the mass media yield their own clues about the practical strength of different pro-life groups. OR is engaged in an "idealistic" sidewalk campaign, not "practical" political lobbying or legal maneuvers. And yet when the media look for a pro-life leader to comment on a new development — even a legislative or legal development — they do not look immediately for the pro-life lobbyists or legal scholars. Their first calls go to Randall Terry.

Hardball politicians should admire Terry's grasp of elementary campaign strategy. But needless to say, the strategy of the Rescue

movement is miles removed from ordinary hardball politics. The pressure that OR brings to bear on politicians stems not simply from the movement's persistence but from its powerful moral witness. Week after week, as they sit in front of abortion mills and endure their time in jail, Rescuers prick the nation's conscience, nudging politicians and nonpoliticians alike to reexamine their moral precepts. If the movement continues to grow, or even if it simply endures, more and more ordinary Americans will come into contact with someone who has joined the Rescue crusade. Perhaps it will be a relative or neighbor, perhaps a friend or colleague at work, perhaps only a casual acquaintance. Or perhaps they will happen across the scene when a Rescue takes place. However they come into direct personal contact with the movement, these people will be forced to confront a primal question: Why are these people making this sacrifice? Once they ask themselves that question, Americans will have taken the first step toward a real nationwide campaign against legal abortion. From Broward prison, where she was making her own quiet witness, Joan Andrews encouraged her fellow Rescuers: "All it takes is a very small, but visible and determined, minority willing to suffer and even die for truth and justice in order to force a change."

Up to this point, most dedicated pro-lifers would agree completely with the logic of the Rescue campaign. Yes, we must make a constant, uncompromising stand against all abortion. Yes, we must keep up the pressure. Yes, we must be determined to persevere whatever the costs. On all those points, the pro-life movement can quickly reach unanimous agreement. But OR goes further. Other groups believe that the pro-life movement can work most effectively within the system. OR disagrees. Other groups complain that illegal tactics are counterproductive; they alienate the great mass of people who have not yet made their own personal decisions about abortion. OR disagrees again. Other groups insist that pro-life activists should never disobey the law. On that point, OR disagrees forcefully.

"Should a man or a woman ever break the law?" Randall Terry answers his own question in *Accessory to Murder*: "If that law requires they disobey God, yes! The question, however, really should be framed: 'When man's law and God's law conflict, whom should we obey?' "

Glance back at the abolitionist movement again, and another

intriguing historical precedent leaps into view. The noted preacher Charles Beecher (whose sister Harriet Beecher Stowe made her own massive contribution to the antislavery campaign by writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) exhorted his flock against obedience to the fugitive-slave law: "Disobey this law. If you have ever dreamed of obeying it, repent before God, and ask His forgiveness."

Rescuers take a dim view of some American laws, because those laws require Christians to sit by idly and allow the destruction of innocent unborn children. Insofar as they enforce a passive attitude toward abortion, those laws directly contradict God's mandate, which is presented so strongly in the Book of Proverbs (24:11): "Rescue those being dragged to death."

That passage — Proverbs 24:11 — resounds through the Rescue movement. OR leaders are devout Christians with a deep love for the Scriptures; they quote the Bible frequently in their preaching, and even in ordinary conversation. But no other passage is quoted as frequently as that one. OR participants wear T-shirts emblazoned with it; it serves as the subtitle for Randall Terry's book *Operation Rescue*. Ask Rescuers where they receive permission to defy the law, and they will turn immediately to the Book of Proverbs, repeating the familiar refrain: "Rescue those being dragged to death." The Rescue movement exists to fulfill that command.

God's law mandates a rescue. Man's law — whether it is a federal law or a state regulation, a local statute or a court injunction — forbids any such action. The two are incompatible. So what should earnest Christians do? Terry quotes Brother Andrew, who for many years routinely broke the local laws of Eastern Europe by smuggling Bibles and Christian religious books across the borders. In his autobiographical book *God's Smuggler*, Brother Andrew referred all questions back to the Acts of the Apostles. Brought before the Sanhedrin to explain why he had continued to preach — in violation of his own legal authorities — St. Peter answered boldly: "Obedience before God comes before obedience to men. . ." (Acts 5:29).

(Another verse with a special significance for OR occurs a few verses later in that same chapter of Acts. When asked if he was sure that OR was God's will, Bishop Austin Vaughan harked back to the wisdom of Gamaliel, the Pharisee who intervened with the Sanhedrin

on Peter's behalf. If OR is not the work of the Holy Spirit, Bishop Vaughan reasoned, it will soon die of its own weakness; if it is God's will, its success is assured.)

So Christian theology provides a clear answer. But so does our own country's legal tradition. In the building that houses the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the walls are inscribed with a quotation from Blackstone, whose *Commentaries* furnish the acknowledged definitive source of the Anglo-American common-law tradition. "The Law of Nature dictated by God Himself is superior to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times. No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid derive their force and all their authority mediately and immediately from this original. Upon these two foundations, the Law of Nature and the Law of Revelation, depend all human laws."

Human law changes; the laws of Nature and of Nature's God do not. So whatever legal problems they face today, Rescuers retain courage in the assurance that their trials will eventually cease and their righteousness will be rewarded. Shortly before he was sentenced to serve thirty months in prison for violating a state court injunction, Bill Cotter of OR-Boston could still wisecrack: "Judge Lauriat has made his injunction permanent . . . or so he *thinks*."

That attitude, so comforting to Rescue activists, can be equally frustrating to court officials. The American judicial system handles thousands of trials every day, but virtually every defendant comes before the court as a humble petitioner. If the evidence weighs against the defendant, he usually shows signs of sorrow — even if it is feigned sorrow — for his transgressions. Judges are accustomed to seeing at least the pretext of repentance on the part of defendants, and a lively deference from their lawyers. But Rescue defendants challenge the court directly, looking judges in the eye and telling them that *they*, the *judges*, are the ones on trial! That approach infuriates some judges. As he did so often during Wichita's historic summer of 1991, Judge Patrick Kelly set the standard for irascible conduct, with an outburst at Randall Terry: "Your soul may belong to God, but your butt belongs to me, and you're going to jail!"

Despite the judges' ire, the calm self-assurance of Rescue leaders (like the phenomenon Mark Twain dubbed "the quiet

confidence of a Christian holding four aces”) pricks again at American consciences. Even in an essay bitterly attacking OR, published in *The Nation*, Philip Green coughed up a grudging recognition of the moral challenge: “Who can argue with this ‘sincerity’? Still, we must argue or we will be victimized by the kind of guilt . . .” that OR makes the pro-abortion lobby feel.

Earnest Christians can cite many good, sound, logical reasons why they should avoid contact with OR, and especially with the illegal activities that might earn them a jail sentence. We all have children to raise, careers to pursue, bills to pay, assignments to complete. These are all solid, responsible arguments. But OR leader Joseph Foreman raises a warning finger. Pregnant women, he notes, cite those same solid, logical reasons when they abort their babies. They cannot afford to interrupt their careers, they say; they cannot afford the financial strain; they cannot afford the emotional toll on their families. In short, the reasons some pro-lifers cite to justify their passivity mirror the reasons some women cite to justify their abortions. In both cases, too many people are simply unwilling to make a sacrifice on behalf of human life.

Foreman asks his audience to answer a startling question. When they are aborted, will these unborn children go to heaven or hell? If they have souls, those souls must eventually abide in one place or another; where? Whichever way the audience answers, Foreman can cite a formidable challenge, based on the Gospel of St. Matthew.

If the baby’s souls are destined for hell, Foreman points out, then the Christian community has utterly failed to fulfill the mission which Jesus gave to his followers (Matthew 28:19): “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations” The number of unborn Americans killed by abortion now outstrips the population of many of the world’s nations. Yet here, in the midst of a country where eighty-seven percent of the population is nominally Christian, we have done nothing to preach the Gospel to these souls. If the unborn children had heard the news of salvation preached to them — even if they had felt the message of love enacted on the streets by Christians trying to save their lives — then perhaps American Christians could accept their fate peacefully. But they have not heard the Gospel; we have failed.

The overwhelming majority of Christians, however, believe that

the innocent unborn children will find their way to heaven, to become brothers and sisters of Christ in the fullest sense. That is certainly good news for the babies, Foreman agrees, but it is not a thought that should ease the Christian conscience. If we believe that they are going to heaven, then we must prepare to meet our own final judgment, which was so vividly pictured by Jesus Himself in Matthew's Gospel (25:40): "Insofar as you did this to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me." Who could more aptly be described as the least of Christ's brethren, if not the helpless unborn? We knew that they were facing a painful death; we knew that they were the cherished brothers and sisters of the Lord Himself. And we stood by? Then we should not sleep easily.

Summing up the question in *Newsday*, a distinctly unsympathetic B.D. Colen wrote, "Anyone who believes that abortion is murder has a moral obligation to join Operation Rescue. How can they not?"

Actually, not even the most ardent OR recruiter would claim that every pro-life Christian should join the ranks of sidewalk activists. Yes, every Christian is obligated to fight against abortion, but the exact form of that fight might differ from one person to another. We each have our special talents, our special limitations, and our special vocation. OR needs volunteers who are willing to risk arrest, Randall Terry emphasizes, just as any army needs plenty of front-line troops. But armies need different units as well. The individual's exact strategic role is not important; the crucial point is to enlist.

After prayerful reflection, many sincere pro-life Christians honestly believe that they are not called to risk arrest. If so, OR leaders unhesitatingly tell them, they should certainly not join the blockades. On the other hand some Rescuers feel called to venture even beyond that point. Writing from her jail cell to Joseph Foreman, Joan Andrews revealed that her "noncooperation" policy was based on the private appeals of her own conscience: "It would not be objectively immoral for me to cooperate in prison because to cooperate here is much removed from the actual killing. But the reason it would be immoral for me to cooperate at this point is that I do believe God has asked me to take this stand."

In the abortion conflict as in any other, the most important battles are the struggles that individuals work out privately, within the dictates of their own conscience. Joseph Foreman asks Christians

to remember the advice that Mordecai gave to Esther: God will surely save the people of Israel; the question is whether He will save your own house. Similarly today, God will surely bring an eventual end to the violent injustice of abortion. The question for us — for each individual Christian — is not whether we can stop abortion by our own human efforts, but whether we will answer God's call. God will save the babies. Will we save ourselves?

A faithful few can inspire the participation of others, and their suffering may fertilize the ground that others will harvest. God's work flourishes on earth when Christians shoulder the load and bear their burden faithfully. In March 1987, Joan Andrews wrote to pro-life leaders from prison: "If the price to be paid became higher, I think our numbers would swell. But only if the few now remain resolute, and suffer the consequences first."

No one knows the end of the American story. No one knows when, or how, the scourge of abortion will be lifted. No one knows whether OR will ultimately succeed or fail in its goal of stopping the Holocaust. But ultimately even that question is irrelevant. Randall Terry sums up:

"When people ask after a rescue whether we achieved our goal, it is hard to answer. Most of the babies usually die after we are removed. Not all of them, but most of them. Were we trying to save a few? Absolutely not — we were trying to save all the babies scheduled to die there that day. Well, then, does that mean we failed? No, because we were really trying to be obedient to the Lord, who asked us to rescue those babies. And if we were obedient, then the results are in God's hands, not ours."