

# ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

## “In the Nick of Time”

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Occasional Essays  
and Other Stuff  
for Christian Students

Presented by the  
President of

Central Baptist  
Theological Seminary  
of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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June 17, 2005  
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## Civil Disobedience

### Part Four

#### The New Abortion Battle

In mid-April, Arizona governor Janet Napolitano vetoed a bill that would have allowed pharmacists to refuse, on moral grounds, to dispense contraceptives or abortion-inducing drugs. This followed an earlier decision by the governor of Illinois, Ron Blagojevich, to issue an executive order requiring pharmacists to fill all prescriptions for contraceptives and abortifacients. Quoth Governor Blagojevich, “No delays, no hassles, no lectures, just fill the prescription,” and, “We are not going to allow pharmacists to make political statements at the expense of women's health care.”

What are Christians to make of such laws? At what point does civil disobedience become permissible, and at what point does it become obligatory?

The problem is larger than the debate over abortion. About a year ago I had the opportunity to converse with a Canadian physician about the state of medical ethics in his nation. According to this man, a doctor who is treating a homosexual patient for AIDS is required, not simply to overlook, but actually to affirm, the patient's homosexuality. A failure to do this is regarded as a delinquency in providing adequate care.

The ready answer is that abortion and homosexuality are both wrong; therefore, helping an abortion (by dispensing abortifacients) and approving homosexuality are also wrong. Since

these acts are wrong, no law can justly require them to be performed. If the civil law compels the dispensing of abortifacients or the approval of homosexuality, then it pits itself against God's law. Under such circumstances, Christians are morally obligated to obey God in violation of the civil authority.

I believe that this answer is the correct one. Defending it, however, is more complicated than most people realize. In order for this answer to work, those who give it are obligated to answer two questions.

First, is every activity wrong that contributes to a wrong deed? We say that selling abortion-inducing drugs to women who want abortions is wrong. By the same token, would selling ammunition or a knife be wrong when the purchaser uses them to commit a robbery or murder? Would a builder be equally wrong to construct a hospital that could be used to perform abortions? Would the pharmacist be wrong to fill prescriptions for narcotic medications to people who might be addicted?

In order to answer this question, we must remember the distinction between intended and unintended consequences. The intention of guns and ammunition is to launch high-speed projectiles (i.e., to shoot). Shooters must choose their own targets: paper, or wild game, or a criminal (if they are police officers), or an innocent person (if they are criminals). The consequences of this intention rest solely with the shooter, and not with the person who makes and sells guns and ammunition. The only exception to this rule occurs when the seller knows in advance what the shooter's intention is. Otherwise, a misuse of the gun or ammunition is an unintended consequence on the part of the seller, and one for which he cannot rightly be held liable.

The same is true of the builder who erects a hospital. The builder's intention is to build a facility for the purpose of healing people. He may even know that some people will misuse that facility, perhaps to perform abortions. But he cannot avoid that possibility without refusing to do the good that he ought to do. He does not intend the harm that will be done if abortions are performed; he intends the good that will occur when people are healed. If others misuse what he has done, then they are culpable, and he is not.

Much the same can be said of the pharmacist who fills prescriptions for narcotic medications. The pharmacist is not the physician. The physician has the primary responsibility to weigh the benefits of the medication against the hazards of addiction. Patients may misuse the medication. Unless those patients announce their intentions, however, pharmacists are justified in assuming that the drugs will be used in proper medicinal ways. They cannot normally be held responsible for any misuse.

The dispensing of abortifacients is not analogous to these situations. RU486 is not used innocuously. It is marketed with the sole purpose of inducing abortions. The consequences of distributing it can never be unintended, for it has only one intended use. To dispense the drug implicates one in the use to which it is put. The hands of the pharmacist who dispenses an abortifacient are stained with the blood of the child who is aborted.

Therefore, the only circumstances under which abortion-inducing drugs can be dispensed justly are those circumstances under which abortion is morally permissible. If such

circumstances exist, they are exceptional. As a general principle, we may conclude that pharmacists who fill prescriptions for abortifacients are guilty of a gravely immoral act. Laws that require pharmacists to sell abortifacients are immoral laws. Breaking those laws is a moral duty for all Christian pharmacists.

This leads to the second question: should Christians support laws that permit Christian pharmacists to refuse an employer's demand to fill prescriptions for abortifacients? Here the question is not whether the Christian should disobey the law, but whether the law should protect the Christian who, for moral reasons, disobeys an employer. In this case the pharmacist is being required to sell abortion-inducing drugs, not by legal mandate, but by an employer.

The crucial factor in answering this question is the eighth commandment, which implies the right to property. The right to property is abridged whenever owners are denied the lawful use of their possessions. A business is the property of its owners. The right to property implies the right to pursue whatever commerce is otherwise within the bounds of the law. This is true even if the business itself is immoral.

A worker does not have a right to work for a given employer, but employers do have a right to require employees to perform the tasks for which they are being paid. If workers are not willing to fulfill the tasks assigned by an employer, then they ought to seek some other employment. To force an employer to pay an employee for a job that the employee is not willing to perform is equivalent to stealing from the employer.

Christians must not become complicit in such an act. They must resist the temptation to appeal to civil authority in order to force employers to conform to the consciences of employees. They are not acting justly if they attempt to stop one injustice by perpetrating another. While Christian pharmacists must not dispense abortion-inducing drugs, they must not demand that the state protect their jobs in spite of this choice.

Does this mean that Christian pharmacists have no recourse? No, because employees have at least two actions that they are able to make. The first is to appeal directly to their employers, asking the employers to defer to their moral convictions. Most employers are happy to comply with such a request if it is respectfully made.

In some instances, an employer may respond negatively, forcing the employee to leave the business. In a case like this, other Christians will probably not wish to frequent the business. The (former) employee may rightly inform his fellow believers of the employer's intransigence so that they may take their business elsewhere. ✕

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of Central Seminary's professors, students, or alumni necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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