

“What if She Was Raped?”

Far and Away the Most Common Question We Hear on Campus. Here's How I Respond...



STEPHEN WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE

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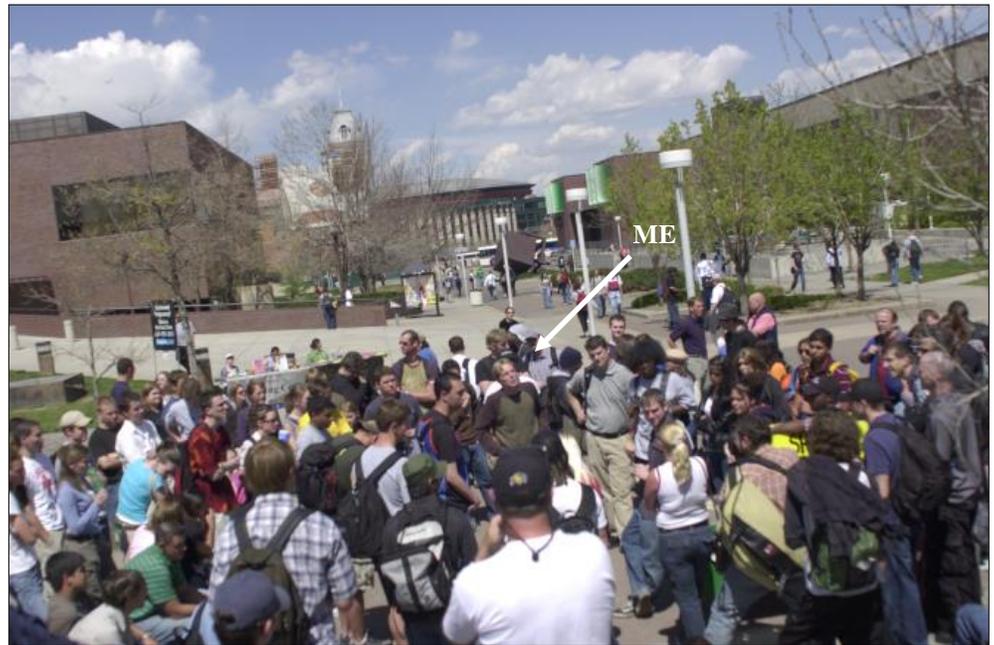
Note: This is an unedited, reformatted version of the letter I sent to supporters in May 2004 while working at Stand to Reason (www.str.org).

Dear Friend,

On Wednesday April 14, after eight days on the road, five training sessions, and two days in the sun talking with students, I found myself in the middle of a huge crowd of people at Metropolitan State College of Denver. One after another, the students complained that the fetus is not fully human and expressed frustration with the Justice For All Exhibit.

After about an hour, a female student spoke up. Exasperated, she said, “I was raped. It’s only because I’ve gone through counseling that I can say that to all of you right now. I was raped and then had an abortion. What do you think about that?”

I’ve heard this concern many times on campus. It doesn’t scare me in the least, but the interpersonal element here presents a challenge in every new situation no matter how refined my intellectual response. I prayed to the Lord, “I’m tired. I’m running on six hours of sleep and I need your help with responding to this rape challenge. Help me not to bumble over my response.” I didn’t want to waste this opportunity to clarify the logic of the pro-life position as this large crowd of pro-life and pro-choice listened intently. More importantly, I did not want to fail this test.



Here’s the crowd that formed at Denver Metropolitan on Wednesday. About ten students challenged my views on abortion for almost three hours. You can find me in the green and brown sweater in the center. Along with students I was seeking to persuade, I was able to model the skills of a good ambassador for high school students I had trained the week before. Since we aren’t invited into many classrooms to dialogue with students about abortion, we create our own classroom in the center of campus. With beautiful Denver weather (provided by God through the prayers of many of you), one couldn’t ask for a better teaching environment.

Why do I say this is a test? When I teach pro-lifers to respond to the rape challenge, I point out that when people offer this challenge, it is not so much to show the fetus isn’t human; it is a test to see *if the pro-lifer is human*. Too many times have I watched from the sidelines as pro-life people fail to show a real understanding and concern for women who are hurting. Their points are valid but they make no impact.

I said, “I think rape is seriously evil. It’s horrible what was done to you. And I think the rapist should be punished to the fullest extent of the law. I’ll bet the man who raped you was not punished, was he?” She said, “No.” I replied, “I’m so sorry. That shouldn’t happen. We should punish the rapist severely for his



JUSTICE FOR ALL — TRAINING THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

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crime. But even when we do punish him, if the woman gets pregnant, I think we've let the rapist off easy. If the woman gets pregnant, the rapist not only perpetrated an act of violent assault; he also forced her to become a mother, such that if she wants to do what's right, like everyone does, she *has* to carry to term. It's wrong to put her in the position where she either has to carry a baby she didn't consent to create (followed by giving birth and going through the pain of adoption) or she has to do this (I pointed to the pictures of aborted children) to the child. But it's the rapist who did all of this. We're too easy on him. He should be punished for all of these things." My response here was totally centered on the woman and the injustice done to her. There's one other point I needed to make explicitly, though, in order for the crowd to see the moral logic of our position.



When the woman in white shared her rape experience, I prayed that God would help me communicate concern and not compromise His message because of fatigue. This dependence on God is an essential component of being a good ambassador (see STR's *Ambassador's Creed* at www.str.org).

After a few responses from the crowd, I said, "Why should the child pay for the crimes of his father?" I can

easily use this sentence at the beginning of my response, but I know it will not be heard or understood. That's why I always place it in the context of concern for the mother; then the audience can focus on its intuition that those who commit injustice are the ones who should be punished.

Even this careful approach to the rape question isn't always easily accepted. Women many times protest that it's very wrong for them to have to carry a child when they didn't do anything to be placed in the situation— that the pregnancy makes the rape worse. I agree with them, but I point out that all of the unthinkable horrors of rape – including any forced pregnancy that results – are the rapist's fault, not the child's. They may struggle with the fact that the rapist isn't punished and won't be punished, but because I acknowledge the serious wrong done to the woman, they are more likely to see the sensibility of the pro-life position.

The crowd pictured in this newsletter is one of at least eight opportunities I had in the past two months to minister to crowds of students and at the same time to train pro-lifers to pass tests like the rape challenge. Your financial support made this impact possible. Please pray with me for each of the students to whom I spoke, that God will provide a Christian nearby who can help them to think clearly about abortion and the truth of Christianity. And pray for me as I recuperate from many days on the road, interact with some of these students over email, write important articles for our website, and talk with new supporters.

For the Kingdom,

Stephen

Steve Wagner