

Anti-Abortion Zealots' Grasp for Power

By Warren M. Hern

Rocky Mountain News

SPEAKOUT

Monday, December 19, 1994

The thoughtful comments by Douglass Groothuis in his Dec. 7 Speakout "Pro-lifers face defining moment," urging adversaries of abortion to be non-violent in their opposition, is a welcome attempt to inject peaceful dialogue into the otherwise insane zealotry of the anti-abortion movement. Unfortunately, Groothuis' essay reveals some of the roots of this insoluble conflict.

While I would strongly encourage would-be anti-abortion assassins to read Groothuis' plea for reason and civility, it contains echoes of the rhetoric that has made assassination of physicians who do abortions seem an attractive strategy to some of Groothuis' more militant colleagues.

Groothuis refers to physicians who perform abortions as "abortionists," a degrading and demeaning term that carries with it a history of sordid, illegal activities conducted by unscrupulous and incompetent criminals on terrified women.

"Abortionist" is not a neutral term, and it purposefully degrades and dehumanizes those to whom it is applied. It has the same negative connotations as the most despicable racial epithet, and it is for that reason that the anti-abortion movement uses "abortionist" to describe physicians who help women who seek their assistance.

The term "pro-life," by contrast, linguistically commandeers the moral high ground by implying that those who believe in freedom of choice in abortion are "anti-life" or "pro-death." Nothing could be further from the truth, and the anti-abortion zealots know it. It is also an outright lie, because what we live with today is the directive from some members of the anti-abortion movement that: "Do what we tell you to do or we will kill you." There is nothing pro-life about that.

At least two physicians have been assassinated, two others have been shot in assassination attempts, and other clinic workers have been critically wounded. The rest of us live in fear.

Groothuis' essay implies that he and his colleagues have a monopoly on concern for "life." This denies that there is a legitimate concern for the life of the woman whose health or very being is threatened by pregnancy, a condition that male priests cannot suffer, and which can kill women, even when it is welcome.

While Groothuis speaks of "abortion on demand," it doesn't exist. But the term implies that there is no thought process involved in obtaining or providing an abortion for a woman who needs one. This is a lie.

The ideas that "human life begins at conception" and that the embryo is an "unborn" or "pre-born child" are preposterous (I hope no one decides I am a "pre-dead corpse" and tries to bury me). Human life began hundreds of thousands of years ago and has continued in an unbroken sequence ever since.

The question is not when human life begins, but who is best prepared to make the decision to transmit life to a new generation: the individual or the state? In this arena, the individual woman is more competent than any government.

Anti-abortion zealots would nonetheless use the coercive power of the state to prevent all abortions. This would deprive women of an essential component of women's health care which has lowered maternal mortality rates.

Therein lies the rub: Anti-abortion zealots care nothing for the health and welfare of women; what they care about is not fetuses or even life, but power. That is why the murders of physicians who perform abortions are political assassinations. The physicians represent what the assassins hate: freedom.

Advocates of peaceful persuasion like Groothuis notwithstanding, the anti-abortion movement is now most clearly represented by thugs whose purpose is to inflict pain, terror, and tyranny. "Know ye a tree by its fruit."

Warren M. Hern, M.D. is director of the Boulder Abortion Clinic

For further information and commentary by Warren M. Hern, go to www.drhern.com > News and publications