

An electronic demon stalks clinic workers

By WARREN M. HERN

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News of the abortion clinic shooting in Massachusetts brought grief, fear and trembling to those of us providing this service in my office in Boulder. That day, we saw a young couple who had driven hundreds of miles from another state to see me because their pregnancy had tragically gone wrong – the fetus was afflicted with a deadly malformation, and carrying it longer could endanger her life.

They were extremely sad, but grateful to have our service. They were shocked, however, to have to go through electronic security and bulletproof doors. The morning news caused them to reflect on their own situation, in which a desired pregnancy that meant hope for the future had become, instead, a source of deep emotional pain. They were bewildered that anyone would walk into a clinic helping women and begin shooting. Why?, they said.

We had a long talk, and both the woman and her husband, a physician, gave me a tearful embrace before they left. My tears joined theirs. I was glad to help them. That's what it's all about.

That evening, I went to get some of my favorite wilderness calendars for my office. The last item I picked up was a copy of a magazine carrying an article on anti-abortion protests. A friendly comment about my choice from the pleasant young man at the cash register caused me to hold up the cover so he could see it.

"Did you hear what happened in Boston today?" I asked. "No," he said. After I described the carnage that the gunman had inflicted, he said brightly. "Oh, he must be *pro-life*."

I looked at him for a moment, not believing my ears, and finally said, "Did you hear what you just said? Did you *think* about the words you just used to describe someone who just walked in and killed two people?" Embarrassed, the young man said, "Oh, I see your point. But really, I'm *pro-choice*. I didn't think about that."

The response of a Denver-based anti-abortion TV talk show host to the killings in Boston was to make comments attacking me personally and my work on a nationally broadcast cable network program, complete with an image of the yellow pages listing that gives my name and the name, address and telephone number of my medical practice.

Several persons called me from around the country to report this broadcast, beamed to 750 cable TV stations, which callers described as "incitement to hurt you." Viewers calling in to speak to the host advocated violence against abortion providers. The most common words on the broadcast, according to reports, were my last name and the word "kill."

Militant anti-abortion activists are getting serious attention by condoning the Boston abortion clinic killings as "moral." Other branches of the anti-abortion movement are giving out sanctimonious messages that they condemn the shootings. But the damage has been done, and an electronic demon now stalks us.

On August 13, 1993, Randall Terry, national leader of Operation Rescue, went on National

Christian Radio Broadcasting and, identifying me by name, invited his listeners to assassinate me. The next day, Rev. David Trosch of Birmingham, Alabama, announced that killing doctors who do abortions is “justifiable homicide.”

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The next day, August 15, the doctor who replaced Dr. Gunn at the Pensacola clinic was murdered in Birmingham with money in his pocket. The next week, August 19, Rochelle Shannon flew from Oregon and tried to assassinate Dr. George Tiller in Wichita. One of Trosch’s supporters, Paul Hill, assassinated Dr. John Britton and a bodyguard last July, 1994. Now, unspeakable terrorism in Boston.

The anti-abortion movement has spent 20 years inflaming the public with propaganda terms that demonize doctors and others who help women with this difficult and painful choice. Doctors are called “abortionists,” “butchers,” “baby-killers” and worse, and the same despicable terms are applied broadly to all those who work at or service the clinics and doctors' offices.

The anti-abortion movement claims the linguistic high ground by calling itself “pro-life,” implying that those of us who help women are “pro-death” or “anti-life.” Meanwhile, the anti-abortion movement is now represented by thugs whose purpose is to inflict pain, terror, death and tyranny. The message is, “Do what we tell you to do, or we will kill you.” There is nothing pro-life about that.

Since 1975, the radical religious right has joined forces with the radical right wing of the Republican Party in using the abortion issue to get power, and it has worked. Anti-abortion activists have helped win elections across the country for the Republican Party.

The harsh rhetoric from leaders and high officials has also given powerful psychological permission to radical anti-abortion groups and individuals to step up their violent campaigns. Inevitably, someone with a rifle or shotgun hears a message from God that he must kill an abortion doctor or clinic worker for Christ.

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This conflict is not about abortion. This is about power. What do we represent that the anti-abortion fanatics want to kill? Freedom. They hate a fundamental premise of American society. When they get through with people who provide abortions, who will be next? People who read books?

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