

## Does Pro-Life Rhetoric Lead to Violence?

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By Scott Klusendorf

On July 11, 2000, a knife-wielding man attacked Vancouver (BC) abortionist Garson Romalis in a downtown clinic. Abortion advocacy groups seized on his brush with death to score cheap political points against their opponents, notably Canadian Alliance Party leader Stockwell Day, who opposes abortion.<sup>1</sup>

Day was quick to condemn the attack against Romalis as “outrageous and untenable,” but that did not satisfy local abortion advocates. Marilyn Wilson, president of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, said Day had “indirectly sanctioned” the violence against Romalis with his extremist rhetoric.

Why was Mr. Day responsible for the attack? It’s really quite simple: He disagrees with Ms. Wilson on abortion and has said publicly that elective abortion is the unjust killing of an innocent human being. “Day is going to try and deny that he would support any violence,” she said in a press release, “but his rhetoric does incite other people who share his beliefs against abortion to violence.” She then called Day a “fanatic” for “the amount of anti-choice, extremist rhetoric that’s out there.”

Bear in mind that to Ms. Wilson, “fanatic” and “extremist” mean anyone who deviates in the slightest from her own position, which is that abortion should be legal for any reason whatsoever during all nine months of pregnancy. If you say that elective abortion takes the life of a defenseless child, as Day believes it does, your irresponsible rhetoric will cost an abortionist his life.

Ms. Wilson is using scaremongering tactics to poison the public debate over abortion. Her statements are intellectually dishonest for at least four reasons.

First, let’s assume that pro-life rhetoric does in fact lead to acts of violence against abortionists (though there is no good reason to suppose that this is so). Would this in anyway refute the pro-life argument that elective abortion unjustly takes the life of an innocent human being? Keep in mind that pro-life advocates do not merely state their case; they buttress it with scientific and philosophic reasoning. If Ms. Wilson thinks we are wrong about the humanity of the unborn and the inhumanity of abortion, she should patiently explain why our arguments are mistaken and why fetuses should be disqualified from membership in the human community. But instead of refuting the pro-life view, she attempts to silence it with personal attacks.

Second, it is blatantly unfair of Ms. Wilson to demonize pro-life advocates for espousing their sincerely held beliefs. Let’s assume that I’m an animal rights activist opposed to the sale of fur. If a deranged environmentalist firebombs a local clothing store, am I

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<sup>1</sup> The facts from this story, as well as some of the analysis, come from Andrew Coyne, “Opinions are not Crimes,” *The National Post*, July 14, 2000.

responsible? More to the point, is Ms. Wilson responsible if, upon reading her press release, a pro-abortion activist shoots Stockwell Day for the purpose of saving the community from such an awful extremist? (In a press release one day prior to the stabbing, Wilson accused Mr. Day of favoring “state-sanctioned violence against women by forcing them to bear children they may not want.”<sup>2</sup>) If she is serious that merely disagreeing with her on abortion is itself an incitement to violence, then let’s not fool around: Ms. Wilson should lead the charge to ban all pro-life speech. (Actually, she would like that, but lacks the courage to say so publicly.)

Third, it does not follow that because a lone extremist stabs an abortionist, the pro-life cause *itself* is unjust. Dr. Martin Luther King, for example, used strong language to condemn the evil of racism during the 1960s. In response to his peaceful but confrontational tactics, racists unjustly blamed him for the violent unrest that sometimes followed his public demonstrations. Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago argued that if Dr. King would stop exposing racial injustice, black people would be less likely to riot.<sup>3</sup> The Mayor’s remarks, like those of Ms. Wilson, were an outrage. Are we to believe that a handful of rioters made Dr. King’s crusade for civil rights entirely unjust? In his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, King rebuts this dishonest attempt to change the subject:

In your statement you asserted that our actions, though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence....[I]t is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain...basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence....Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such a creative tension that a community...is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to dramatize the issue so it can be no longer ignored.

Fourth, if it is extreme to call elective abortion killing, then abortion advocates bear partial responsibility for the stabbing of Dr. Romalis. The fact is that pro-lifers aren’t the only ones who call abortion killing. Consider these candid statements by abortion providers themselves:

- **Warren Hern**, late-term abortionist: *We have reached a point in this particular technology [D&E abortion] where there is no possibility of denial of an act of destruction by the operator. It is before one’s eyes. The sensations of dismemberment flow through the forceps like an electric current.*<sup>4</sup>
- **Anthony Kennedy**, pro-abortion Supreme Court Associate Justice, describing common abortion techniques: *The fetus, in many cases, dies just as a human adult or child would: it bleeds to death as it is torn from limb to limb. . . . The fetus can be alive at the beginning of the dismemberment process and can survive for a time while its limbs are being torn off. . . . Dr. [Leroy] Carhart [the abortionist who challenged Nebraska’s partial-birth ban] has observed fetal heartbeat . . . with “extensive parts of the fetus removed,” . . . and testified that mere dismemberment of a limb does not always cause death because he knows of a physician who removed the arm of a fetus*

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Abortion Rights Action League press release, July 10, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Gregg Cunningham, *Why Abortion is Genocide*, available from [www.abortionno.org](http://www.abortionno.org)

<sup>4</sup> Warren Hern & Billie Corrigan, “What About Us? Staff Reactions to D&E,” paper presented at the annual meeting of Planned Parenthood Physicians, San Diego, CA, 1978.

only to have the fetus go on to be born “as a living child with one arm.” . . . At the conclusion of a D&E abortion . . . the abortionist is left with “a tray full of pieces.”<sup>5</sup>

- **Planned Parenthood, 1963 brochure:** *Abortion kills the life of a baby after it has begun. It is dangerous to your life and health.*<sup>6</sup>
- **New Mexico abortionist, 1993:** *Paradoxically, I have angry feelings at myself for feeling good about doing a technically good procedure which destroys a fetus, kills a baby.*<sup>7</sup>
- **Abortionist Dr. Crist, 2000:** *In testimony Wednesday in St. Louis Circuit Court, [abortionist] Crist said that it is not uncommon for second-trimester fetuses to leave the womb feet-first, intact and with their hearts still beating. He sometimes crushes their skulls to get the fetuses out. Other times, he dismembers them.*<sup>8</sup>

My question for Ms. Wilson and abortion-advocates who think like her is this: If calling abortion “killing” makes one responsible for acts of violence against doctors, are pro-abortionists like Warren Hern and Anthony Kennedy guilty of inciting violence against their own people? Like pro-life advocates, they candidly admit that abortion is brutal killing. Therefore, when Dr. Hern complains about threats to abortion doctors, is he partially to blame for his own insecurity? Put simply pro-abortion advocates like Ms. Wilson lack the courage to defend their views publicly. Instead of refuting the scientific and philosophic case for the pro-life view, they call names from a distance in hopes of silencing their critics. There is a name for this—fascism. Pro-lifers take heart: Our critics have truly run out of ideas.

To sum up, pro-abortion advocates like Ms. Wilson lack the courage to defend their views publicly. Instead of refuting the scientific and philosophic case for the pro-life view, they call names from a distance in hopes of silencing their critics.

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<sup>5</sup> *Stenberg v. Carhart*, 2000. Cited in David Smolin, *et al*, “The Supreme Court 2000: A Symposium,” *First Things*, October 2000. Kennedy voted to uphold *Roe v. Wade* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) and in various other Court decisions.

<sup>6</sup> “Plan Your Children for Health and Happiness,” Planned Parenthood Brochure, 1961.

<sup>7</sup> New Mexico abortionist cited in Diane Gianelli, “Abortion Providers Share Inner Conflicts,” *American Medical News*, July 12, 1993

<sup>8</sup> Jo Mannies, “Abortion Doctor Gives Graphic testimony Describing Abortion Procedure,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 25, 2000.