

By *Sunsara Taylor* □



The killing of Dr. George Tiller, the courageous abortion provider from Kansas, has thrown down a moral and a practical challenge to every human being in this country.

History has been punctuated. The future will pivot one way or the other depending on what we do.

Either this killing will succeed in creating a climate where abortion providers cannot do their work and no one else joins them in that work, or it will be answered by growing numbers of people waking up, coming off the sidelines, defending our doctors and our clinics, and reversing the whole dynamic that has led to this situation where not only abortion, but birth control too, is imperiled.

Between these two possibilities, there really is no lasting neutral "middle ground."

Two weeks ago, Notre Dame became a flash point in the struggle for women's right to abortion when Obama was invited to give the graduation commencement address. It provides a concentrated expression of why we keep losing ground and losing clinics and losing doctors and losing hearts and minds, especially of young people who have grown up in a time of

complete moral confusion around abortion. And, in many ways, the events surrounding Obama's Notre Dame appearance set the stage for this most recent killing.

When anti-abortion leaders learned of Obama's invitation to Notre Dame, they put their movement on an emergency footing. They crowed about how Obama is the most "radical pro-choice" president ever. Christian fascist lunatic women-haters like Randall Terry (who is all over the media now exclaiming he has no sympathy for Dr. Tiller and calling him a "mass murderer") were joined by zombie-like fundamentalist foot-soldiers to descend on the campus. They screamed bloody murder, trespassed and got arrested, projected their rhetoric all over the national media, and incited their fanatical base across the country.

On the other side, there were no pro-choice organizations. That's right, zero. It seems that, just like under the Clinton years when abortion access was dramatically restricted, the pro-choice movement was asleep at the wheel because a "pro-choice" Democrat is in the White House.

I went to Notre Dame together with a half dozen other supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Several handfuls of students and community members who came out on their own joined us in raising a banner, "Abortion on Demand and Without Apology!" and signs that read, "Women Are Not Incubators! Fetuses Are Not Babies! Abortion Is Not Murder!"

Meanwhile, Obama was inside the graduation hall pumping out the deadly illusion of "common ground." He suggested that every woman feels morally heart-wrenched by abortion. He suggested that we find "common ground" in reducing the number of abortions and the number of unintended pregnancies. Obama said we should find "common ground" around the need to "care and support for women who do carry their child to term."

As I analyzed more fully here (http://revcom.us/a/166/ST_on_Obama-en.html), Obama's speech gave more moral legitimacy and political initiative to the movement that wants to force women to bear children against their will.

There can be no "common ground" over reducing the number of abortions. At a time when 87% of counties do not have abortion access, when doctors are being hunted, and women have to run a gauntlet of obstacles (parental notification laws, mandatory waiting periods, the thousands of anti-abortion "pregnancy crises centers," and financial and travel burdens), the tremendous need is to expand abortion access, not to reduce the number of abortions!

There can be no "common ground" on reducing unintended pregnancies. It would be truly wonderful if all young people received frank and scientific education about their bodies, their sexuality, and how to form healthy and mutually respectful emotional and physical relationships. It would be truly wonderful if birth control were widely and its use was popularized. However, this is not something that the "pro-life" movement will agree to. The same biblical scripture that drives them to insist women carry every pregnancy to term, also drives them to oppose birth control. There is not a single "pro-life" organization that supports birth control.

When it comes to abortion, there is only one moral question: will women have control over their own lives and reproduction, or will we be forced to breed against our will and subjugated to

male patriarchal authority?

If we want to save the right to abortion, which is essential for women to be free, we must take on the notion that there anything wrong with abortion. We must not be pacified by a president who calls himself "pro-choice" in one breath but refers to a fetus as a "child" in the next, thereby legitimating the view that "abortion is murder." We must go out to the new generation that has never heard people speak positively about abortion and tell them the truth: abortion saves lives and enriches the lives of women who are able to choose it free from stigma, shame, coercion or obstacles.

We must seize back the moral high ground and yes, repolarize things. Everyone seems convinced these days that polarization is a bad thing. Not so. The current polarization is very, very bad. The one where anti-woman fascists are unleashed and allowed to claim the moral high ground and pro-choice people are relying on the mealy mouthed "common ground" of Obama is deadly and getting worse.

But a different polarization, one where people had to decide if they were for forcing women to bear children against their will or if they were for women's full emancipation, would be very good.

If people don't understand that they have to pick between women's subjugation or women's liberation, then we have to clarify that for them. The more people see this for what it really is, the more people will have the chance – which they don't have as long as pro-choice people fail to take the moral and political offensive – to stand on the side of women and of humanity as a whole.

I believe – and have seen in practice over and over again – that when people get clear on the stakes, they will in their great numbers side with women. Even those who today feel conflicted or even negatively towards abortion can be won to change their views – but only if we challenge them.

I am a living example of this. I was 15 years old and living in a small city in Minnesota when the first abortion doctor was killed. At the time I was Christian and hanging out with members of the Young Life club. Although I considered myself pro-choice and knew most of my friends were "pro-life," I never really thought it mattered. Then I heard my friends empathizing with the man who had killed the doctor. "Not that I approve of violence," they'd say, "But I can understand his motivation. He did stop babies from getting killed." All of a sudden, I had to decide whether or not I could be passive as doctors were hunted and people sympathized with this.

This is what is going on in millions of minds right now – over dinner tables, in classrooms, and on late-night textfests between teenage friends.

For myself, I was lucky to run into people who were clear about abortion. They helped me understand scientifically why a fetus is a subordinate part of a woman's body, not a "child." They gave me a positive way to express the outrage I was feeling. They had posted up signs calling on people to join them in defending the last abortion clinic in North Dakota when it was under

siege by Christian fascists. I signed up. I learned a great deal. I have never been the same since.

Right now, people who thought they didn't have to concern themselves with the "abortion wars" are being forced to tune in. What voices, what clarity, what challenge will they hear?

We must raise our voices now to demand the full emancipation of women. That includes the right to abortion on demand and without apology. It is possible to discern already that relying on Obama and seeking "common ground" will lead only to further disaster. It is time for the people, ourselves, to stand up and fight for the world we want to live in.

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