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## Does Shooting Abortionists Reveal a Lack of Faith?

by

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When I was in college, we studied the works of the Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died during World War II. He wrote movingly of the requirements of living out one's faith, the cost of discipleship.<sup>1</sup> Yet he was a child of his times and found some burdens too costly to bear passively — he was executed for his part in an assassination plot on Hitler's life.

In the past year, we have witnessed an escalation in the nation's ongoing conflict over abortion. What once had been a war of words has progressed to resemble actual warfare, with the shooting death in Florida of a physician outside his abortion clinic, and the wounding of another in Kansas.<sup>2</sup> (A third shooting appears to have been an unrelated robbery attempt.) What is disturbing is the escalation in violence; what is remarkable is that, thus far, all the bullets seem to be flying in one direction. Both assailants charged with the shootings have acknowledged that they did so as an outgrowth of their strong opposition to abortion. During the past 20 years, deeply held convictions have driven the actions of both Pro-Choice and Pro-Life activists, but those who have opposed abortion have made a special moral claim. In almost every case they base their position on the requirements of their religious faith, most often a Christian faith. It is right and good that every viewpoint in a pluralistic society can claim a hearing, and to silence an opponent because his or her perspective is based on a religious conviction would be decidedly un-American. A religious person has as much right to express an opinion as a secular humanist, agnostic, or atheist, and such an opinion usually has much to add to the moral discourse. But to seize the moral high ground only in order to gain a better field of fire is to betray the moral convictions that lead you there.

The abortion debate in America is on shifting ground and the point of focus may soon move from the sidewalks outside abortion clinics. The advent of new technologies such as RU-486, the so called "Abortion Pill" may move

the majority of abortions to the privacy of an individual's home instead of a medical facility.<sup>3</sup> High-visibility interventions such as "Rescue" operations or picketing will have little effect in such a future. In fact, the increasing rancor now associated with them, from both sides, make them arguably less effective even now. When violence follows, it is an affront to all citizens, but especially those millions of Americans who are more than merely anti-abortion but are truly Pro-Life, and demonstrate their commitment through their support of the pregnant woman before delivery and the mother and child afterwards.

Both Ghandi and Martin Luther King remembered a lesson from Christ that some Christians seem to have forgotten today: to be most effective, passive resistance must remain passive. Admonitions to "turn the other cheek" suggest that moral persuasion relies best on the strength of moral argument, not on strength of arms. To resort to force suggests, as with Bonhoeffer, a possible lack of faith in one's position or in its eventual vindication. Those opposed to abortion point out that lives are lost daily through abortion, but this in no way confers a right to add to the carnage they see. It is the ultimate oxymoron to become a "Pro-Life gunman". We must not tolerate bombings or drive-by shootings — for whatever cause. Those who would persuade their countrymen of the evils of abortion must continue to rely on the caliber of their arguments, not the caliber of their armaments.

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