

Friday Night Theology, 5th June 2009.
The Murder of George Tiller

The [murder](#) of US late term abortion doctor George Tiller last Sunday, has sparked the debate again between the pro-choice and pro-life camps on both sides of the Atlantic. The murder suspect, Scott Roeder, was a member of a Christian group, albeit an extreme right wing militia group, prompting a Guardian headline, [Terror in the name of Jesus](#).

Sadly, this is not the first violent incident in the US over this issue: to date 15,125 violent acts have been committed towards abortion providers, many carried out supposedly in the name of Jesus. Speaking on Tiller's murder, Barack Obama said, "However profound our differences as Americans over difficult issues such as abortion, they cannot be resolved by heinous acts of violence." I for one certainly agree with that. And as many commentators have noted, the suspect may have viewed Tiller as a murderer, but murdering the murderer on the basis that you think he is a murderer is surely a contradiction.

While researching this article, I read some stories of women who have had late term abortions. As I read, I felt overwhelming compassion. Most of these are [stories of women](#) who have to make agonizing decisions, stories of foetuses with horrendous disabilities, unlikely to live more than a few days, stories of women who longed for a baby. Pro-life arguments against the decision to abort would include that to abort the foetus is to pre-judge God and that only God has the right to give life and take it away. Yet these women have found themselves in harrowing situations that I would not wish on anyone.

Jesus' actions towards people though were not based on whether or not he endorsed their decisions and behavior, yet sometimes we seem to think that ours can be. Jesus told us very clearly not to judge people, to examine carefully our own conduct, (Matthew 7:1) and equally clearly, he tells us that we are to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:39). Yet often we rush to make judgments and treat people depending on whether we think they're right or wrong. In this case, such disagreement has led to violence, murder, abuse and hatred: at both Tiller and women attending his clinic. Such acts have no regard for their common humanity, as people made in the image of God. We may not carry out murder and violence, but how do we treat people whose actions or points of view we disagree with?

Jesus wasn't afraid to tell people he disagreed with them and he did so out of love, to show them a better way. Sometimes they didn't respond, but it didn't mean he ceased to love them. He comforted the hurting, healed the broken, bound up the broken hearted, loved those who felt alone and abandoned, wept with those who were suffering and offered them hope and life. If we believe in a God of love, compassion and mercy, let's be the first to demonstrate that to people: no matter what they've done, or what situation they are facing.

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