

Abortion opponents denounce Fla. killings

WASHINGTON — The killing of a Florida abortion doctor and a clinic escort was decried by church leaders and other opponents of abortion.

As the Justice Department announced U.S. marshals would be assigned to protect some abortion clinics, mainstream organizations opposed to abortion said violence has no place in the movement and denounced the killings of Dr. John Bayard Britton and James Herman Barrett in Pensacola, Fla., July 29. Barrett's wife, June, who worked as a volunteer escort at the Ladies' Center abortion clinic, was wounded.

Paul Hill, an outspoken advocate of using violence to stop abortion, was arrested and charged with the shootings.

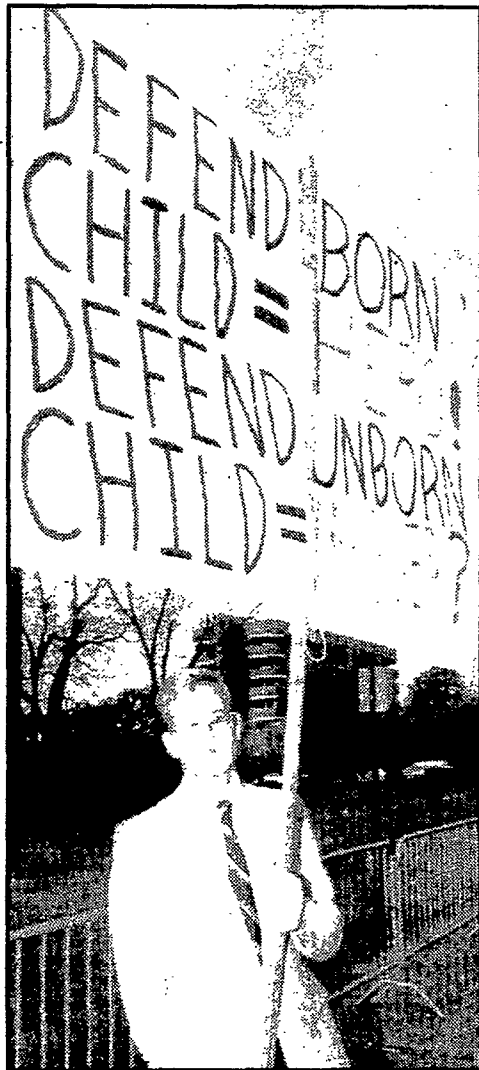
Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, said violence in the name of the pro-life movement "makes a mockery of everything we stand for."

"We are deeply saddened by the killings," said D. Michael McCarron, assistant executive director of the Florida Catholic Conference. "We condemn these killings in no uncertain terms. Such violence shows no understanding of the pro-life movement and serves no purpose in stemming the tide of abortion."

"The commandment 'Thou shalt not kill,' the basis of the pro-life movement, has been violated," he said. "We call on all people in the pro-life movement to condemn these violent acts."

Bishop John M. Smith of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee said it "defies logic and flies in the face of divine law" for anyone to take a human life in the name of the pro-life movement. "No one has the right to take the life of another human being as a solution to the issues surrounding abortion."

A statement from Father Frank A. Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, said consistency demands denunciation of both the killing of abortion providers and the killing of babies.



AP/Wide World Photos
This photo of Paul Hill, an outspoken advocate of using violence to stop abortion, was taken outside an abortion clinic Pensacola, Fla., on Feb. 23. Hill was arrested July 29 following a shooting outside the Ladies Center abortion clinic in Pensacola.

"The response to today's tragedy should not be to further protect the abortion industry, but to stop all violence, including abortion itself," he said.

American Life League president Judie Brown said Hill "is a creation of the tabloid talk-show media. He is not a

leader in the pro-life movement."

The death of anyone diminishes each person's sacred role in life, said Brown in a statement. "I pray for all those who have been affected by this tragic loss of life. We are called to convert abortionists and their accomplices, not kill them."

Beverly LaHaye, president and founder of Concerned Women for America, called the killings "barbaric vigilantism" and said "we cannot allow Paul Hill to become a symbol for the pro-life movement."

"The urgency of the pro-life message can only be advanced through prayer, education and peaceful protest," said Benedictine Father Matthew Habinger, president of Human Life International. "We cannot trade evil for evil. Just as those people had no right to kill any of the millions of unborn children who are executed in their mother's wombs every year, the person who shot them had no right to take their lives away. Adding to the body count won't make it go away."

A spokeswoman for Americans United for Life said anyone who fails the criteria of compassion and nonviolence is not pro-life.

At a Washington press conference, Myrna Gutierrez said the "real face of the pro-life movement" is found among those providing care for women, working the legislatures, lobbying Congress and battling in the courts to make abortion less a part of American life.

At the same conference, Serrin M. Foster, executive director of Feminists for Life, said life-affirming solutions to the problems facing women need to be found.

"Out of frustration, there are people who are targeting the messenger, so to speak, when it's the message that needs to be changed; the message that abortion liberates women has been wrong from the start," she said. "Just as abortion is an inequitable action taken in response to a crisis pregnancy, the shootings that have taken place cannot be justified."

The National Right to Life Committee issued a statement said it "is false and offensive to suggest, as some pro-abortion groups have done, that speaking in favor of the right to life somehow causes violence. Such a suggestion is like blaming the civil rights movement — and all those who courageously spoke in favor of the rights of African-Americans — for the riots or deaths that were a part of that era."

In Chicago, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin issued a statement saying the use of violence in the name of fighting abortion "not only defies logic, but the law of God and the teachings of the church."

The co-chairman of the House Pro-Life Caucus, Rep. Christopher H. Smith, R-N.J., called the shooting "a sickening tragedy." He also objected to news reports describing Hill as a "pro-life activist."

"No one who destroys innocent human life — through abortion or any other means — can be called pro-life. It is a contradiction in terms," Smith said.

On Aug. 1, Justice Department spokesman Carl Stern said U.S. marshals had been assigned to some abortion clinics after the shooting and a fire at a Falls Church, Va., abortion clinic the same night. The Commonwealth Women's Clinic was burned at its rear entrance by a fire late the night of July 29.

Fire inspectors said Aug. 1 the cause was still under investigation but that a device had been found which is believed to have started the blaze. The Falls Church clinic reopened the next day.

In March 1993, Dr. David Gunn was shot to death outside Pensacola's only other abortion clinic. Anti-abortion activist Michael F. Griffin was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole.

In August 1993 Dr. George Tiller was injured outside his Wichita, Kan., abortion clinic. His assailant, Rachelle Shannon, was sentenced to just under 11 years in prison.

Young man who felt 'healing' after meeting the pope dies

By Chris Albracht
Catholic News Service

AMARILLO, Texas — Frankie Rocha, 26, died July 23 after a long battle with heart disease, but for the young man from Amarillo death did not take him before his dream of meeting Pope John Paul II came true.

Last August he talked with the pope while in Denver as a delegate representing the Diocese of Amarillo at the International Youth Forum that preceded World Youth Day events.

It was his disease and the feeling he did not have long to live that made him want to see the church's leader, he had told *The West Texas Catholic*, diocesan newspaper, last year in an interview.

Mr. Rocha was attending the Mass celebrated by the pope for forum delegates at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

"I was so overcome with emotion, being only a few seats in front" of him, he said later.

Several photographers captured Mr. Rocha's emotion. The flurry of picture-taking led to Mr. Rocha telling a priest about his illness and his dream. The priest then arranged for him to go to the pope, who in the meantime was told about the young man's health.

"He told me to come to him, to give him a hug," Mr. Rocha said afterwards. "He told me that he loved me very much

and I had a special gift and that was to open hearts to the youth of the world.

"He said God was going to bless me ... He said that Jesus wanted me to suffer and to carry my cross for the rest of my life. As I touched his face I told him to forgive me ... He told me I was going to be an example to the youth all over the world."

Then came more photos. His picture with the pope, taken by Associated Press, showed up everywhere: in Denver's two daily newspapers, the *Rocky Mountain News* and *The Denver Post*; his hometown paper, *The Amarillo Globe-News*; *The New York Times*; and other papers in the United States and around the world.

The national recognition was nice but not even close to the blessing from the pope that he felt gave him new confidence in his battle with heart disease.

"Miracles can happen, not only by being healed physically, but spiritually — becoming stronger," he said at the time. "It was a blessing I received. He showed me what my gift was."

When Mr. Rocha died, he left behind his young wife, Julia Teresa Diaz, whom he married last September. Other survivors include his parents, two brothers, three sisters and his grandmothers.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated July 25 at St. Laurence Cathedral with interment in Llano Garden Mausoleum.



AP/Wide World Photos

Filling graves in Rwanda

Zairian Boy Scouts load a child's body onto a truck outside Goma, Zaire. Although thousands of Rwandan refugees are going home after Zaire reopened its border crossing, relief workers are seeing few signs that the one million starving refugees crammed into the squalid, disease-ridden camps are ready or even able to return to Rwanda en masse. An estimated 20,000 refugees have died of cholera, hunger, exhaustion and dehydration in recent days, leaving workers to fill several mass graves with corpses.