

Terry: Catholics have responsibility to defy government on abortion

WASHINGTON - If coverage of abortion is not excluded in health care reform legislation, Catholics should refuse to pay their taxes, anti-abortion activist Randall Terry said.

"Do not expect us to betray God and pay for the murder of our neighbor," said Terry, a Catholic and founder of Operation Rescue Insurrecta Nex, at the National Press Club July 21.

Pro-life activists say that unless language to specifically exclude abortion coverage is part of any reform measure taxpayers' money will fund abortions, and most insurance providers will be mandated to cover it.

Civil disobedience to protest abortion is Catholics' right, Terry said, citing Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" ("The Gospel of Life").

"Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize," the pontiff wrote in 1995. "There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection."

But representatives of Catholic groups who have voiced opposition to abortion funding being part of any proposed health reform plan told Catholic News Service the late pope's words should not be interpreted as condoning civil disobedience, and said there are ways to prevent abortion funding from being included in legislation without getting into trouble with the law.

"That line of argument can be used by every opponent of every bill by either party," said Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League of Religious and Civil Rights, of Terry's promise not to pay taxes. "It is a recipe for anarchy."

Catholics can use freedom of speech and religion to work to change a law if it passed, said a Catholic League spokeswoman, who sent CNS Donohue's statement.

Jose Garcia, executive director of Catholic War Veterans, agreed, recommending a letter-writing campaign to Congress about the issue.

“If we unite as Catholics, we have enough power to overturn decisions made by Congress,” Garcia said.

A group of six Christians who spoke with Terry at the press club event said they also would go to jail before paying taxes that fund abortion as part of health reform. They predicted the issue will divide the Catholic Church.

Terry also predicted violence from the pro-life “fringes” if abortion becomes publicly funded. He warned that people will be pushed to the breaking point and historians will hold the government accountable for it.

“There will be unthinkable, horrifying ramifications,” he said. “People will react.”

He noted he is committed to nonviolence.