

Randall Terry as pro-life face

Michael Sean Winters | May. 14, 2009 NCR Today



A majority of the bishops in the United States have made no public statement

about the University of Notre Dame's decision to invite President Barack Obama to give the commencement address on Sunday. Many, I suspect, simply feel it is not their place to comment on such an event happening outside their diocese. Others may view such protests, correctly I think, as making the church look like an adjunct of the Republican Party. But, here is something all bishops should be prepared to speak about.

Randall Terry is already flying a plane over the campus with the picture of an aborted fetus, evidently not recognizing that turning the dead child into a prop falls short of what the church teaches about human dignity. Alas, Terry will exploit anyone and anything in his crude crusade. Sunday, like it or not, he will be the face of the pro-life movement in the media. The students who are graduating after four years of effort will see their big day turned into a circus.

The bishops, at least the leadership of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, should send out one of their own to say, "We regret the protests that disrupted Notre Dame's graduation. We believe that respect for life demands respect for those with whom we disagree." It would be nice, but perhaps expecting too much, to have the bishops also acknowledge that by coming to Notre Dame the president was not courting controversy but was, instead, honoring a distinguished Catholic institution, and to thank him for the honor.

The church thinks in centuries, but media coverage fits within a 24-hour news cycle. The bishops need to have a statement ready to go. Otherwise, Terry will be the face of the pro-life movement and the bishops will have no one but themselves to blame for that fact.

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