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Don't Trust The Doctors

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 4, 2009 NCR Today

Eugene Robinson wrote some of the best commentaries on the election of President Barack Obama last year. But, this morning he addressed [1]the issue of doctors and psychologists who participated in the Bush administration?s ?enhanced interrogations.? He writes: ?Doctors and psychologists might have been able to prevent this whole shameful episode by refusing to participate. Instead, professionals who were trained in the healing arts used their experience and skill in a way that facilitated harm.?

I agree with Robinson that such participation was shameful but I do not share his sense of surprise or shock. Among the saddest reading in the annals of recent Catholic commentary are the articles by Father Robert Drinan in the late 1960s and early 1970s when state legislatures were debating whether or not to liberalize abortion laws. ?The question is no longer the possibility of a total prohibition of abortion but rather te question of weighing the long-range evil effects of permitting the government to establish standards as to who will live and who will die rather than simply having the government withdraw from the area of protecting the first twelve to twenty weeks of non-viable fetal life,? Drinan wrote in Commonweal in 1970. He preferred to put his hope in the medical profession which wad pledged itself to protect life. He did not foresee that some doctors would soon be making a livelihood performing abortions.

Catholics need to be especially concerned that a similar misplaced hope is not enacted in the health care reform pending before Congress. Leaving decisions about whether or not to provide abortion coverage cannot be left to panels of experts or doctors. The application of government funds to abortion services is a matter for our legislature to adjudicate, and the reform legislation must decide the issue. Referring the matter to panels of doctors or experts is ?too cute by half.? Last night, I saw a Rep. Jan Schakowsky argue that the legislation passed by the House would not result in federal funds going to cover abortions. She was wrong. And, we can?t afford to be fooled again. Father Drinan can be forgiven for failing to anticipate doctors participating in the destruction of human life. We have no such excuse.

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[1] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/03/AR2009090302861.html?hpid=opinionsbox1