

## Revisiting ABC abortion forum

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

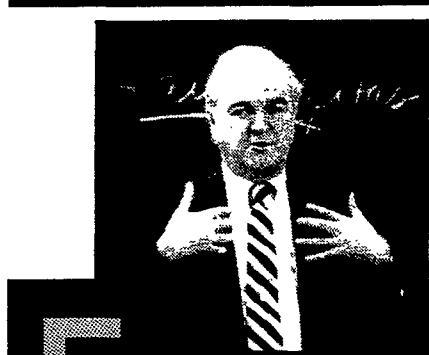
It's been just over a year since the ABC News special, "The New Civil War," a nationally televised panel discussion on abortion moderated by anchorman Peter Jennings.

I participated in that panel alongside well-known spokespeople for both sides of the abortion debate: Dr. John Willke, Judge Robert Bork, Kate Michelman, Faye Wattleton, and others.

Some pro-life activists — including many who never even saw the show — were furious with me, even though I had said three times on the program that I regarded abortion as "immoral" and even though their own right-of-center political approach to the issue was amply and vigorously represented by panelists such as Dr. Willke, Judge Bork, Republican pollster Richard Wirthlin, Olivia Gans (director of American Victims of Abortion), and the Rev. Bobby Welch, a Florida preacher.

My right-to-life critics distorted my position at the time (just as they have constantly distorted the position of Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland) and the distortions continue a year later — as recently as the October 6 issue of *Catholic Twin Circle*, an ultra-conservative weekly paper.

An article entitled, "Why Priests



### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Stay Mum on Abortion," refers to me as "the leading exponent of legalized abortion among the ranks of U.S. Catholic priests." (The author also refers to Archbishop Weakland's "ongoing equivocation on the abortion issue.") If I am a "leading exponent" of anything, it is the U.S. Catholic bishops' consistent-ethic-of-life approach, which the right-to-life lobby loathes.

The *Twin Circle* writer quotes from a portion of my remarks on last November's ABC panel discussion (he inserted the bracketed material): "I think the only way out of the (impasse) on abortion is the way that Kate Michelman (of the

National Abortion Rights League) and (New York Gov.) Mario Cuomo and others have pointed to ..."

Referring still to my remarks: "He added that Americans should stop this useless and endless debate about whether there is a baby there with a personality or whether or not it's a woman's right."

The *Twin Circle* writer's intent is obvious. He wants his readers to conclude that I embrace the agenda of the National Abortion Rights League (in fact, I have explicitly criticized it in this weekly column) and that I don't think human life is being terminated in an abortion.

As the one hour and 45-minute program came to an end, Peter Jennings asked several of the panelists if we thought we'd "still be having precisely the same conversation five years from now."

The panelist just before me expressed the hope that we wouldn't. Then Jennings asked me the question: "Father McBrien, do you think we'll be having the same debate?"

My answer in full: "I hope not, too, and I really do think that the only way out of it is not — I don't agree with Judge Bork that there's ever going to be a resolution of the argument that we've heard in this part of the circle tonight, because I think people have sincere convictions and I respect their integrity and the sincerity of their convic-

tions. I think the only way out of it is the way that Kate Michelman and Gov. Mario Cuomo and others have pointed to.

"We've got to eliminate the causes of unwanted pregnancies, and if we can work together, liberals and conservatives, religious people and non-religious people alike, to work together to eliminate the reasons why young women have- feel that they must have an abortion, they don't want to have an abortion, then we can, together, do something constructive and stop this useless and endless debate about whether there's a baby there with a personality or whether or not it's simply a woman's right."

Last January, the Jan. 28, 1991 issue of *The National Review* had similarly distorted my reference to Kate Michelman and Gov. Cuomo, using that same misleading excerpt of my remarks.

Immediately thereafter a *National Review* subscriber wrote to express his surprise and dismay. I immediately sent him a copy of the relevant portion of the transcript, with the full content and context of my remarks.

My critic recognized the distortion and, to his credit, wrote a letter of complaint to William F. Buckley, founding editor of the magazine.

Would that others were so fair-minded.

## A 700-year-old prophecy is fulfilled

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"Samuel, you have a tendency to be outspoken," the chief priest commented to his companion as they made their way through the streets of Jerusalem. "It will go well for us today if you just answer King Herod's questions as best you can."

Samuel shrugged off this advice as nonsense. "Herod is an old fool, obsessed with power. Doesn't he know that the real government rests in Rome with Emperor Caesar Augustus?"

"Nevertheless, Samuel, this king is not to be trifled with," Eli continued. "We do, after all, enjoy certain privileges under his rule. Because of King Herod, we have our temple to worship in as we please."

"We may worship God, but we pay homage to these Roman rulers," Samuel challenged. "One has to only look on any city street corner to see them lording it over us."

"Lower your voice!" Eli cautioned him sharply as they approached a Roman soldier who appeared to be observing them. "Have you lost your mind?"

For all of his boldness, Samuel stopped his conversation abruptly until they had passed the soldier.

"Eli, did you happen to notice what our friend was posting there?" Before he could answer, Samuel added, "It's a notice about a census from the emperor. No doubt we will be counted so that our rulers can burden us with more taxes."

After they had reached the entrance to King Herod's palace, neither of them said another word until they were announced and brought into the throne room.

"You have undoubtedly seen the new star that has risen in the sky," King Herod began, looking at both of them intently. "What do you make of it?"

"Your majesty, with all due respect, if you are seeking information about astronomy, then I regret my knowledge about such things is quite lacking," Samuel commented despite Eli's wary glances.

For all of his initial pretense of cordiality, King Herod glared at Samuel and snapped, "No, I have my royal astrologers for that." Then catching himself, he asked, "What if I needed information about the ancient Hebrew Scriptures? Who is more qualified than the chief priest and the best teacher of the law?"

"And so we will do our best to help you," said Eli.

"What do your Scriptures say about a Messiah?" the king ques-

tioned, looking directly at Samuel.

"It's common knowledge that a Messiah has been promised for centuries," Samuel replied. "Every prophet through the ages has repeated this prophecy made by God."

"Well, what will this Messiah do for you when he comes?" King Herod asked. "Is he to be your king?"

Before they could say anything, one of King Herod's aides entered the room followed by three men. Judging by their attire, they seemed to be of some royal distinction. Yet each one bowed graciously in deference to King Herod.

Much to Eli's relief, the king was momentarily charmed by this show of respect. "You look as though you've been traveling for some time. Please stay for a few days here in the palace as my guests."

"We appreciate your generosity, but our stay here must be brief," one of them replied.

"It's been two years since we first began pursuing his star," another one added. "We had hoped that we might find the new king here in Jerusalem."

It was all King Herod could do to check his rising emotions, but he calmly stated: "No, as you can see, I am the only king here. But, promise

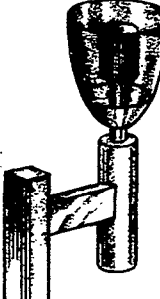


### THE BIBLE CORNER

me that you will return here after you find him. I would like to go and pay homage to this new king, too."

King Herod turned his attention back to Eli and Samuel. "What do your Scriptures say about the birthplace of a new king?"

Samuel's words were as clear as if he had been reading them directly from the scroll in the temple. "The prophet, Micah, predicted more than 700 years ago: 'O Bethlehem, you are just a small Judean village, but you will be the birthplace of my King who is alive from everlasting ages past!'" (Micah 5:2)

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