

WORLD & NATION

Prelates urge Clinton to accept abortion bill

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The seven active U.S. cardinals, in a letter to President Clinton, asked the president to sign a new bill introduced in Congress to ban the partial-birth abortion procedure.

Based on recent admissions from one chief supporter of the procedure that he had lied about the need to retain partial-birth abortions, the cardinals said in their March 7 letter, "We urge you to seize the opportunity before you to explain that you were misled, as were most Americans."

They asked Clinton to "ask Congress to pass a bill banning partial-birth abortions, and let it be known that you will sign it into law." A bill was introduced March 5 in the House to ban the procedure except when the mother's life is in danger.

The cardinals cited the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which said that partial-birth abortion "is never the only procedure that will preserve a woman's health or fertility in any situation."

"The public has learned that partial-birth abortions are performed not a few hundred times a year, but thousands of times each year," the cardinals said.

"It has learned that partial-birth abortion is used primarily in the fifth and sixth months of pregnancy, and that restrictions confined to the third trimester would therefore be inadequate. The public has also learned that the vast majority of these procedures are performed on the healthy babies of healthy women."

The cardinals also cited the remarks of "hundreds of doctors, most specialists in maternal and fetal medicine," who say that partial birth abortion "poses, not avoids, significant risks to women's health and future fertility. Clearly, any claim that partial-birth abortion must be available to protect a woman's health has no basis in fact."

The letter was to be read during Masses March 9 at the cardinals' home cathedrals.

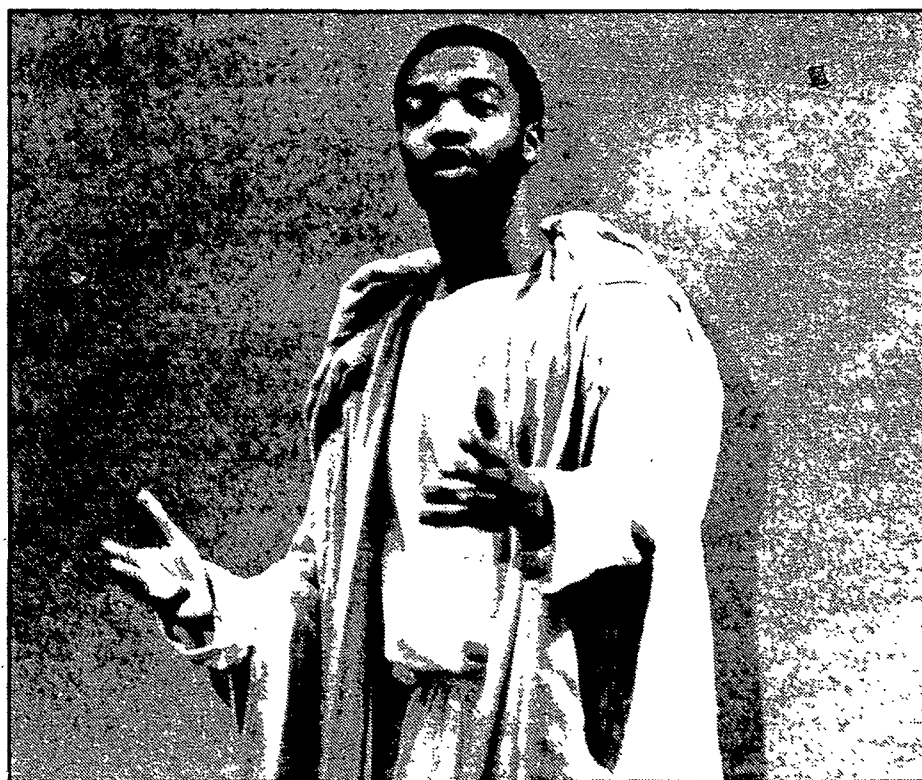
Signing the letter were Cardinals Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia, James A. Hickey of Washington, William H. Keeler of Baltimore, Bernard F. Law of Boston, Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, Adam J. Maida of Detroit, and John J. O'Connor of New York, and Bishop Anthony M. Pilla of Cleveland, president of the U.S. bishops.

At a March 7 press conference, Clinton said that he believes "it would be a mistake for us to pass this bill one more time without taking care of those folks" who believe their future fertility would be threatened if unable to procure a partial-birth abortion.

"They're the people I'm concerned about," he said, "and they're the people I'm going to try to protect right down to the end."

The cardinals said they would urge Congress to pass a partial-birth abortion ban "with sufficient votes to ensure that it will become the law of the land."

Last year's Clinton veto of the ban was overridden in the House, but failed to get the two-thirds majority required in the Senate. The bishops mounted an unprecedented effort to override the veto.



CNS/Reuter

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Kids' Answers

from page 16

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