

# COLUMNISTS

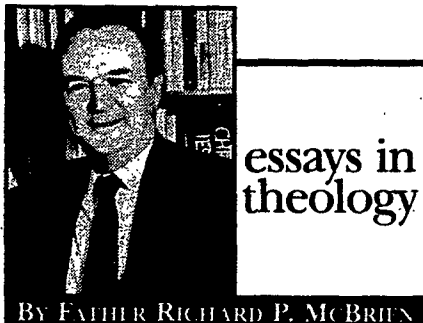
## Abortion stances block ethical considerations

President George W. Bush's nomination of former Senator John Ashcroft as U. S. attorney general and his executive order, on his third day in office, banning federal aid to overseas organizations that provide abortion services or counseling, were welcomed by Catholics who regard abortion as the defining moral and political issue of our day.

Such Catholics have opposed their own bishops' position that Catholics should vote for presidential candidates on the basis of a spectrum of life issues rather than on any single issue. In fact, one prominent columnist recently asserted in the Catholic press that the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's consistent-ethic-of-life approach was responsible for the fact that a slight majority of Catholics voted for Vice President Al Gore in the November election.

Whether abortions will continue to decline under the new president, as they did under President Bill Clinton, remains to be seen. Indeed, the election of a self-professed pro-life president does not guarantee such a happy outcome. The number of abortions actually increased during Ronald Reagan's eight-year administration.

Robin Toner's piece in *The New York Times*, "The Abortion Debate, Stuck in



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

*Time* (1/21/01), should be required reading for anyone, liberal or conservative, for whom abortion serves as the ultimate political and moral litmus test.

Reproductive science and medicine are changing almost daily, Toner reports, but the public debate over abortion remains "frozen in time."

Analysts and ethicists agree that the issue has become more complex with the use of "ever more sophisticated prenatal testing and sonography, the availability of RU-486 and 'morning after' pills, the ability to save younger and younger babies, the mapping of the genome, [and] the discovery of the vast medical potential of embryonic stem cell research."

"Things are shifting underneath," observes Dr. Arthur Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of

Pennsylvania, "but politics doesn't let you see what's going on. You're pro-life or pro-choice, that's it, thank you very much, goodbye."

The stem cell issue and the development of sonography are cases in point.

Anti-abortion groups are urging the president to abolish rules that permit federal funds to be used for research on stem cells from human embryos, even though federally funded scientists cannot destroy embryos to obtain stem cells.

Ms. Toner notes that the anti-abortion position is firm. Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee, insists that, even if existing embryos are ready to be discarded at fertility centers, research should be confined to cells obtained from adults.

Patient advocates urge the continuation of stem cell research in the hope of discovering cures for Parkinson's, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and the like. Even pro-life Senator Gordon Smith (R-Oregon) supports such research. "My pro-life beliefs," he has said, "guide me to make life better for the living as well, to relieve suffering ... , and to find cures for deadly diseases wherever possible."

Developments in sonography challenge advocates on the other side, who seem reluctant to say "an abortion" fol-

lowing "the right to choose." It has been suggested that those with sonograms of fetuses on their refrigerators are unlikely to think the same way about abortion.

The strongest advocates on either side seem oblivious to society's non-absolutist attitude toward abortion. While the overwhelming majority of Americans oppose late-term abortion, many support the right to abortion early in a pregnancy.

Abortion deemed necessary in the face of danger to a woman's health is seen as far more acceptable than one chosen for economic reasons.

The issue, however, continues to get even more complicated and ideologically scrambled. Those who support abortion when there is evidence of the impairment of the fetus are now challenged by disability rights advocates. And some ethicists are concerned that parents will eventually demand the right to select their children's traits.

In light of these developments, "pro-life" and "pro-choice" shorthand seems increasingly inadequate and even morally counter-productive.

How long it will take for this to sink in — on both sides of the debate.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## Our bodies are gifts from God

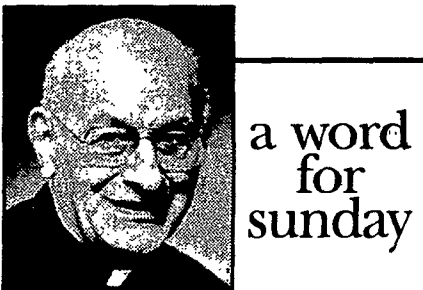
**2nd Sunday of Lent (March 11): (R3) Luke 9:28-36; (R1) Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; (R2) Philippians 3:17-4:1.**

St. Paul said there are only two kinds of people: citizens of this world and citizens of heaven.

The citizens of this world are those "whose God is their belly" — the pleasures of the flesh. "And their glory is in their shame." They live in active rebellion against the things of God. They can't have fun unless they are doing something naughty. They can't express their feelings without the use of obscenity. They flaunt the moral law without any consciousness of any wrongdoing.

Former basketball great Wilt Chamberlain boasted of 20,000 sexual conquests, showing no awareness of the possibility that his approach to sex might be perverted, that perhaps the creator has a different plan in mind for our sexual nature than a series of one-night stands.

The so-called "Playboy Philosophy" of sex is in fundamental error. Sex can only be recreational when it is relational. God intends sex as an expression of oneness between a man and a woman committed to each other until death do them part. This is not to devalue sex as a source of pleasure. Married people de-



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

rive more long-lasting satisfaction in their sex relations than unmarried people. Any other approach to sex than through marriage is misguided and wrong.

That is one kind of lifestyle, much publicized in our society. But there is another. St. Paul also speaks of our citizenship in heaven — "the citizenship of those who eagerly await the coming of our Savior ... who will remake this lowly body of ours according to the pattern of his glorified body."

Modern society puts much emphasis on the body. And why not? Our body is a gift from God, the instrument of our soul — therefore holy. But a citizen of the world has an obsession with the body.

A *Time* article about California point-

ed out that one of its trends today is obsession with the body, stating that men are having silicone implants to have chiseled pectorals, firm derrieres, bulging calves and strong chins. Such silliness will go on wherever people are only citizens of the world.

Citizens of heaven look forward to the day when their imperfect bodies will be transformed by Christ into glorious new bodies. So their lifestyle is one of faith, discipline and devotion.

Citizens of heaven hold dual citizenship. They are in the world, but not of it. They stumble and sometimes fall, but they know that there is something better for those who strive to do God's will.

There was a very wealthy young man, born with a deformity which left him with a very ugly face. One evening he left his garden to walk by the seashore. He saw a young girl playing a violin. Each night he would walk down and listen, always hiding so she would not see him.

Later, he secretly paid for her to study in Europe and master the violin. Returning home, she asked to be taken to the man who had paid for her education. In his garden, she came up behind him, threw her arms around him and cried, "I love you! I love you!"

The young man turned around and said, "How can you love me when you see ugliness in my face?" She replied, "You see, sir, I'm blind."

So it is with all who try to serve God. We may not be perfect, but if we strive to do God's will each day, then God, too, will be blind to the ugliness of our sins.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

### Daily Readings

- Monday, March 12**  
Daniel 9:4B-10; Luke 6:36-38
- Tuesday, March 13**  
Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12
- Wednesday, March 14**  
Jeremiah 18:18-20;  
Matthew 20:17-28
- Thursday, March 15**  
Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31
- Friday, March 16**  
Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13A, 17B-28;  
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46
- Saturday, March 17**  
Micah 7:14-15, 18-20;  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

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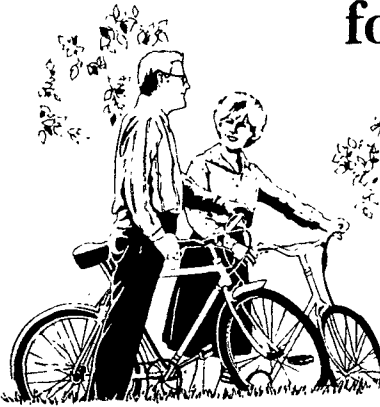


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