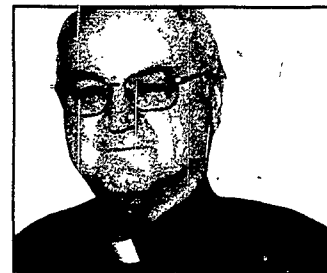


# Authors disagree on papacy's challenges



Father Richard McBrien

## Essays in Theology

revitalize the church in the developed world will be among the heavier challenges facing the next pope.

Weigel places the same issue under a narrower heading: the "collapsing Catholicism in Europe."

Neither mentions the so-called "new evangelization," which is identified with movements on the right end of the ecclesiastical spectrum, such as Opus Dei, Comunione e Liberazione and the Legion of Christ. Many Catholics regard these as ecclesially divisive rather than evangelically constructive. Will they continue to be accorded free play in the next pontificate?

Allen's third issue coincides with Weigel's, namely Islam. Some cardinals, Allen reports, think it important to reach out to moderates in the Islamic community, while the more hawkish think that the church must stand its ground and defend the rights of the church in Muslim countries, demanding reciprocity for religious freedom in the West.

Neither author cautions against the danger of anti-Semitism nor do they mention the sexual-abuse scandal, which raises fundamental questions about recruitment, seminary education, supervision of priests and obligatory celibacy.

The next pope will have to deal with this ongoing and spreading crisis.

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

The papacy, unlike the presidency of the United States, has no term limits. The only term limitation for the current pope, John Paul II, is the state of his health. He will remain pope until his death, and that event is entirely in God's hands.

The issues that will face the next pope and the conclave that will elect him do not change from year to year, even if individual commentators disagree on what those issues are and how they should be prioritized.

Two recent lists are typical. One is the work of John Allen, Vatican correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, and the other is by George Weigel, the author of a widely read biography of John Paul II, entitled *Witness to Hope*.

The first issue, according to Allen, is collegiality. A number of cardinals, he reports, are concerned that the "power of Rome in the 19th and 20th centuries over the local churches was expanded to an unprecedented degree, and that various attempts to inject balance have been largely unsuccessful."

Others, however, are less concerned about the process of recentralization of authority in the Vatican and believe that a strong papacy is essential in a world fraught with secularism, relativism and various nationalisms that threaten the unity of the church.

What Allen and his Vatican sources do not mention explicitly is the process by

who support the death penalty; to those who supported the war in Iraq; or to those who want to cut welfare and reduce Medicaid. The Pope and the bishops have properly spoken as fervently on these subjects as on the subject of abortion. The utter hypocrisy of this double standard is totally outrageous!

I will absent myself from the Eucharist when the supporters of the death penalty and the war in Iraq absent themselves from the Eucharist.

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## We should choose to protect life

To the editor:

For many Catholics, to abort or not to abort is part of a "woman's right to choose." As voters we can and do choose. We choose candidates as to whether they are strong on defense, or will grant the poor affordable housing, or are better for the environment. Whether they support abortion or not, however, trumps all of these choices.

Abortion outweighs everything else because it is a primordial evil, a mortal sin. When you choose it, you choose spiritual death, until you repent in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Furthermore, every future law chosen by your candidate which results in abortions will be with your formal compliance. Think about cloning, fetal experimentation, not to forget partial-birth abortion. Being pro-life, by contrast, is a non-negotiable trust.

Nor is this solely a Party matter. The Democrat Party platform totally supports abortion, but there are members of the Republican Party who are as virulently pro-abortion.

So let us choose by all means, but let us choose for that which we were created, namely, to increase life, not to be executioners. The future of this country hinges on your choice.

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according to the teachings of Jesus Christ? When a segment of the church leadership does not actively condemn the actions of abortion, by allowing each bishop to selectively decide whether to give Communion to a person who publicly condones abortion, is not the leadership relinquishing their responsibility and sending the wrong message to their flock?

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## Don't make Communion political tool

To the editor:

I am a product of 17 years of Catholic education; a lecturer and Trustee of my parish; a regular monetary contributor to church activities and enterprises; and a member of the Board of Trustees of a Catholic educational facility. I believe, with Catholic bishops and the Pope, that abortion is wrong and immoral as are capital punishment, the war in Iraq, and the failure to adequately feed, house and provide health care to the poorest members of our community.

However, just as my parents raised me in the Catholic Church, they also raised me in the Democratic Party and I am equally proud to call myself a politician.

I can no longer remain silent as elements in the Church seek to turn the Body and Blood of Christ into a political pawn for the benefit of certain Republican politicians.

I support the right of a woman to choose abortion. On this highly emotional and divisive issue, I believe, while personally having strong anti-abortion beliefs, that a woman should have the right to choose what is morally and physically right for her. I do not feel divinely empowered to make that choice for her!

What really appalls me is that while some want to deny the Eucharist to me — or even excommunicate me — there is no similar cry to deny the Eucharist to those

## Letters Policy

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Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

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