

Columnists

Recollecting with 'young' Pat

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

In 1955, young Pat Resen was a little boy who served Mass when I was chaplain at Biggs Air Force Base, El Paso, Texas. He was the only son of Capt. and Mrs. Jack Resen. His mother, Ellen, was equally enthusiastic about her Catholic faith and her Irish heritage. Capt. Resen was a convert, and also active in the base's church activities.

I have always remembered young Pat. He was bright-eyed, eager, inquisitive, dependable — and quick to be of service. After I left the Air Force in 1956, I kept in touch with many military friends through a fine Christmas folder which included a beautiful Christmas front page, a short autobiography, some inspirational articles, a bit of humor — and usually a recommendation of certain books and the (Archbishop Fulton J.) Sheen tapes.

Many years ago, Ellen had written that young Pat had tested the seminary and decided that was not his vocation. He went to law school, and my little Pat became six feet two inches tall. Recently, a letter came from him in California that thrills my soul.

Dear Father Cuddy,

"My parents have often forwarded to me your Christmas bulletin-letter-card which I have always enjoyed. Since you ask, 'What of young Pat?' I can tell you that he is not so young anymore — to be 43 this year.

Busy with my practice (mostly family law — or rather anti-family law, and with a bit of military law) and have built a practice after these many years which is gratifyingly successful. I enjoy the heavy emphasis on personal contact in my practice and the satisfaction of helping people during a difficult time (even if they don't always appreciate it)."

Comment: Letters and written articles have long been a keen apostolate for me. Note how the nice Christmas bulletin to his parents was

Democrats and the pro-choice line

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Joseph A. Califano Jr. served as President Lyndon Johnson's assistant for domestic affairs from 1965 to 1969, and as President Jimmy Carter's secretary of health, education and welfare from 1977 to 1979. Currently the senior partner in a prestigious Washington law firm, Califano is one of the nation's most prominent Democrats.

His article, "Tough Talk for Democrats" in the January 8 issue of *The New York Times Magazine* deserves a wide and careful reading by his fellow Democrats.

Califano's thesis is that the Democrats have been losing most of the recent presidential elections because a decisive majority of American voters have lost confidence in the Democrats' ability to govern from the White House. He does not counsel the party to abandon or even temper its commitment to social and economic justice, but to do something about the widespread perception among white Americans that the Democrats are the party of blacks and special interests, are soft on crime and naive about defense.

He spells this out clearly and convincingly, and with commendable balance. His is no sounding of a retreat to neo-conservatism. On the contrary, Califano insists that government still has "a sacred obligation to help the vulnerable."

Its abiding agenda includes the stamping out of racism and the ending of discrimination, the providing of shelter for the homeless and health care to the uninsured, attending to the elderly with dignity, offering quality education to children and job training to the millions "trapped in the pincers of industrial restructuring," helping to balance "the fearful disparity between rich and poor among our people and among the world's nations," and leading "a monumental crusade against the addictive drugs that threaten our society."

But the Democrats will never get the chance to work on such an agenda from the White House if they continue to avoid open debate on "dicey issues like busing, affirmative action, crime, the use of military force."

Under the present system, Califano complains, candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination have to pass liberal "litmus tests" to win in the primaries. One of those tests, which, unfortunately, he mentions only once in an otherwise comprehensive article, has to do with abortion.

A Democrat who would be president, he points out, "has had to be pro-choice and support federal funding of abortion" even though Jimmy Carter, the only recent Democratic winner, was pro-life and opposed such funding.

On the Right side

shared with such good results. And note his happiness in being of assistance.

"Recently, I read Karl Keating's *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*. Liked it so much I have bought six more copies as gifts for friends."

Comment: The book *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, published by Ignatius Press, was recommended in the Christmas folder. It is a good book, explaining the Catholic faith to fundamentalists who attack the church with such vehemence. Jimmy Swaggart is such. But it is not an easy book to read. And the fact that young Pat Resen bought it, read it, and bought six copies for friends indicates that he is a strong Catholic, has an intellectual bent which is so necessary in sophisticated circles, and since he bought six copies for friends, that he has the apostolic spirit.

"Your note re Miss Elder struck home. A couple of years ago I began recollecting on several teachers who had a particular impact on me, and I contacted them. One was Sister Ann Vincent, SL, who taught me in the sixth grade in El Paso. Unfortunately she was suffering from Alzheimer's and could not communicate. Also contacted Father Henere, SJ, who (attempted) to teach me Latin in the Jesuit school in El Paso. It led to a fine reunion when he was out visiting relatives in Oakland. If only I had contacted Sister Ann sooner!"

Comment: The note re Miss Elder was the preface to a series of suggestions of things to do, entitled: "Do it Now! There is Danger in Delay!" It is a charity to tell others of the good they have done. It gives courage, so needed today.

Essays in Theology

The abortion issue, I would suggest, is as significant a factor in Democratic defeats in recent presidential elections as are the issues of race, special interests, crime, taxes, and national defense. Accordingly, the Democrats had better get their political act together soon if they are to have any realistic hope of stopping the hemorrhage of Catholic voters from their ranks every four years.

The Democrats must address the abortion issue head-on and face down the liberal lobby that demands a ritual pro-choice line from every candidate for national office. Given the extraordinary advances in medical technology, the problem is likely to get worse rather than better.

On Christmas day, for example, *The New York Times* published a front-page story on a major change in medical attitudes and practice. Many doctors are now providing pre-natal diagnoses to pregnant women who want to abort a fetus on the basis of sex alone. In typical cases, women from ethnic groups that favor male offspring want to abort a female fetus and try again for a male. A woman who always wanted a daughter chooses to abort a male fetus.

"Doctors say only very rarely is there a medical reason to determine a fetus's sex," the *Times* reported. But even doctors who will not provide this service themselves will often tell women where to go to get it.

Many geneticists are disturbed by this trend. "What we are talking about," one of them told the *Times*, "is a collision course, which pits a patient's autonomy and the right to do what she wants with her own body against the broader issue of social responsibility."

On the other side, one Detroit obstetrician saw no ethical problem whatever. "I think that abortion should be available on demand," he said.

A professor of medicine at the University of California in San Francisco conceded that "it is very hard to make a moral argument about terminations for sex when you can have abortions for any reason."

If, in the face of such outrageous abuses as abortion-for-sex-selection, Democratic candidates for the presidency simply repeat the line that "It's the woman... who has to make that judgment" (Governor Dukakis, St. Louis, July 24, 1988), Democratic losses will continue.

The Democrats should listen to Joe Califano.



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