

# Democrats' 'New Covenant' a mixed blessing

By Patricia Zapor  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The Democratic Party ended its national convention in New York City July 16 with an unusual degree of unity and a call from its Jesuit-educated, Southern Baptist nominee for family values and a "New Covenant."

In accepting the presidential nomination, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton — a graduate of Jesuit-run Georgetown University — quoted Scripture and credited his family with shaping his ideals. U.S. Sen. Albert Gore of Tennessee, the vice-presidential nominee, spoke about how his perspective changed when his son, then 6, was nearly killed when a car hit him.

The platform Democrats approved during their July 13-16 convention had a mixed message for those who look at political issues from a Catholic viewpoint.

The party's "New Covenant" theme emphasizes increased cooperation among individuals, business, communities and government. It advocates tax breaks for families and the middle class, stresses workers' rights — including prohibiting employers from hiring permanent replacements for strikers — and family and medical leave.

The platform also proposes full funding for Head Start, expanding apprenticeship programs, and providing college loans for everyone willing to pay them back either as a percentage of income or through national service.

But the Democrats' platform also calls for government funding of contraceptives and abortion, and supports a national law guaranteeing the right to abortion.

In addition, it explicitly opposes the Bush administration's education proposal, which would make funds available to parents who may choose to spend the money on public or private schools.

Many Catholic delegates found accepting the party's support for abortion rights to be the toughest part of their role at the convention. While several Catholics interviewed by Catholic News Service on the convention floor said they support the party platform's support of legal abortion, others see it as a trade-off for the Democrats' social agenda.

Carol Cycmanick of St. Charles Parish in Orlando, Fla., falls somewhere in the middle.

A longtime party activist, Cycmanick said she sees a direct correlation between the Gospel call to service and her work in politics.

"God said to take care of the world and to take care of people," said Cycmanick, the principal of a private elementary school. "I feel the qualities Jesus demonstrated are the qualities of the Democrats. I never understood



AP/Wide World Photos

Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton (right) and running mate Al Gore raise arms at the end of the Democratic National Convention Thursday.

how any Catholic could be a Republican."

The vice chairwoman of the Florida delegation, Cycmanick is uncomfortable when the subject of abortion comes up, particularly in a discussion about religion. She supports the party in advocating that abortion be kept legal, but said she personally keeps a low profile on the topic.

Cycmanick closely links the subject of the church's opposition to abortion linked with such other life issues as the death penalty and war.

The death penalty was never officially an issue at the convention; it was not mentioned in the party platform, and a contingent led by Ohio delegate Robert Fitrakis was unsuccessful in its efforts to force the Democratic National Committee to permit debate on the convention floor on the topic.

Fitrakis, a delegate for former California Gov. Jerry Brown, charged during a July 13 press conference that the DNC stifled attempts to hold a discussion of the death penalty. Fitrakis said the effort to discuss the death penalty occurred as part of negotiations to give Clinton, who supports capital punishment, a convention unruffled by any intra-party dissent.

Abortion also remained largely outside the convention's doors, since Clinton, Gore and the party platform all expressed opposition to restrictions on abortion.

Ann Maloney, a philosophy professor at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn., came to the convention as a delegate uncommitted to any candidate but determined to protest her party's support for abortion.

"The Democratic Party traditionally has been the party of the powerless," she said at a July 14 press conference sponsored by the National Right to Life Political Action Committee. "But in

supporting abortion, it has forgotten the most powerless, the unborn."

Carol Long, director of the National Right to Life Political Action Committee, read a statement charging that Clinton and Gore were among the many Democratic leaders who once opposed abortion but "flip-flopped" under pressure.

One outspoken Democratic opponent of the platform's abortion plank was conspicuously absent from the official proceedings.

Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey not only was denied an opportunity to bring his opposition to abortion to the podium, but his efforts to attract publicity to his troubles also drew little attention.

Anti-abortion protests were low-key

during the convention, and drew few arrests. Four years ago, Operation Rescue blockades became a significant secondary story at the Democratic convention in Atlanta.

Fearing a repeat, New York Attorney General Robert Abrams successfully petitioned for an injunction.

On July 14 three abortion opponents were arrested after they, under the guise of seeking an autograph, pushed a container holding a 19-week-old fetus at Clinton. Operation Rescue took credit for the action.

The three were charged with health-code violations: transporting a fetus into New York, removal of human remains from the place of death, and improper disposal of a fetus. They were given summonses and released.

Also outside the convention, a Catholic agency working on behalf of young people appealed to the Democrats to formulate a "national youth policy."

"In all the talk about family values, who will put their money where their mouth is?" Sister Mary Rose McGeady, president of the Covenant House ministry to runaway and homeless youth, asked during a conference the day before the Democratic convention opened.

"I have not heard any discussion of what I believe should be a major concern — namely the devastating problems facing millions of youth," said Sister McGeady, a member of the Daughters of Charity.

In other convention news, a man claiming to be a Dominican priest attracted media attention by setting up what he called a "Portofess" to hear confessions. The bogus priest disappeared after news of the hoax surfaced.

Contributing to this story was Tracy Early in New York.

## Visionaries stress prayer, fasts as means to end war

MEDJUGORJE, Bosnia-Herzegovina (CNS) — Two of the youths claiming to receive regular messages from the Blessed Virgin in Medjugorje said the best way to end the war in their country was foretold when the reported apparitions began 11 years ago.

In separate meetings with 17 American pilgrims, Vicka Ivankovic and Ivan Dragicevic said "prayer and fasting," conversion of individuals and families — not military intervention — could end the year-old conflict between Serbia and allied Croatian and Muslims forces.

"The first message was to pray for peace," Ivankovic said as automatic weapon fire crackled in the distance outside her home.

She said the second vision, also in

1981, included a call to prayer and fasting to prevent war.

At the time, all was peaceful in the region, and the young visionaries thought the war would be elsewhere, she said.

"Our Lady has never mentioned (military) intervention by anyone," she added. "Pray for peace in your heart, in your families. When you get that peace, we'll have peace in the world."

Dragicevic echoed the message, telling the group, "It's very important in all the world that first you have peace in your families."

Everything, we have to accept — even this," he added. "But Medjugorje is not only here. Medjugorje is in all the world, the messages are in all the world. Our task is to pray."

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