

CATHOLICS DECIDE THE ELECTION

For the past few decades, Catholics have decided who wins elections nationally. After the McGovernization of the Democratic Party in 1972, Catholics were left homeless: they felt betrayed by the Democrats and were leery of the Republicans; they have been up for grabs ever since. On election night in November, they proved once again that of the three major religions in the U.S., they are the ones that count most: Protestants never abandon the Republicans, and Jews never abandon the Democrats.

Catholics voted 58-40 for the Republican candidates. This was a dramatic 20-point swing from two years ago. What caused Catholics to bolt is not clear, but there is one issue that surely played a major role: the out-of-control debt. Practicing Catholics (the others should not be counted as Catholics for polling purposes) understand the virtue of self-denial, and by extension, they value belt tightening at home. What they don't appreciate is promiscuity, be it sexual, fiscal or otherwise.

Michael Sean Winters, a liberal Catholic writer, bemoaned what happened, saying that the Democratic loss meant, "Anti-poverty efforts are off the table." This is cause for celebration: the anti-poverty efforts of the Obama administration have resulted in a poverty rate of 14.3 percent, the highest national rate since 1994. If a jobs-centered economic plan is adopted, the poverty rate will likely decline.

One of the most startling statistics to come out of the election was noted by Catholic activist Deal Hudson. Recall that it was Rep. Bart Stupak, a Catholic Democrat and self-described pro-life congressman, who decided at the last minute to switch sides and vote for the health care bill, knowing that it contained pro-abortion provisions. He decided not to run for reelection, but others who followed his lead—Catholic Democrats considered to be pro-life and then voted for the bill—tried to win another term. But many failed.

Seven House members of the Stupak coalition went down in defeat: Steve Driehaus, Kathy Dahlkemper, Charlie Wilson, Chris Carney, Paul Kanjorski, Baron Hill and Brad Ellsworth. In all, over 17 pro-life Catholics will be added to the Congress, while roughly 26 pro-abortion Catholics will be

departing.

"Perhaps the biggest news of all for Catholics on election night," says Hudson, "was the emergence of a pro-life Catholic Speaker of the House, Cong. John Boehner to replace Nancy Pelosi, a pro-abortion Catholic." He's right. Pelosi had to be summoned to the office of her local Ordinary, while Boehner is proudly pro-life and in good standing in the Church. Leadership matters, so this is an important change.

None of this is to say that practicing Catholics have nothing to worry about. The Department of Health and Human Services is considering a proposal by the ACLU that would force Catholic hospitals to perform so-called emergency abortions or lose federal funding. The bishops, of course, would close the hospitals before ever doing this. Nonetheless, the fact that the Obama administration is even considering such punitive action is troubling enough.