

DEMOCRATS HAVE A CATHOLIC PROBLEM

Heath Mello has divided the Democratic Party. This is unusual given his low profile: he is running for mayor of Omaha, Nebraska. What makes him controversial among Democrats are his pro-life convictions.

Senator Bernie Sanders, an Independent, has taken the high road, prudently saying that although he favors abortion rights, there should be room for Mello in the Democratic Party. Tom Perez, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, disagrees—there is no room for people like him.

Perez speaks for the base of the Party. The Daily Kos initially endorsed Mello, but pulled its support once it learned that his idea of human rights begins when humans are conceived. NARAL Pro-Choice America, the extreme pro-abortion organization, sided with Perez, calling Sanders' support for Mello "politically stupid."

Is it okay to hold "personal beliefs" against abortion and be a Democrat? Perez says it is, just so long as those beliefs are not voiced. "If they try to legislate or govern that way," he declared, "we will take them on." In other words, keep your pro-life ideas to yourself or else.

So whatever happened to those grand ideas about diversity and inclusion? Perez just blew them up. Where does this leave Catholics?

It's been a long time since Catholics have been welcomed in the Democratic Party. Geoffrey Layman of Columbia University cites 1972 as the pivotal year when secularists took command. So do Louis Bolce and Gerald De Maio of Baruch College. That was the year Catholics were effectively driven out of command positions in the Party.

After Senator Hubert Humphrey lost to Richard Nixon in 1968, the McGovern Commission was established to reform the way presidential candidates were chosen. "Catholics had made up about one in four Humphrey votes in 1968," observes author Mark Stricherz, "yet they received only one in fourteen slots on the commission in 1969." When the voters went to the polls in 1972, secular Americans chose the Democrats by a margin of 3-1.

Fast forward two decades to 1992. According to Layman, "The Democratic Party now appears to be a party whose core of support comes from secularists, Jews, and the less committed members of the major religious traditions." Similarly, Bolce and De Maio said, "60 percent of first-time white delegates at the [1992] Democratic convention in New York City either claimed no attachment to religion or displayed the minimal attachment by attending worship services 'a few times a year' or less."

Why did this happen? Mike McCurry, former press secretary to President Bill Clinton, explained it this way: "Because we want to be politically correct, in particular being sensitive to Jews, that's taken the party to a direction where faith language is soft and opaque."

Now the "faith language" is just about gone. In the 2016 Democratic Party Platform, there are 14 sentences on specific rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People, and two vague sentences on "respecting faith" at home. Though LGBT rights are nowhere mentioned in the Bill of Rights, and the First Amendment protects religious liberty, the Platform warns against "the misuse of religion to discriminate" against LGBT persons. Religious rights are not mentioned at all, save for a line condemning ISIS.

Mello and Perez are equally Catholic, though not all Catholics are equal. The Democrats need to decide if there is room in their increasingly shrinking tent to house practicing

Catholics, the ones most likely to see abortion as
“intrinsically evil.”