

# WHY KAMALA STIFFED AL SMITH DINNER

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When Kamala Harris decided to stiff New York Archbishop Timothy Cardinal Dolan and skip the Al Smith Dinner on Oct. 17, she became the first presidential candidate to do so since Walter Mondale in 1984. As Cardinal Dolan pointed out, he lost every state but one. (New York Archbishop John Cardinal O'Connor did not extend an invitation to either candidate in 1996 and that is because he could not bring himself to invite Bill Clinton; he had just vetoed a ban on partial-birth abortion.)

The Al Smith Dinner, named after the first Catholic to run for president in 1928, is well attended by elites from government, the media, business and the entertainment industry. It is an opportunity to showcase one's policies and persona. This may explain why Harris took a pass.

Neither Harris nor Trump is Catholic, but that doesn't matter as much as their policies. They differ tremendously on abortion, school choice and religious liberty, and many other issues of importance to Catholics.

Harris is a rabid proponent of abortion-on-demand, and even agrees that babies born alive as a result of a botched abortion need not be attended to by medical personnel.

When it comes to religious liberty, Harris is a co-sponsor of the Equality Act and the sponsor of the Do No Harm Act. Both would exempt the bill's provisions from the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the most consequential religious-liberty

legislation ever adopted.

It would have been uncomfortable for Harris, and, quite frankly, for many others, had she attended. She has a lot in common with dissident Catholics (to the extent they can realistically be called Catholic), but not with practicing Catholics.

There is another reason why it would have been awkward for Harris to attend the dinner. The event is known for allowing the candidates to “roast” each other. This is right up Trump’s alley—he is lightning fast and loves to roast his foes on a regular basis. But for Harris, this kind of setting would have been a disaster.

Harris was raised in a confused religious household. Her father was a Christian and her mother was Hindu. She attended a Baptist church but she says very little about her religious upbringing. Nor does she say much about her faith today.

The Religion News Service, a secular-leaning media outlet, says two things about her religious status. She likes to talk about the Good Samaritan and she likes to invoke liberation theology.

What does the Good Samaritan New Testament verse mean to Harris? It means helping our neighbor. Fine. But her comments are so pedestrian as to be childlike in their innocence. “Neighbor is not about having the same ZIP code. What we learn from that parable is that neighbor is someone you are walking by on the street.” That is certainly a novel interpretation.

Religion News Service tried to help her by offering a sanitized understanding of liberation theology, saying it is a “strain of Christian thought that emphasizes social concern for the poor and political liberation of oppressed peoples.” Not really. It is a Marxist-driven ideology with a Christian veneer, just the kind of “theology” that secularists are okay with.

To be sure, Harris is not that different from the man she serves. While the media call Joe Biden a “devout Catholic,” a survey by Pew Research Center found that only 13 percent of Americans think he is “very religious.”

Her running mate, Tim Walz, is no better. His parents were nominally Catholic and he bolted the Catholic Church long ago to join the most liberal mainline Lutheran denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He wanted nothing to do with the more orthodox Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. During the debate with JD Vance, he admitted, “I don’t talk about my faith a lot,” which is certifiably true. He then quoted a passage from the Bible.

The religion problem is deeper than the candidates. The Democratic Party has been thoroughly secularized for some time.

In 2012, the Democrats deleted the word “God” from their Platform (they had to restore it after a pushback). Four years later, the 2016 Democratic Party Platform had 14 sentences on specific rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People, and two vague sentences on “respecting faith” at home.

The only time the 2024 Platform mentions God is in a throwaway reference speaking about the need for all of us to “live up to their God-given potential.” That’s it. Though it does make mention of Jews and Muslims, it makes no mention of Christians or Catholics. It’s as though we don’t exist.

People of faith don’t even merit their own section on religious liberty.

Instead, there is a small section on “Combating Hate & Protecting Freedom of Religion.” It condemns anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, but says not a word about all the violence directed at Christian churches and crisis pregnancy centers. Nor does it comment on attempts to stifle Christian speech or punishing Christian foster parents.

Harris had a chance to reach out to Catholics at the Al Smith Dinner. She chose not to.