



Republican presidential nominee and former U.S. President Donald Trump gestures to the crowd at the conclusion of his final campaign rally on Election Day, Nov. 5, at Van Andel Arena in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Trump garnered the 270 electoral votes needed to clinch the presidency. (OSV News/Reuters/Brian Snyder)



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After Donald J. Trump's improbable election victory in November 2016, there was a lot of shock, dismay, confusion and denial about how someone so crude and disrespectful, so comfortable with expressing overtly racist and misogynist sentiments — not to mention being so unqualified for the office — could have won the presidency. Many in the professional pundit class and the ordinary coworker or neighbor alike were moved to handwringing proclamations like, "This is not who we are" or "This is not the America I know."

Admittedly, the majority of the shock came from white self-identified progressive voters. Those who have been historically disenfranchised and marginalized were [less surprised](#) that millions of Americans resonated with Trump's message, style and proposed agenda. This disparity in reaction was captured well in NBC's "Saturday Night Live" sketch titled "[Election Night](#)," which aired days after the 2016 election.

The scene opens at a watch party where the majority of attendees are as white as they are jubilant with the conclusion that the United States is about to elect its first woman president. As the night goes on and election returns show a very different picture than they had expected, the white guests move through the stages of grief and struggle to make sense of what they see unfolding.

All the while, the lone Black man at the party, played by comedian Dave Chappelle, quietly conveys that he is not at all surprised, for this country has always been more racist and sexist than his white fellow partygoers wanted to believe. When surprise guest Chris Rock shows up to the party late, he joins Chappelle's character in affirming that what the well-meaning white people were refusing to accept: This country's history tells a different, more complex, more unflattering story about what this country has been, what it is today and where it could be going.

But this is no longer 2016. No one should be surprised by Trump's win last week. According to the polls, it was always going to be a very close race that could have gone either way; but in the end, the majority of Americans voted in Trump's favor.

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I admit that I am disappointed and saddened by the outcome, but I am not shocked. With Trump's decisive Electoral College win (including all seven of the so-called "battleground" states) and his being [poised to likely also win the popular vote](#), what this election reveals in no uncertain terms is a snapshot of what America actually is without the gloss of false narratives, revisionist histories or tall tales of global exceptionalism.

America's true origins begin with European colonial expansion that led to widespread indigenous genocide and was thereafter funded by a reprehensible system of chattel slavery. It continually subordinated women for centuries by denying the right to vote and other civil liberties, and reinforced a society shaped by white supremacy through Jim Crow, xenophobic and anti-immigrant laws.

There has been a lot of talk in recent years about the increased civil and ecclesial polarization in this country, which is certainly true. But many of the underlying factors that have surfaced with new nastiness during the last decade have been present, often roiling under the surface of some semblance of social decorum. Over the years, Trump's rhetoric, behavior and policy agendas provided a permission structure for this already always present reality to rear its ugly head among the public. Although it emerged with new vigor from the shadows, there's nothing new about it.

Despite the best efforts of some to claim that each of Trump's or his followers' actions were just "exceptions to the rule," this election cycle has put any such shallow hopes to rest. I am reminded of the [famous line](#) from civil rights activist H. Rap Brown (now known as Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin) in 1969, who said that "violence is as American as cherry pie." And as [Maya Angleou has wisely said](#), "when someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

We are long overdue to believe America when it shows us who or what it is.



The sun sets on the U.S. Capitol building as seen from the Capitol Reflecting Pool in Washington on Nov. 6, the day after Republican President-elect Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States. (OSV News/Reuters/Leah Millis)

It is a country in which growing income inequality is ignored or dismissed as the wealthiest class continues to grow in wealth and power.

It is a country that jealously protects the interests and comforts of white supremacy, while minimizing or erasing the persistent reality of systemic racism and xenophobia.

It is a country that would prefer to have a twice impeached, septuagenarian, convicted felon, who lost the last election and has never accepted that reality, who incited violence at the nation's Capitol after that loss, and who verbally attacks the most vulnerable in society and scapegoats struggling migrants and refugees, [serve in the highest office in the land rather](#) than elect a qualified woman of color who happens to be the sitting vice president of the United States.

It is a country that collectively refuses to accept the hard truths of its past and present, to reckon with the complicity of many people and has increasingly sought to enact laws to ban books or curriculum that would educate future generations about these facts.

This is what America is today. Trump's election has made that clear and, perhaps finally, impossible to deny.

But we are not condemned to stay this way forever. We can change, but like the saying goes in recovery communities, we have to want to change first.

This is where the Christian tradition can offer some wisdom and guidance.

Christian discipleship is predicated on the belief that authentic conversion is indeed possible, that who we are in a given moment is not who we are condemned to be for all time. Called by Jesus Christ to live in a manner reflecting God's original intention for a human community marked by peace and justice, which is expressed in Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God.

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Those who dare to call themselves Christians embark on a lifelong journey of metanoia, which is the Greek word describing the transformation of heart, mind and life to become more Christlike. Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection reveal to us not only who God is but also who we are called to be and who we are called to be in community looks very, very different from what America is today.

In the coming days, weeks, months and years, there will be a lot of important work to do, especially as it relates to protecting and caring for the most vulnerable in our society. But this is also a time of introspection, examination of conscience and discernment of the spirit on both the individual and collective levels.

This is a time when we must decide whether the picture of America that we see reflected to us in the mirror of Trump's victory is what we want to be, or if we want to embrace the difficult but grace-filled work of ongoing conversion. If we choose the latter, we should remember that Christian metanoia is never easy, but that we also

never go at it alone.

And if we embrace the path of conversion toward a more peaceable society, one that strives to resemble the breaking of the reign of God, only then might we be in a position to denounce the Trump-like vision of America as "not who we are." We have a lot of work to do in the meantime.