



U.S. President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort is seen in Palm Beach, Fla., Feb. 8, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Marco Bello)



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I guess my invitation got lost in the mail. How else to explain why I was not at the "Catholic Prayer for America" [gala](#) at Mar-a-Lago last week?

The event was sponsored by the group Catholics for Catholics. According to its website, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who was President Donald Trump's National Security Adviser for less than a month in 2017, is a "senior advisor" to the group. Flynn resigned after he [got caught lying](#) to Vice President Mike Pence and others about his discussions with Russian officials.

Flynn was in attendance at the gala, but he wasn't the star. That would be Bishop Joseph Strickland, formerly the bishop of Tyler, Texas. Strickland [was removed](#) from the pastoral governance of his diocese in 2023, 10 years shy of his 75th birthday, the age at which most bishops retire.

The diocese was poorly managed and Strickland's [comments](#) about Pope Francis and the Second Vatican Council became increasingly unhinged. His posts on X continue to traffic in schismatic ideas, such as this endorsement of an article speculating about the election of a "public heretic" as pope.

Strickland is not formally in schism, like his friend, disgraced former nuncio Carlo Maria Viganò who was [excommunicated](#) because of his schismatic attacks on the pope, his brother bishops and Vatican II. But he walks right up to the line.

At the Mar-a-Lago, Strickland led the room in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Trump was not present. Would he have been jealous? Maybe Trump would suggest that people kneel when he walks into the room too?

John-Henry Westen, the editor of LifeSiteNews, was in black tie for the gala. He posted photos and told a reporter for his website: "It was a wonderful evening which brought 100 priests to the house of the President in a historic gathering of prayer led by Bishop Joseph Strickland." Westen complained that "the Florida bishops forbade their priests from attending the event" but Catholics for Catholics [thanked](#) Palm Beach Bishop Gerald Barbarito on X for "his support." Cardinal Christophe Pierre: Call your office! If Barbarito really "supported" this ghastly profanation of the faith for crass politics, it is time to accept his resignation which was submitted earlier this

year when he turned 75.

Ours is a big church. As I have written many times, if anyone believes that Christ cannot come to dwell in a conservative heart, or in a liberal heart, that person misunderstands the meaning of the word "catholic." I go to Mass with people who voted for Kamala Harris and people who voted for Donald Trump. That is as it should be.

Ours is a church that can and should engage the public square, including the realm of politics. Francis and Catholics for Catholics agree that the church should not be confined to the sacristy, but should influence the realms of culture, society and politics. "Christian nationalism," which has become a derisive, default slur hurled by some on the left, is not the problem. Archbishop Borys Gudziak's [call](#) for Americans to not be silent is an expression of Christian nationalism, as were many of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s [speeches and sermons](#).

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What was worrisome about the gala at Mar-a-Lago was that there was no mediation of the church's teachings, or even of its symbols and sacraments. Apart from mystics, the mediation of grace was one of the central issues at the time of the Reformation, and we Catholics took a position that was not, and is not, ambiguous: Grace is mediated through the church.

The Second Vatican Council was clear that the church's teachings are mediated through conscience and natural law. Going to the private home of the president, who is not Catholic, having Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in his ballroom, engaging in the kind of sycophancy that is required in Trumpland, the fervency of the devotion to the president set against the schismatic nastiness directed at Francis, all these evidence a very un-Catholic approach to the relationship of the sacred and the profane.

For most Catholics, the kingdom of God is something to which we hope to gain admittance by God's mercy and the grace the church confers on us in the sacraments. These alt-right folks may shout "Viva Christo Rey!" but they act like they have found their king and Mar-a-Lago is his kingdom. That is the problem. Their eschaton has collapsed and while all collapsed eschatons betray the Gospel,

collapsing the Gospel into Trumpism is uniquely repellant.

What happened at Mar-a-Lago on March 19 was not patriotic and it wasn't Catholic. It was idolatrous and it was appalling.