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by NCR Staff

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Following are NCR reader responses to recent news articles, opinion columns and theological essays with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

The '60's to now

I very much appreciate Sr. Joan's essay about the state of our politics this year as opposed to earlier times (ncronline.org, [May 23, 2024](#)). However, I am a contemporary of Sr. Joan since I was an undergraduate in the 1960s. Today's

political environment , in my view, is more toxic. Although our society seemed to be falling apart in the 1960's with assassinations, riots, the war in Vietnam and our government's lies about the conduct of that war, we have a more subtle, and poisonous, brew to deal with today.

During the time when Sr. Joan was teaching history and I was in college our population, I believe, felt at least some trust in our institutions. Our politicians, although not agreeing on all issues, at least were courteous enough to hear each others' views. Today our representatives add to our polarization by questioning not just the views of their opponents but their patriotism. Many of their arguments degenerate into suggestions about the mental acuity of members of the other party and this gives license to their supporters to become equally vindictive in their interactions with those with whom they disagree.

The question we need to ask ourselves is what type of country do we want. If we replace democracy with authoritarianism it will not benefit those who bring this about since they will similarly suffer the consequences. Vindictiveness against others, whom some political actors and media outlets frame as second class, will likewise only bring about a more toxic political environment. If we can not question each other in an atmosphere of comity and respect we will only speak past each other and never come to common ground which is the only way to effect change.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN
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U.S Synod

Bravo to Gina Christian for her thoughtful and comprehensive overview of the diverse perspectives raised in the recent American portion of the Synod ("Report on U.S. Synod...", [May 29, 2024](#)). Someone once remarked, "Where there is no tension, there's no growth." In that regard, one could judge the U.S. Synod as an auspicious beginning towards a more egalitarian, inclusive church.

However, Christian identifies several key long-embedded topics that the church and the faithful must confront if it's to really advance. For one, while American society maintains a grossly imbalanced division of wealth between Haves and Have Nots — an inequality so marked it approximates conditions prior to the Great Depression, U.S. Catholic leadership seems to have largely punted on the issue.

Second, our church culture is rife with ingrained structures and stereotypes that have largely relegated Blacks, women and marginal populations — including LGBT Catholics — as essentially second-class citizens. Yet Jesus' ministry showed a special regard for people shunned by the dominant culture then. So what will be done concretely to address this glaring contradiction? Without a wholesale commitment to addressing these issues, the blighting — even assaults — on these real lives can only persist.

Finally, with powerful domestic forces advocating some form of a unified state religion roughly modeled on Christianity, will the American Catholic church have the chutzpah to resist the lure of enhanced power and privilege that joining such an entity would provide? Will it dare to insist on a church forging its own humane path: a way centered on Jesus' life and deeds and Scripture bravely translated into our fraught times? Or will it instead succumb to religious groupthink, a force sympathetic to emerging autocratic structures that threaten to dash democracy, perhaps irrevocably?

R. JAY ALLAIN

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Traditionalism's power felt

In a recent letter to the editor published in NCR Les Joe Schalm spoke on the topic of Traditionalism (ncronline.org, [May 24, 2024](#)). He brought up a situation very similar to mine and the traditional return local parishes are taking. Les mentioned the need to drive many miles to join the celebration of the liturgy in a progressive parish (20 miles each way).

My wife and I live in rural North Carolina. We tried four parishes within the 25 mile range of our home. One is more traditional than the next. Birettas, Latin, Kneeling for communion, etc. Finally we settled on a parish and a 100 mile round trip, just to participate in what should be a standard Vatican II liturgy.

We make the 100 mile journey once a month. The other Sunday mornings we break bread and share the cup in our home.

Tragic yes, but we are getting a new bishop. Maybe some change. Maybe.

JAMES DOLL
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