



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

Volume 27, Number 4

Fall 2018

A Crucial Midterm Pivot

Quincy Howard, OP

EXPERIENCE

One thing Americans agree on: our country has veered drastically off-course. Failures of national systems have led to frustration, bewilderment, and distrust among the commonwealth. Beyond that we are a deeply divided country: from cynical resignation to railing against perceived wrongs, we are turning on one another. Madeline Albright describes the experiment of democracy as paradoxical: as equally characterized by fragility and resilience. These challenging times have exposed the delicate nature of our body politic and will test our nation's spirit of resilience, and it's terrifying.

The political vitriol among Americans, the scapegoating by elected leaders, the echo-chambers of social media, the claimed victimhood by the most privileged, the plausible deniability of truth ... all dynamics that have changed the playing field of civic participation. It can feel impossible to gain our bearings or even to discern reality from hype. As a nation, we are moving through stages of fear and anxiety that threaten the very

institutions on which we're founded. Watching the evening news is a litany of stories of people acting-out — from random shootings to tell-all exposes to the President's tweets — making it feel like we are nearing a panicky crescendo.

Americans are human, and thus respond to fear in different ways. Responses include partisan outrage and blame, endless analyses to determine "what's happening," desperate clamoring for distractions and a pervasive, cynical indifference—fear elicits a variety of protective mechanisms. Those who strive to keep the faith count on the hope that it is never too late for real, meaningful change that can lead us into a positive future. While some still cling to the idea that those in power offer that change, others are hinging that hope on the midterm election as the crucial point where change will take place. As such, this midterm election is seen as pivotal: both the political Left and the Right sense its importance in determining what's to come.

In some ways it seems like the most consequential midterm election in American history—and those paying attention, regardless of political affiliation, are full of anxiety about its outcome and impli-

cations. The collective fantasy is that a power shift will take the nation in a drastically different direction.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

NETWORK Lobby, LCWR, and other faith-based advocates seek federal policies that reflect gospel principles because we know that an economy and a society of inclusion depend on good policy. As such, it's no secret that we're hoping for a power shift in Washington, DC. However, the pivot that's needed is about something much deeper than policy and lawmakers. The current leadership and its policies are symptoms, not the cause,

Resolutions to Action is a quarterly publication of the Global Concerns Committee of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Members of the committee are: Gemma Doll, OP; Susan Dunning, CSJ; Susan Francois, CSJP; Donna Marie Gribshaw, CDP; Eileen Haynes, SCL; Patricia Siemen, OP; and Ann Scholz, SSND, staff. Please address correspondence to:

LCWR
8808 Cameron Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-4955
www.lcwr.org
fax: 301-587-4575
ascholz@lcwr.org

of our current crisis. Focus at this time cannot be narrowed to incumbents, parties, swing votes, and campaigns or we risk missing what's at the root: We the People.

Partisan in-fighting and gridlock in the halls of Congress will not change unless there is a softening of the hearts of elected officials. Unbridled capitalism has a stranglehold on our democracy which will not be remedied by a change in party alone. Controversy and conflict between factions of Americans will not end unless a common understanding of values emerges. Marginalized people will continue to be oppressed and excluded as long as there remains a collective national lack of self-awareness. We will not be redeemed from our nation's original sin of racism by an ideal of "tolerance." Until we can mend relationships among "We the People," there will be no repairing the fabric of our nation.

The politics of opposition and victimization have taken over our national discourse, and so the pivot must go deeper than the political power equation. If we will fail to move forward as a nation, the mid-term election might even compound the deep divisions—further hardening hearts against each other. Correcting course requires more than getting out the vote. What's required is a civic transformation that shifts our nation's collective consciousness and public discourse.

REFLECTION

St. Augustine wrote about the concept of *Incurvatus in se* (curved inward on oneself) —the idea describes a life lived "inward" on behalf of oneself rather than "outward" for God and others. The American condition brings to my mind the heart of a nation 'curved in on itself.' In our culture of entitlement, we focus on individual or tribal self-interests rather than looking outward to the needs of others—"America First." Our imagination of possibilities for the future and our collective dreams have been disabled by prevailing cynicism. We are so locked-up in fear that we are eroding our civic institutions and proliferating violence inside and outside of our borders.

Jesus' parable of the new cloth on an old garment, of new wine in old wineskins, tells us why an election cannot fix what's broken. Meaningful change is not about "patching up" what's off-track but about embracing completely new paradigms and ways-of-engaging with each other and with the world. Electing a new party to power within the context of a deeply broken democracy and a distrustful, alienated citizenry will not bring the transformation we need. Our institutions and our civic discourse will continue to erode until we are prepared to soften our hearts, to prioritize the common good, to create a culture of inclusion and forgiveness. A

deeper shift will require us — individually and collectively — to take a hard look at the ways we turn against one another, judge one another and turn a blind eye to the consequences of our actions or failures to act. It will also require meaningful engagement and forgiveness of those across the aisle.

ACTION

For Christian Americans, this is where our gospel values are put to the test, and we have a responsibility to test ourselves. Our claim of Jesus as the archetype gives us a unique perspective and, hopefully, some practice in how to bridge divides. We look to the scriptures for guidance and profess belonging to the body of Christ, and so the Gospels provide us with our template. Individually and collectively, Christians are called to engage with our fellow Americans — particularly those we view as sinful — in a seeking, loving, forgiving manner and with the intention of reconciliation.

How can I seek out those with different political leanings and find a space to connect with them? How can I facilitate authentic and respectful dialogue? How might I put my fellow citizen who is fearful and suspicious at ease? How have I failed to acknowledge my own sinful contribution to our divided nation?

Rumi's timeless wisdom provides our slogan of democratic resilience for the 2018 midterm campaign season and beyond: *Raise your words not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.*

What's required is a civic transformation that shifts our nation's collective consciousness and public discourse.