

The State of Our Union

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Abstract

A national election provides an opportunity to take a reading of the mood and issues in society. The nomination and election of Donald Trump amounted to a political earthquake that disrupted the establishment of a major political party and set a direction for national leadership that remains uncertain. The rise of populism pushed the issue of social class to the foreground in US politics. There were also issues that continue to divide the nation, particularly race. What is the role for the Catholic Church in post-election America?

Keywords

economic inequality, jobs, Bishop Robert McElroy, polarization, populism, precariat, race, Donald Trump, working class

In 1971, struck by the “wide diversity among the situations in which Christians . . . find themselves,”¹ Paul VI wrote his oft-quoted statement from *Octogesima Adveniens*:

In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words

1. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971) 3 (hereafter cited in text as *OA*), http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

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and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. (OA 4)

This essay is an effort to reflect upon the situation of the United States as it has undergone the process of nominating and electing candidates for national office. What did the campaigns, the public events, the speeches and polls tell us about ourselves, about a reading of “the situation which is proper” to our own country?

I will not attempt a review of the moral literature on this topic, but will present, instead, an interpretation of the past electoral season that might provide an agenda for Catholic social ethics in the coming years. After such an unpredictable and unconventional election, it is not simple to make sense of what the nation has experienced. Adding to that, this essay was written just days after the election and well before any significant activity by the president-elect, making it difficult to know what a future administration will be like when led by a man who remains largely enigmatic.

Anger and Populism

Due to their intensity electoral campaigns may or may not be an accurate barometer of how people really feel, but there was a notable spirit of anger among the citizenry of the USA. There was anger at Wall Street, at Washington, at Muslims, at China, and at immigrants. There was anger over police shootings of black men, over the role of money in politics, over toxic water in Flint, Michigan, over political correctness, and over trade deals. There was anger because of careers and jobs that did not work out as planned, because of the loss of a way of life, and because the nation seemed to be on the wrong track. There was “specific anger and undefined anger and even anger about anger.”²

As it has many times in the past, anger found political expression in the rise of populism, a word coined to describe the People’s Party that emerged during the 1890s in defense of rural and urban workers in the grip of monopolies and financial institutions. Ignatius Donnelly, an early influence on Msgr. John A. Ryan, was one of the leaders of the party. Populist movements and parties have been a recurring feature of presidential elections: George Wallace, Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader each led parties in the recent past. To recall those figures shows that populism is not fixed to any

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2. David Maraniss and Robert Samuels, “The Great Unsettling,” *Washington Post*, March 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/looking-for-america-the-great-unsettling/2016/03/17/e9cb3eaa-e544-11e5-bc08-3e03a5b41910_story.html. Of course, anger should not be understood as simply negative. It can be understood as a “cognitive interruption of the ideological rationalizations for oppression and privilege.” See the fine essay by Michael Jaycox, “The Civic Virtues of Social Anger: A Critically Reconstructed Narrative Ethics for Public Life,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36 (2016) 123–43, doi:10.1353/sce.2016.0008.

specific ideology or policy. Rather it is something of an empty container into which one can pour a variety of political agendas.

Populism frames the electoral contest as moral opposition between the majority of people and corrupt elites who ignore the common good while pursuing private gain. Populism arises when there is a widely held sentiment that an “in-group” is taking advantage of the vast majority who are the “out-group.” The import of populism is how it provides an opportunity for a public figure to identify with “the people.” A skillful populist employs a deeply felt grievance to claim that he or she is the embodiment of, or the advocate for, the victimized group.³ Fr. Charles Coughlin, known as the “shepherd of discontent,” serves as a prominent Catholic example of the type.⁴

According to the historian Michael Kazin, there are two broad styles of populism. One type of populist “directs his or her ire exclusively upward: at corporate elites and their enablers in government” who betray the average worker. This is populism that sees “the people” through the lens of class. The second type of populist also blames political and economic elites for the woes of the people but the “definition of ‘the people’ is narrower and more ethnically restrictive.” For most of American history “it meant only citizens of European heritage,”⁵ and for a time only Protestants of European heritage.

Bernie Sanders was viewed as a populist of the first type while Donald Trump was seen by many as representing the second type. Both had populist appeal because they were self-described “outsiders” from the system they criticized. Trump’s use of economic populism was a bit unusual since it is often more of a Democratic theme in recent times, but he coupled the economic theme with an ethnic nationalism that conveyed both anti-immigrant and racial messages.⁶ Throughout their campaigns Sanders and Trump were widely considered the two candidates most disruptive of the status quo in an election when the promise of change was a powerful message for many.

Exit polling showed there was a strong desire for change in the electorate and Clinton was not seen as an agent of change. Instead she was viewed by a number of Americans as the ultra-insider of Washington politics. The popularity of Bernie Sanders, the perceived outsider in the Democratic primary campaign, was a sign of Clinton’s potential trouble. The story was the same within the GOP primary season. Jeb Bush carried the name of the Republican establishment elite and had the financial backing to prove it. Yet he and other candidates more acceptable to the GOP leadership—Rubio, Christie, Graham, Jindal—all lost, and among those who lost but did better were self-described outsiders like Carson or Cruz. This was not an election year

3. See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005) esp. chaps. 4–5.

4. Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

5. Michael Kazin, “Trump and American Populism,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-06/trump-and-american-populism>.

6. Bart Bonikowski and Noam Gidron, “Trump and Sanders Aren’t Blazing New Trails: Populism Has Run through U.S. Politics for a Very Long Time,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/04/28/trump-and-sanders-arent-so-different-populism-has-run-through-u-s-politics-for-a-very-long-time/>.

driven by issues but by a desire for change and Trump was the change. He got 83% of voters who said change was their priority. Clinton ran with the burden of seeking a third consecutive term for the same party, which has only happened once since the middle of the 20th century.

Neither Sanders nor Trump dismissed the role of government. Both men gave voice to anger at ineffective governance, meaning a government that did not help the average citizen cope with the effects of the recession, global trade, and the rising cost of higher education. Trump's supporters wanted security more than revolution.⁷ They expressed anger at the loss of blue-collar industrial jobs providing good pay with decent benefits. For many of Trump's followers restoring those jobs was the economic goal, not broader aims of social justice or greater equality. Part of his appeal was that Trump was looked upon as a successful businessman who would get things done after years of ineffectiveness in Washington.⁸ More than detailed policy proposals it was a forceful personality who will get things done that was reassuring and hopeful to Trump supporters.⁹

On the other hand, Sanders did talk about a political revolution. Yet, his standard stump speech was largely a set of proposals to move the USA closer toward a more expansive social welfare state with an extensive regulatory regime over financial institutions. He was never persuasive about how his ideas would be enacted given the polarization in Congress and his lack of history at coalition building. As it became clear he was not going to win, Sanders made claims he was cheated out of the nomination and offered up proposals on college tuition and health care that led supporters on unrealistically. Not unlike the Republican elites who vowed to Tea Party members that they would repeal Obamacare, Sanders could be seen by some as setting his supporters up for disappointment and bitterness toward the political system.

What does the energy surrounding populist themes tell us about the anger within the nation? Exit polls taken in a variety of states revealed that 50 percent of Republican primary voters "felt betrayed by their leaders."¹⁰ If the GOP rank and file were not so angry with their leadership then Trump would not have been successful. But they were that angry and the warning signs went unheeded.¹¹ As a

7. Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400 Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking, 2016) as quoted by Gregory Cowles, "Inside the List," *New York Times Book Review*, July 10, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/10/books/review/inside-the-list.html>.

8. Trump's image of business success was due more to his role on the TV show, *The Apprentice*, rather than his other ventures. Fourteen years of watching him weekly had an effect upon the popular imagination that was underestimated by those who were not fans of the show.

9. Elizabeth Drew, "Red and Blue Agony," *New York Review of Books*, May 26, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/05/26/election-divided-parties-red-blue-agony/>.

10. Patrick Healy and Jonathan Martin, "Republican Party Unravels Over Donald Trump's Takeover," *New York Times*, May 7, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/us/politics/republican-party-unravels-over-donald-trumps-takeover.html>.

11. A useful sketch of recent developments in the Republican party is David Frum, "The Great Republican Revolt," *The Atlantic*, January/February 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/01/the-great-republican-revolt/419118/>.

Commonweal editorial put it, a number of GOP reformers had observed “the free-trade, low-tax and anti-government orthodoxy of the Republican Party was doing nothing to alleviate the economic insecurities of working- and middle-class Americans.” While the rank and file gave their votes to the GOP what they got in return was to “see their wages stagnate, their benefits evaporate, or their jobs disappear altogether, while the cost of college rose out of reach for their children.”¹² Longtime Congressional observer, Norm Ornstein, points to the impact of the economic bailout where it seemed to many people that “the elites in Washington and New York conspired to bail out the miscreants who caused the disaster and then gave them bonuses, while the rest of us lost our houses or saw their value, the biggest and often only asset of Americans, plummet, lost our jobs or saw them frozen and stagnant.”¹³ Or as the journalist Mark Shields succinctly put it, “Americans don’t have portfolios . . . Americans have homes.”¹⁴

The dividing lines in the GOP became income and education levels. Throughout the primary season Trump won those voters without college degrees and those earning less than \$50,000.¹⁵ Over time large numbers of the GOP base came to understand they were not benefiting for their support of GOP nominees promoted by party elites. Both of the Bushes, John McCain, and Mitt Romney promoted policies that saw the top 20 percent of the nation continue to separate itself from the lower income quintiles of the population. Trump uncovered the Achilles’ heel of the old Reagan coalition, an economic policy focused on tax cuts for the rich that did not help the working class, coupled with a failure to expand support for the conservative social agenda in the culture wars.¹⁶

In sum, Trump found strong support among voters who believed the nation had been heading in the wrong direction. A Pew research poll indicated that during the primaries, “75% of Trump voters say that life has gotten worse for people like them over the last half century.”¹⁷ Of course, it is not only those angry over economic pain that support Trump, though exit polling during the primaries suggested this was where

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12. The Editors, “GOP R.I.P.?” *Commonweal*, March 9, 2016, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/gop-rip>.
 13. Thomas Edsall, “Why Trump Now?” *Washington Post*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/02/opinion/campaign-stops/why-trump-now.html>.
 14. As quoted in Tom Roberts, “Georgetown Panel Analyzes Anger within 2016 Presidential Election,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 16, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/print/news/politics/georgetown-panel-analyzes-anger-within-2016-presidential-election>.
 15. Derek Thompson, “Who are Donald Trump’s Supporters, Really?” *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/who-are-donald-trumps-supporters-really/471714/>.
 16. As the *New York Times* economics columnist Paul Krugman pointedly wrote, “the establishment’s problem with Mr. Trump isn’t the con he brings; it’s the cons he disrupts.” See “Clash of Republican Con Artists,” *New York Times*, March 4, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/04/opinion/clash-of-republican-con-artists.html>.
 17. David Brooks, “If Not Trump, What?” *New York Times*, April 29, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/29/opinion/if-not-trump-what.html>.

he found his strongest support.¹⁸ Mike Huckabee and Rick Santorum also had populist economic messages and went nowhere in the party primaries.

Trump had at least two other factors in his rise, and that is the anger owing not to those hurt by economic issues, but to those who are uncomfortable with social and cultural trends in national life. It is the anger of those who fit into Kazin's second populist type, what might be called ethnic nationalism. Back in 1992 and again in 1996 Pat Buchanan ran on an agenda close to that espoused by Trump: opposition to free trade, restrictions on immigration, and attentive to the concerns of the white ethnic working class.¹⁹ Many voters animated by Trump's campaign left the Democratic party in the 1960s as that party took up the concerns of minorities and women. They joined with Southern conservatives who had defected from the Dixiecrat movement and entered the Republican party after the failed campaigns of George Wallace in 1964 as a Democrat and then in 1968 as a third-party candidate.²⁰ This segment of the Trump coalition was energized by his criticisms of Muslims, women, African Americans, Mexicans, and other immigrants. Even those GOP voters who did not support Trump in the primaries did agree with him on three of his nationalist issues: banning Muslims, deporting undocumented immigrants, and building a wall on the Mexico–US border.²¹

The populist mood is not restricted to the USA but is found in a variety of nations struggling with the impact of globalization on domestic society, stagnant or slow growth economies, and tensions related to immigration. Brexit was the most publicized instance of a populist insurrection against the political and economic elites in Britain, but similar dynamics are occurring in Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, India, and the Philippines.²²

Economic Trends

What stoked the populist fires in the election was the economic situation.²³ Beginning in the 1970s, the US economy underwent a series of changes that were transformative

18. Dan Balz, "How the Republican Party Created Donald Trump," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/behind-the-rise-of-trump-long-standing-grievances-among-left-out-voters/2016/03/05/7996bca2-e253-11e5-9c36-e1902f6b6571_story.html.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. Ronald Rapoport, Alan Abramowitz, and Walter Stone, "Why Trump Was Inevitable," *New York Review of Books*, June 23, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/06/23/why-trump-was-inevitable/>.

22. Eduardo Porter, "We've Seen the Trump Phenomenon Before," *New York Times*, May 24, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/25/business/economy/weve-seen-the-trump-phenomenon-before.html>; Bruce Drake and Jacob Popushter, "In Views of Diversity, Many Europeans Are Less Positive than Americans," *Fact Tank* (blog), *Pew Research Center*, July 12, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/12/in-views-of-diversity-many-europeans-are-less-positive-than-americans/>.

23. Because the topic of economic inequality was the focus of a recent segment of the moral notes it will not be treated here. See Kate Ward and Kenneth Himes, "Growing Apart: The Rise

for the experience of workers. Deindustrialization, automation, and globalization all had impacts. In addition, there was the growth of the high technology and service sectors. In time, blue-collar jobs disappeared, the wages of non-college-educated workers stayed flat or declined, wealth and income gains became concentrated among the top quintile and even the top 5 percent. Social mobility became less common and urban coastal regions far outpaced economic growth in the so-called “flyover country” of the industrial South and Midwest.²⁴ Much of this story is well known; in this subsection I note several trends feeding the populist mood that have not received as much attention.

Automation and Job Loss

Over the past decades much has been written and spoken about the benefits of free trade and there are substantial benefits for great numbers, including residents of some of the poorest nations.²⁵ Yet there are losers as well as winners in global trade, and a lot of the anger during the primary and general elections came from people who saw free trade as harmful to individuals, cities, and even whole regions. Both Trump and Sanders attacked past and pending free-trade agreements. Certainly it is true that trade has hurt some workers, even if the overall effect of global trade is beneficial.

Once China was admitted to the World Trade Organization there was a tripling of its share of global manufacturing. Not only the USA but Japan, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand witnessed similar growth in Chinese imports.²⁶ And China’s trade success was accompanied by questionable practices such as dumping steel at below actual costs in order to seize market share. There was also evidence that China manipulated its currency to keep it artificially low, thereby making its exports more attractive to foreign buyers.

Trade critics move from information like the above to conclude that the decline in manufacturing jobs, about a 30 percent drop over the past two decades, can be halted or even reversed with better trade deals. However, what was unacknowledged by populist complaints was that manufacturing output in the USA hit a record high level by early 2016. Compared to twenty years ago, US manufacturers have increased

of Inequality,” *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 118–32, doi:10.1177/0040563913519045. Inequality remains a significant issue for the American economy and little has improved during the electoral season, but this section will consider other worrisome trends involving labor.

24. Jefferson Cowie, “The Great White Nope,” *Foreign Affairs* 95 (November/December 2016), <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/who-are-donald-trumps-supporters-really/471714/>.
25. For a recounting of some of the benefits that free trade has helped to bring about, see Steven Radelet, “Prosperity Rising: The Success of Global Development—and How to Keep It Going,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 14, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-12-14/prosperity-rising>. Also an unsigned essay, “Trade, at What Price?” *The Economist*, April 2, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/usa/21695855-america-economy-benefits-hugely-trade-its-costs-have-been-amplified-policy>.
26. Charles Morris, “Good for Everyone?” *Commonweal*, March 10, 2016, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/good-everyone>.

production by more than 40 percent. They are doing it with far fewer workers, however. Trade did not cause that. Increased worker productivity did, and that is directly linked to technology and automation. One academic study found that “productivity growth accounted for more than 85 percent of the job loss in manufacturing between 2000 and 2010.” Overall, trade was responsible for 13 percent of the job loss, “although in two sectors, apparel and furniture, it accounted for 40 percent.”²⁷

There will not be a revival of American manufacturing under Trump because there has not been a collapse.²⁸ Without question trade has taken jobs out of American manufacturing, but the main culprit in job loss has been automation. This is only likely to continue in the future as manufacturers move into advanced robotics. Neither Trump nor Sanders nor any other politician focused on this issue as a threat to employment because to speak against automation and technology is to pick a fight that no politician can hope to win. To focus on trade as the big problem allows a populist to sound like the nation is dealing with economic trends that can be resolved by better negotiating or imposing tariffs.

The “Precariat”

There has been a steady gain in job creation for more than six years, but the nature of these jobs is different than what many working-class people knew from the past. The majority of jobs created in recent years are “temp or perma-temp, subcontracted, part time or labeled as that of an independent contractor, whether rightly or not.”²⁹ Few come with the paid benefits of the lost manufacturing jobs. People employed in these new jobs have become what some call a new class, the precariat, workers whose employment is “precarious to the point of affecting their housing opportunities, marriage and family decisions, old-age support, and general peace of mind.”³⁰

Despite the improving unemployment data, a substantial number of workers fear being laid off. The lack of job security is both a cause, and a consequence, of the atomization of the workplace. The absence of unions, the use of forced retirements, early buyouts, and the danger of outsourcing has undercut the sense of solidarity among workers. The use of part-time workers, temps, and on-call workers has greatly

27. Douglas Irwin, “The Truth about Trade,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-06-13/truth-about-trade>.

28. Binyamin Appelbaum, “Why Are Politicians So Obsessed with Manufacturing?” *New York Times Magazine*, October 4, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/magazine/why-are-politicians-so-obsessed-with-manufacturing.html>.

29. Harold Meyerson, “Why Neither Candidate Will Ever Return America to Its 1950 Prosperity,” *PBS Newshour*, July 19, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/column-neither-candidate-will-ever-return-america-1950s-prosperity/>.

30. Mohammad Qadeer, “Feeding the Economy, Starving Society,” *Commonweal*, September 29, 2016, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/feeding-economy-starving-society>. To my knowledge the neologism was coined by Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New and Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

reduced the bargaining power of employees not only for improved pay but for workplace rules and regulations. The share of corporate income that goes to workers has declined to its lowest level since 1951.³¹ Despite the gains in productivity the resulting profit has wound up almost entirely in the hands of owners and managers, not workers.

Yet there is little in the way of job actions, strikes, slowdowns, or other forms of pushback from the laboring class due to fear that jobs might disappear. “The United States has the lowest level of labor-market regulation, the fewest employment protections, and the third-lowest minimum cost of labour among the OECD countries.”³² While some—particularly young college-educated, highly skilled workers—champion the new flexibility of the workplace, it is a labor environment that greatly increases the insecurity of people. The precariat class seems all too real.

Another form of precariousness is in the area of financial reserves. Today, the average family has enough liquid assets to endure for about three weeks without any income. If you go down the scale of wealth to those with below-average resources the financial reserves last for a few days.³³ In a survey done to explore “financial fragility,” the researchers sought to find out how many American families could absorb a financial shock. The question put to those surveyed was whether a person could, in a month’s time, come up with \$2,000 if an unexpected need occurred. The responses indicated that 40 percent of US families could not do so.³⁴

Labor Participation Rates and Labor Policy

An additional disturbing aspect of the employment situation in the USA is the continuing low rate of participation in the workforce, what economists call the employment-to-population ratio. At present, it is at a historic low. “Estimates suggest that the real unemployment rate is more like 10 percent if we take into account those who stopped looking for work or those who can only find part-time work.”³⁵ The number

31. Steven Greenhouse, “The Mystery of the Vanishing Pay Raise,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/sunday-review/the-mystery-of-the-vanishing-pay-raise.html>.

32. Jason Furman, “The Truth about American Unemployment,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/truth-about-american-unemployment>. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, dating back to 1961, was originally comprised of the USA, Canada, and 18 western European nations. Since then it has grown to 34 countries including Asian, South Pacific, and Latin American nations.

33. Edward Wolff interview, “Why So Many Americans in the Middle Class Have No Savings,” *PBS Newshour*, June 1, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/why-so-many-americans-in-the-middle-class-have-no-savings/>.

34. Annamaria Lusardi interview, *ibid*.

35. Jeff Madrick, “America’s Lost Workers,” *New York Review of Books*, September 15, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/09/15/americas-lost-workers-eberstadt-men-without-work/>.

of working-age men not employed cannot be explained by the growth of the student population, nor the growth of people on disability. The data make it clear that men are not avoiding work. The drop in labor-market participation (employed or actively seeking employment) is related to educational status. "The drop is rather small for those with a college education, while for those who only completed high school participation rates have plummeted. There are few good jobs for them."³⁶ Low-skill workers simply cannot find work that earns income above poverty levels. The toll of involuntary joblessness extends well beyond loss of earnings, though that affects spouses, children, and other dependents. There is also, however, a correlation between labor-force decline and mental health issues, which have spiked among the population of white working-class people.

In an interview on Air Force One, President Obama acknowledged the problems with the modern workplace. He observed that many people will "have to worry about retraining at some point in their careers, because they can't anticipate being in one place for 30 years. The occupational mix in the economy places greater demands on people because it's changing more rapidly."³⁷ Obama did suggest several policies to assist workers that did not advance during his administration. It remains to be seen whether a new president and legislative branch can discuss and implement policies drawn from an array of ideas. At present, the US government spends 0.1 percent of GDP on active labor-market policies, for example, job training and job search assistance. This is less than every other OECD nation except Mexico and Chile. The OECD average is six times the US expenditure in labor markets.³⁸

Better alignment of employer needs with community colleges and apprenticeship programs can help workers develop needed skills. Investment in badly needed infrastructure would create many jobs for the unskilled. Expanding the earned income tax credit, increasing the minimum wage, and establishing family-friendly leave policies would all encourage more adults to go back into the workforce. Work-sharing programs coupled with government-sponsored wage insurance through a revised unemployment insurance program could assist those whose hours are reduced is another idea. Some of these proposals might not be possible or useful but they are all ideas that other nations have debated and sometimes implemented. The USA could learn much from other nations about helping people transition to new jobs and work arrangements in a globalized economy.³⁹

A remaining threat that neither candidate addressed is what if the low labor participation rate is a harbinger of things to come and will not improve but only worsen in the future? The new age of robotic technology may usher in a workplace where the

36. Ibid.

37. As quoted in Andrew Sorkin, "President Obama Weighs His Economic Legacy," *New York Times Magazine*, April 28, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/magazine/president-obama-weighs-his-economic-legacy.html>.

38. Furman, "The Truth about American Unemployment."

39. "Free Trade in America," *The Economist*, April 2, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21695879-case-free-trade-overwhelming-losers-need-more-help-open-argument>.

amount of jobs needed to be filled by human workers is simply nowhere near the number of people in the available workforce. What if a large number of people are simply unneeded in a future labor market? The future of work—its place in people’s psychic and social lives, its role as the main source of income for people—may undergo major alterations in the not too distant future. Without conjuring up science fiction visions of a laborless society, there is a possibility that how we will think about work in a generation or two may require skilled public leadership in a postindustrial society.

The upshot of the populist tenor of the past electoral year, present in both the Trump and Sanders campaigns, suggests American politics may finally respond to the rise of inequality and the plight of those who have not benefited from the economic recovery of the Obama years. In the words of Francis Fukuyama, the “real story” of the 2016 election is that “social class is now back at the heart of American politics trumping other cleavages—race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, geography—that had dominated discussion in recent elections.”⁴⁰ One social class in particular was visible and vocal during the campaigns.

White Working Class in the USA

A much discussed account of the white working class is by the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*.⁴¹ Over the course of five years she visited and interviewed adults in Louisiana who identified with the Tea Party. Hochschild wanted to understand the paradox of opposition to federal government action from people in places in great need of it. She sought to get over the “empathy wall,” an “obstacle to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different beliefs or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances.”⁴² Begun well before the past election campaign, Hochschild’s book was an investigation into a cultural world that was deeply supportive of Trump’s populism. Paradoxes abound. The people interviewed by her live in a state that gets more federal aid than what is sent to Washington in taxes. They are proud people who imagine themselves to be independent, yet almost all use government services: Medicaid for elderly parents, or unemployment insurance during job-hunting season. When asked about such behaviors a sense of shame becomes evident.⁴³

Hochschild formulated what she called her “deep story” to explain the *feeling* that her interviewees have about the state of the country. The word feeling is important, for the deep story is not about the facts of the situation, it is a metaphorical description of

40. Francis Fukuyama, “American Political Decay or Renewal?” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/american-political-decay-or-renewal>.

41. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: New Press, 2016). Although not in every instance, but in much of the literature the use of “white” as a modifier of working class was meant to designate non-Hispanic white workers.

42. *Ibid.* 5.

43. *Ibid.* 11.

the “*subjective prism* through which the party on the other side sees the world.”⁴⁴ The story goes like this:

You are patiently standing in the middle of a long line stretching toward the horizon, where the American Dream awaits. But as you wait, you see people cutting in line ahead of you. Many of these line-cutters are black—beneficiaries of affirmative action or welfare. Some are career-driven women pushing into jobs they never had before. Then you see immigrants, Mexicans, Somalis, the Syrian refugees yet to come. As you wait in this unmoving line, you’re being asked to feel sorry for them all. You have a good heart. But who is deciding who you should feel compassion for? Then you see President Barack Hussein-Obama waving the line-cutters forward. He’s on their side. In fact, isn’t he a line-cutter too? How did this fatherless black guy pay for Harvard? As you wait your turn, Obama is using the money in your pocket to help the line-cutters. He and his liberal backers have removed the shame from taking. The government has become an instrument for redistributing your money to the undeserving. It’s not your government anymore; it’s theirs.⁴⁵

When she recounted the “deep story” to her interviewees she received comments to the effect that she had captured exactly how they feel. Beyond the obvious elements of racism and nativism present, as well as the ignorance, willful or otherwise, about how government is actually operating its various social assistance programs, there is also another feeling that ought not be missed. There is anger, for sure, but also mourning, a sense of sadness and grief over a lost life. The people portrayed in the book feel the loss of a religious culture in a secular age, the loss of a white majority to diversity, the loss of a way of life to global economic forces, and the loss of hope for attaining the American Dream. There is also a feeling of resentment toward elites who seem indifferent to the pain of the white working class and even scorn the group as racists, homophobes, and nativists.

In truth, neither political party has been a friend to the working class. Since Bill Clinton’s administration, the Democrats have been more attentive to corporate interests and Wall Street finance while focusing on issues of cultural, not economic, liberalism. The GOP used the culture-war issues to woo the working class, but economically the party has been on the side of elites with tax cuts for the most advantaged, support for anti-unionism, and calls for deregulation of markets that leave workers less protected from laissez-faire policies. The sense of the white working class that they are invisible and insignificant to the power brokers in Washington and on Wall Street contributes to the sense of anger and mourning.

44. Ibid. 135.

45. This is a summary of the “deep story” taken from the author’s essay, “I Spent 5 years with Some of Trump’s Biggest Fans. Here’s What They Won’t Tell You,” *Mother Jones*, August 23, 2016, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/08/trump-white-blue-collar-supporters>. The longer version of the narrative formulated by Hochschild can be found in *Strangers in Their Own Land* 136–40. Two other books focused on the issue of class were widely reviewed during the election year: J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016); and Isenberg, *White Trash*.

A record high level of Americans believe the American dream is now out of reach for them, and among millennials social trust is at historic lows.⁴⁶ Among white blue-collar workers there has been an increase in single parenthood, large upticks in suicide and chemical abuse, and shorter average life spans. “When asked in national surveys about the people with whom they discussed ‘important matters’ in the past six months, those with just a high school education or less are likelier to say no one.” There is a decline in the likelihood of marriage among the working class compared to college-educated people. Social isolation is linked to depression, substance abuse, and suicide.⁴⁷

Mental health experts now talk about increasing numbers of people who are “at risk of risks,” people who are in situations that breed depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, divorce, and suicide.⁴⁸ Nations with stronger safety nets are not experiencing these social ills the way the USA is, despite the fact that the economic recovery in the USA is stronger than that in most European nations. The European nations have better safety nets than we have and better job-training programs for the unemployed. Robert Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone* and *Our Children*, has made the point that when you put economic deprivation together with social isolation you have “really dry tinder.” Trump just “lit a spark”; he may have fed the anger but he did not create it.⁴⁹

Of course the plight of the black working class and Hispanic immigrants is even harsher than for the white working class, so why such anger in the latter group? The answer is that it is an anger caused by failed expectations. Many of the white working class were born in the 1950s and 1960s and witnessed a general prosperity that they came to expect for themselves and their children. It is not that the white working class have it worse than the non-white working class, it is that they had farther to fall, given their experience and expectations.⁵⁰ When blacks and Hispanics compare their situations to that of their parents, they see improved circumstances. High school-educated whites in contrast see a downward trajectory. It is the reference group for comparison that leads to the pessimism and sense of decline among working-class whites. There is a sense of displacement for a group who thought of themselves as the heart and soul of the mainstream culture, the “average” American worker. And there is a sense of despair as the future this group confronts appears to affirm that things will get worse as their numbers dwindle, their incomes stagnate or decline, and their children’s lives hold little promise of doing better.⁵¹

46. Brooks, “If Not Trump, What?”

47. The claims made in this paragraph as well as the direct quote are taken from an essay by the sociologist Victor Tan Chen, “All Hallowed Out: The Lonely Poverty of America’s White Working Class,” *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/01/white-working-class-poverty/424341>.

48. Ibid.

49. As quoted in Healy and Martin, “Republican Party Unravels.”

50. Robert Reich, “Trump: The American Fascist,” *Moyers & Company*, March 11, 2016, <http://billmoyers.com/story/trump-the-american-fascist/>.

51. Exit polling on the question of expectations for the next generation of Americans revealed that 63% of Trump voters thought the future would be worse, while 59% of Clinton voters

Donald Trump brought attention to the “disaffected downwardly mobile as a key voting bloc.”⁵² He became the voice of bewildered and angry white men who do not feel privileged even though in recent decades many other segments of the population have protested the power of white males in US society.⁵³ Although the reporting on Bernie Sanders’s campaign highlighted his appeal to young people and the left wing of the Democratic party, he also did better than Hillary Clinton with the white working class. He did not speak for them as being white, but he did voice a message of economic victimization.⁵⁴ Both Trump and Sanders spoke to people who have been largely overlooked by the major parties in the last few elections. Exit polling indicated that 78 percent of those who thought their family’s financial conditions had gotten worse voted for Trump, whereas among those who thought things had improved, 72 percent voted for Clinton.⁵⁵

Awareness of a problem does not guarantee devising the proper remedy. In the case of Trump there was a worrisome turn to scapegoating in his rhetoric and ideas. Muslims and Hispanic immigrants, along with African Americans, were derided and insulted publicly. The traditional fault lines of ethnic nationalist populism—nativism, racism, and suspicion of religions other than Christianity—were all to be found among the white working-class supporters of Trump.⁵⁶ Among political scientists there has long been the view that “Americans do not organize their political opinions based on ideology,” but they “do organize their opinions around something else: attitudes toward

thought things would be better for the next generation. See Jon Huang et al., “Election 2016: Exit Polls,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>.

52. Andrew Cherlin, “The Downwardly Mobile for Trump,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/opinion/campaign-stops/the-downwardly-mobile-for-trump.html>.
53. Nicholas Confessore, “For Whites Sensing Decline, Donald Trump Unleashes Words of Resistance,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/us/politics/donald-trump-white-identity.html>. Besides the elements of nativism and racism found among a segment of Trump’s supporters, there was also sexism. A Public Religion Research Institute survey in March of 2016 reported that half of Trump’s supporters thought society would be better if “women adhere to traditional gender roles,” as reported by Thomas Edsall, “How Falling Behind the Joneses Fueled the Rise of Trump,” *New York Times*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/07/opinion/campaign-stops/how-falling-behind-the-joneses-fueled-the-rise-of-trump.html>.
54. George Packer, “Head of the Class,” *New Yorker*, May 16, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/16/how-donald-trump-appeals-to-the-white-working-class>.
55. Huang, Jacoby, Rebecca, and Strickland, “Election 2016: Exit Polls.”
56. Various profiles of his supporters reported that Trump did well among voters who score high in “white ethnocentrism, anti-immigrant attitudes, racial resentment, fear of Muslims, and racial and ethnic intolerance.” See Michael Tesler and John Sides, “How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump: The Role of White Identity and Grievances,” *Washington Post*, March 3, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/03/how-political-science-helps-explain-the-rise-of-trump-the-role-of-white-identity-and-grievances/>.

social groups.” Especially “suspicions of minority groups in general, and attitudes about blacks in particular, influence whites’ opinions about many issues.”⁵⁷

This underscores the observation of Leon Wieseltier that “the economic foundations of their [white working-class] way of life were destroyed by the unforgiving logic of globalization, and then by the recession and its scandalously uneven recovery.” The white working class are now demanding sympathy for their plight, “and they deserve sympathy, but they do not give sympathy.”⁵⁸ For far too many, the grievances of the white working class did not teach compassion and solidarity but led to embitterment and the search for scapegoats.⁵⁹

National Divisions

A telling statistic about increased political partisanship is how it has entered into family relations. Stanford University conducted a poll in 1960 asking Americans “whether they would be pleased, displeased, or unmoved if their son or daughter married a member of the other political party.” Only 5 percent of Republicans and 4 percent of Democrats indicated they would be displeased. In 2010 the website YouGov asked the exact same question and this time 49 percent of Republicans and 33 percent of Democrats indicated they would be displeased.⁶⁰ Recent empirical studies by political scientists Shanto Iyengar and Sean Westwood suggest that “partisanship is no longer just a political phenomenon.” Instead, they argue, “party and ideology have become powerful forms of personal identity” with an influence extending far beyond the political realm.⁶¹ More is invested in our political loyalties and so political differences become more profoundly felt.

Changing one’s political identity has become similar to changing one’s religious identity. Despite the hard feelings and accusations of rigging the process aimed at Hillary Clinton by Sanders’s supporters, she won 89 percent of Democratic voters. On the other side, where the “Never Trump” protestations were frequent and vehement, he still received 90 percent of GOP voters’ support. In short, despite the claims that many alienated Democrats and Republicans would not support their party’s candidate, Clinton and Trump each received only 3 percent less of the support of their respective

57. Tesler and Sides, “How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump.”

58. Leon Wieseltier, “How Voters’ Personal Suffering Overtook Reason—And Brought Us Donald Trump,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/22/how-voters-personal-suffering-overtook-reason-and-brought-us-donald-trump/?utm_term=.253f4166c20a.

59. An example counter to Wieseltier’s claim that the white working class has focused on sympathy for itself but not others is the autobiographical essay of Matthew Sitman, “Leaving Conservatism Behind,” *Dissent*, Summer 2016, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/leaving-conservatism-behind-blue-collar-republican-progressive>.

60. Ezra Klein and Alvin Chang, “‘Political Identity is Fair Game for Hatred’: How Republicans and Democrats Discriminate,” *Vox*, December 7, 2015, <https://pcl.stanford.edu/press/2015/vox-pol-hatred.pdf>.

61. *Ibid.*

party than was given to Obama and Romney in 2012. Voters have party loyalties that are not easily broken no matter how disappointed they might be with a candidate.

Anyone familiar with an electoral map knows that there are profound regional divisions in the nation and even within regions there are big differences between urban and rural populations.⁶² The gender gap exists but it was not as yawning as pre-election polling indicated and there was no surge of new women voters angry over Trump's behavior. In fact the percentage of the electorate that was female declined 1 percent from 2012. While Clinton's margin with women was +12 percent, that was only 1 percent more than Obama earned in the previous election.⁶³ With regard to income, those making less than \$50,000 per year favored Clinton by roughly 10 percent, with the divide being larger for those at the lower income levels and less so as income approached \$50,000. For those making more than \$100,000, more than \$200,000, and more than a quarter of a million, the split was only 1 percent between Clinton and Trump in each group.

The actual voting pattern looked at by educational levels was also less divisive than pre-election expectations suggested. Trump led Clinton among those with only a high school diploma by 8 percent, while he trailed Clinton among college graduates by 9 percent. Those education numbers, when broken down by race, however, show the real divide. Whites without a college degree went 67 percent to 28 percent for Trump over Clinton as non-whites without a college degree went 75 percent to 25 percent for Clinton. Whites with a college degree favored Trump by 4 percent, 49 percent to 45 percent, while non-whites with a college degree went 71 percent to 23 percent for Clinton. It was not education that was the big divide but race. Only 8 percent of African Americans voted for Trump while 58 percent of whites did.⁶⁴

A significant development that occurred throughout the electoral season was the rise of political consciousness among a new generation of African Americans. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged out of the tragic reality of multiple killings of unarmed black men and women by police officers rather than as a direct response to the presidential campaign. Yet the candidacy of the man who promoted "birtherism" in response to Barack Obama's election added to the urgency surrounding the issue of race relations. As numerous commentators pointed out, there was a good deal of "dog whistle" racial politics evident in the rhetoric of Trump. "Dog whistles are when politicians used coded language that [tried and triggered stereotypical] beliefs,"⁶⁵ such as blacks prefer welfare to work, undocumented immigrants are breeders

62. Trump received 62 percent of the vote in rural areas and Clinton got 59 percent of those living in cities with more than 50,000 people. Huang et al., "Election 2016: Exit Polls."

63. Data for the 2012 election are taken from "How Groups Voted in 2012," Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Cornell University, <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-2012/>.

64. All data for the 2016 election results are taken from Huang et al., "Election 2016: Exit Polls."

65. Ian Haney Lopez, "On the Dog Whistle Politics of Race (Part One)," *Bill Moyers*, February 28, 2014, <http://billmoyers.com/episode/ian-haney-lopez-on-the-dog-whistle-politics-of-race/>; Lopez, "The Dog Whistle Politics of Race, Part II," *Bill Moyers*, March 7, 2014, <http://billmoyers.com/episode/ian-haney-lopez-on-the-dog-whistle-politics-of-race-part-two/>.

of crime, and Muslims are terrorists. The “dog whistle” language is not the stereotype, it is the manipulation of stereotypes.

Such stereotyping can be found in the support that interviewees gave to Hochschild’s “deep story” with the anger at “line cutters” who take advantage of the white working class. A large percentage of white people (43 percent) think that discrimination against whites is as big a problem as discrimination against blacks.⁶⁶ Data from the American National Election Pilot Study’s 2016 Pilot Study showed that “beliefs that whites are treated unfairly are powerful predictors of support for Donald Trump in the Republican Primaries.”⁶⁷

However, it is important that racism, while certainly present throughout the campaign, is not all that influenced the election. Obama carried Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan in 2008 and 2012. Not only did he win those states, but in both elections he won a majority of white voters in those states. Hillary Clinton lost them and Donald Trump won them, but more was going on than race. The same voters who opposed a white woman supported a black man, so it is hard to cite racism as the cause of the shift to Trump.

On the other hand, an older study from the National Bureau of Economic Research offers strong evidence that one reason European nations are more generous to those in need than is the case in the USA is due to racial misgivings. The study shows that a large number of white Americans would rather not have robust government social spending if it is thought that blacks will be significant beneficiaries. Racial diversity has played a major role in why Americans do not support the social welfare programs that European nations with greater racial homogeneity have implemented.⁶⁸

In the face of the ongoing violence within black communities, the disparities in household income and wealth, the extraordinary rates of incarceration of black men, segregated housing patterns, the poor educational opportunities afforded black children, and myriad other problems where disadvantages between blacks and whites can be cited, the importance of the BLM movement is a sign of hope. Young African Americans are not despairing of the future and adopting a stance of passive resignation. Rather there is an effort to organize for increased black political will and power. The lethal encounters with police were the immediate cause for BLM but the movement has productively brought focus to the persistence of racial discrimination that impedes progress for black Americans. “The typical white household earns 70% more than the typical black household, unchanged from 40 years ago.”⁶⁹

66. Robert Jones et al., *Anxiety, Nostalgia, and Mistrust: Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey* (Washington, D.C.: Public Religion Research Institute, 2015), <http://www.pri.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/PRRI-AVS-2015-Web.pdf>.

67. Tesler and Sides, “How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump.”

68. Alberto Alesina, Edward Glaeser, and Bruce Sacerdote, “Why Doesn’t the U.S. Have a European-Style Welfare System?” (National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 8524, October, 2001), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w8524>.

69. David Leonhardt, “A Great Fight of Our Times,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/11/opinion/a-great-fight-of-our-times.html>.

BLM has exhibited some of the strengths of social media, but it has also reflected the limitations of the medium. It has often been compared to the Occupy movement, with the warning that social media-driven movements may fall short of their initial promise.⁷⁰ There has been progress in BLM moving past protest and becoming proactive in political activity. During the election year the group helped organize a serious dialogue that developed a political platform advocating an array of policies on issues that impact black lives.⁷¹ There was also the development of educational materials for syllabi that could be used in school and university curricula.⁷²

The civil rights movement started in the churches, while BLM has not operated from within the historic heart of African American life, the black churches.⁷³ With regard to the Catholic community, it seems “the movement does not give much thought to the Catholic Church. Movement supporters assume the church does not give much thought to them either.”⁷⁴ According to Bishop Edward Braxton, the impression BLM members have is that the Catholic community is largely white and conservative. That impression may only solidify since the majority of Catholics voted for Trump 52 percent to 45 percent, with white Catholics voting 60 percent in favor of the new president.⁷⁵

Still there needs to be an effort by the Catholic community to be a source of healing the racial divide rather than contributing to it. Jon Nilson has suggested, as plentiful data indicates, that there is ignorance among the white population about the continuing disadvantages that beset many black Americans. What is needed is education and American Catholics have a recent model that may be useful to resurrect. “Why not conduct the kind of public, collaborative investigation into the state of race relations today that the US bishops did in writing their pastoral letters” on peace and economic justice back in the 1980s?⁷⁶

Nilson notes that besides the publication of their insightful letters, the bishops stimulated discussion within the church by the process they adopted. Their approach was not warmly received by John Paul II or then Cardinal Josef Ratzinger. In the era of Francis, however, it is likely to be a different story. So why not make the effort, given the racial divide intensified by the electoral season? In July of last year Archbishop

70. Jelani Cobb, “The Matter of Black Lives,” *New Yorker*, March 14, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>.

71. “Platform,” *The Movement for Black Lives*, <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>.

72. “Black Lives Matter Fall 2016 Syllabus,” *Black Lives Matter Syllabus*, <http://www.black-livesmattersyllabus.com/fall2016/>.

73. Emma Green, “Black Activism, Unchurched,” *The Atlantic*, March 22, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/black-activism-baltimore-black-church/474822/>.

74. Edward Braxton, “Bridging a Racial Divide,” *America*, May 16, 2016, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/bridging-racial-divide>.

75. Gregory Smith and Jessica Martinez, “How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis,” *Fact Tank* (blog), *Pew Research Center*, November 9, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

76. Jon Nilson, “Last Word: Black Lives, White Catholics,” *Commonweal*, May 18, 2016, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/last-word-black-lives-white-catholics>.

Wilton Gregory was appointed chair of a new task force to help the bishops engage the pastoral challenges stemming from the tragic summertime shootings. Perhaps the task force could morph into a committee charged with producing a pastoral letter, or at least call for the creation of such a committee.⁷⁷

Divisions of race and class are among the most obvious and crucial for our nation to confront but they hardly exhaust the obstacles to national unity. One of the other major divides that was highlighted in the presidential campaign was between supporters and opponents of immigration, with undocumented migrants being an especially sore point.⁷⁸ There were also the divisions within US society over questions sometimes grouped under the rubric of “culture wars.” Without dismissing the significance of public policy around abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, treatment of sexual minorities, and religious freedom, it does not seem these topics had the same traction that they had in previous elections. In polling about the political saliency of issues in the electoral campaign abortion did not rate in the top ten for importance. Yet a greater number of Clinton supporters, presumably wishing even greater access to abortion, rated it as very important compared to Trump supporters, presumably wishing tighter restrictions.⁷⁹

Religious freedom, a concern promoted by the Catholic bishops, evangelical leaders, and organizations like the Becket Fund, never seemed to be of great concern to most Americans. This was true even when Trump as a candidate raised the issue of a religious test for immigration, aimed at Muslims. Although our bishops were concerned about contraceptive exemptions for Catholic organizations’ health-care plans, they appeared lamentably less interested in the issue of religious freedom for Muslims.

77. A brief and thoughtful reflection by another white theologian inspired by the racial incidents of last summer is Charles Curran, “Facing Up to Privilege Requires Conversion,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 18, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/facing-privilege-requires-conversion>. See also Matthew Cressler, “What White Catholics Owe Black Americans,” *Slate*, September 2, 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2016/09/georgetown_s_reparations_are_to_be_commended_but_catholics_still_owe_black.html, occasioned by the controversy at Georgetown University over its connection with Jesuit slaveholding.

78. Several recent and upcoming publications by Catholic scholars provide helpful perspectives on immigration, refugees, and internally displaced persons. See Kristin Heyer and Mark Potter, “From Exclusion to Engagement across Borders: Justice through Immigrants’ Participation,” and Rene Micallef, “Porous Borders, Priority Rules, and the Virtue of Hospitality,” both in Kevin Ahearn et al., eds., *Public Theology and the Global Common Good* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016); David Hollenbach, “Borders and Duties to the Displaced: Ethical Perspectives on the Refugee Protection System,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 4 (2016) 148–65, doi:10.14240/jmhs.v4i3.66. Also see Hollenbach, *Humanity in Crisis: Ethical and Religious Response to People Displaced by War* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, forthcoming).

79. *2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread Dissatisfaction* (Pew Research Center, July 7, 2016) 5, <http://www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/2016-campaign-strong-interest-widespread-dissatisfaction/>.

Moving Forward

The United States is a divided country led by a new president who did not win the popular vote, though he comfortably won an electoral college majority. His mandate was unclear, as he assumed office with just over 25 percent of eligible voters casting a ballot in support of him,⁸⁰ and even those who voted for him did not agree with his views. He had been nominated by winning about 9 percent of the population.⁸¹ Many people who backed Trump dismissed his more extreme statements—quitting NATO, revising the Iran nuclear deal, appointing a special prosecutor to investigate Hillary Clinton, building a wall on the Mexican border, deporting millions of people—as so much electioneering rhetoric.⁸²

Will Trump wind up being a more conventional Republican or will his populist style be translated into a substantive program? The GOP House and Senate members are far more ideologically committed than Trump to a certain vision of governance. House Speaker Paul Ryan indicated right after the election that he hoped to use his party's control of the White House and Congress to push through a program of tax and budget cuts. Trump favored tax cuts but he coupled that with promises to fund significant infrastructure projects that would create new jobs. Yet, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell stated that infrastructure spending was not a priority. Trump might find the Democrats more supportive of that part of his agenda. Senator Elizabeth Warren has stated that she and other progressives would work with Trump on “regulating banks, protecting Social Security, opposing trade deals, college affordability, and rebuilding infrastructure.”⁸³ Will Trump attempt to forge a populist agenda across party lines, taking on his own party's congressional leaders, or will he go the way of more establishment Republicans? His Vice President Mike Pence may push that he be more conventional.

Never having held any political office previously, there is no past track record to assess what Trump will do, and his shifting positions on issues such as abortion or the Iraq war leave one unsure as to whether his campaign statements are reliable guides. In a speech at Gettysburg, Trump listed what he would do in his first hundred days.

80. Millennials were especially opposed to Trump, with Clinton beating him in that age cohort by 55 percent to 37 percent. In addition to people who cast votes for candidates other than Trump, more than 90 million eligible voters did not go to the polls. Only 56.8 percent of the eligible population voted.

81. Alicia Parlapiano and Adam Pearce, “Only 9% of Americans Chose Trump and Clinton as the Nominees,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/01/us/elections/nine-percent-of-america-selected-trump-and-clinton.html>.

82. “The press takes him literally, but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally.” Salena Zito, “Taking Trump Seriously, Not Literally,” *The Atlantic*, September 23, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/trump-makes-his-case-in-pittsburgh/501335/>.

83. Annie Linskey, “Warren Charting a Course for the Left,” *Boston Globe*, November 11, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2016/11/10/elizabeth-warren-charts-course-for-left-donald-trump-washington/FMnXwQ4WcjRl3rsjnzO7IK/story.html>.

Among his priorities was “draining the swamp” of special interest collusion in the national capital by proposing a constitutional amendment for term limits on Congress and imposing a five-year ban on White House or Congressional officials becoming lobbyists after leaving office.⁸⁴ Yet Trump has appointed a number of lobbyists to key positions on his transition teams, including those working on energy, agriculture, and the EPA. An assessment of Trump’s economic aims questions whether it is possible to implement tax cuts for the wealthy, increase military spending, and fund a major infrastructure initiative sufficient to employ significant numbers of workers without creating a serious increase in the national debt.

What many white working-class people really want from a Trump presidency is a clear and accessible path toward a middle-class life. That is the expectation many of them had when growing up and which has become far harder to reach and maintain than they imagined. As noted earlier, this will require far more than getting tough on trade and outsourcing. It will entail a significant reform of our educational system for younger people, job training, and employment transition policies for older workers, grappling with the concerns of the “precariat” and dealing with automation. Those are all major tasks and ones that cannot be resolved quickly.

The resentment and anger to be found in the populist mood also points toward people’s desire for a sense of being heard, of having their interests matter to the political elites. This election was, in part, about people who felt marginalized and ignored taking over a major political party from the hands of the corporate establishment. People who felt as if they were Trump’s “forgotten man or woman” found a voice and vote to counter people who were more fortunate and privileged. There was something good in that even if the choice of leader for the movement may prove to be deeply unwise.

Should Trump fail, and it is likely that he will disappoint the working class, will he search out a new set of scapegoats? Will those who placed their faith in Trump’s ability to get things done for them continue to support him if he turns into just another politician who sold a message that he will not or cannot implement? Will there be a search for another populist figure and will this come from the left or right of the political spectrum? Or will the anger and activism we witnessed in 2016 lead to cynicism and despair among workers who voted for Trump? They are the ones who pushed their vulnerabilities to the foreground of the national agenda. It is very uncertain whether they will like what happens in a Trump presidency. Those who voted for Trump in the hope of asserting populism championing the working class may find that served only to provide cover for those who wished for Trump as representative of a populism of ethnic nationalism.

Trump may attempt to bring about big changes, because that is what he promised, but no president can simply work his will on the rest of Washington, not to mention state houses and foreign capitals. A divided nation requires strategies that create

84. Amita Kelly and Barbara Sprunt, “Here Is What Donald Trump Wants to Do In His First 100 Days,” *National Public Radio*, November 9, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/09/501451368/here-is-what-donald-trump-wants-to-do-in-his-first-100-days>.

consensus through dialogue and inclusion. An interdependent world needs a strategy for globalized solidarity not unilateral agendas and activity. There is much in the perspective of Catholic social teaching that might serve as a corrective to Trump's foreign as well as domestic policy.

When Pope Francis addressed the joint session of the US Congress, he reminded his audience, "You are called to defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good, for this is the chief aim of all politics."⁸⁵ He went on to say that "building a future of freedom requires love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity."⁸⁶ Appealing to our nation's "historical memory," Francis entered into dialogue with his audience through the legacy of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton. It was a call for a defense of liberty that allows each and every person to enjoy their full rights, that seeks justice for all and especially the oppressed, and that promotes dialogue as the way toward peace.

Sadly, as Bishop Robert McElroy wrote just five months later, "the contrast between the beautiful vision of politics that Pope Francis presented to the United States and the political campaigns that have unfolded in the past several months could not be more heartbreaking."⁸⁷ McElroy wisely noted that the foundation for Catholic political engagement is not "any one issue or set of issues but rather . . . a process of spiritual and moral conversion about the very nature of politics itself."⁸⁸ The spiritual conversion needed is to embrace solidarity and turn away from a tribalism that narrows our concern to one class or race or religious identity. Such a conversion entails the development of civic virtues such as the founding generation of Americans proposed. For Hamilton, Jefferson, Jay, Madison, and others, the project of being self-governing demanded certain qualities of character, not least a willingness to sacrifice for the common good.⁸⁹

The moral conversion McElroy calls for is to the common good, which he describes as "the set of social conditions at a given historical moment that will best allow all people in a society to attain their fulfillment as individuals and groups."⁹⁰ He goes on to note five dimensions to Catholic teaching about the political common good. First, it

85. Pope Francis, Address of the Holy Father (homily, United States Congress, Washington, D.C., September 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Robert McElroy, "The Greatness of a Nation," *America*, February 15, 2016, <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/greatness-nation>.

88. *Ibid.*

89. In a series of blog posts James Keenan enumerated those virtues he sees as requisite for enhancing public life. See "Virtues for Civil Discourse: Solidarity," *dotCommonweal*, July 23, 2016, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/virtues-civil-discourse-solidarity>. This link is to the sixth and final of Keenan's posts, which contains links for his earlier comments.

90. McElroy, "The Greatness of a Nation."

has to do with those elements of social life that properly are the work of government. Second, it is dynamic and takes into account the conditions and needs of the historical moment, for example immigration policy at a time of refugee crisis and huge migrant numbers. Third, the teaching is subject to development of doctrine as structural change evokes new insights, for example industrialization and labor rights. Fourth, globalization pushes us to move beyond the domestic common good to see its global nature. And, fifth, increasingly the political common good must be focused on the needs of the most vulnerable.⁹¹

McElroy's rich essay goes on to address setting priorities and linkages between issues. What I wish to emphasize, however, is his plea for the formulation of a Catholic political imagination. Joseph Bernadin attempted to do that with his call for a consistent ethic of life using the metaphor of a seamless garment. The project has been adopted by a number of Catholics but has not been able to steer the conversation within the church, no less the wider public. Perhaps another of Bernadin's ideas ought to be resurrected, his Common Ground Initiative, but expanded beyond an ecclesial audience to our political society. For many Americans the very idea that there is common ground is doubtful. Our pessimism about a particular candidate or issue is less worrisome than the pessimism that our politics is incapable of articulating a common good.

It has been said that democracies do not begin with elections but with public conversations. The nation desperately needs to have public conversations about things that truly matter: climate change, economic inequality, the nature of work, race relations, the future we want for our children. Perhaps Hochschild's approach is what is needed. We need to get to know people who are unlike us, to enter into the lives of others so that we come to know the worlds they inhabit. Such efforts at conversation will not end up with consensus on every vital matter but they may permit us to see the other person not as an enemy, a threat, someone weird, foolish, or unworthy of attention. As a nation we need to rebuild a sense of ourselves as one people, one electorate that despite its differences remains one nation. Convening and hosting such conversations is the sort of activity that churches and schools, along with other public institutions, can facilitate. To borrow once more from Robert McElroy, what is needed is to move from a culture of grievance to a culture of solidarity, which entails rejecting the "habit in our political culture of attributing all differences of opinion to ignorance or malice."⁹²

Pope Francis spoke to Congress of the need to engage in dialogue, to retrieve what is vital in the historical memory of the country. We cannot find or promote a common good through the imposition of any one political philosophy or agenda. The common good, the very *raison d'être* of government, according to Catholic social teaching, must be a project that marginalizes no individual or group but engages each citizen in

91. Ibid.

92. Robert McElroy, "The Healing of a Nation" (lecture, Center for Catholic Thought and Culture, University of San Diego, November 1, 2016). These remarks were an expanded version of his article in *America* cited above.

the work of democratic self-governance. This is the hope that people of good will must continue to hold after a divisive and dispiriting electoral process.

The dramatist turned politician Vaclav Havel distinguished between hope and optimism. “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”⁹³ To engage in a culture of dialogue and encounter with others different than ourselves may not lead to a healthier United States, but so much in the past election reminds us that we have a dysfunctional political system. Efforts to repair it are meaningful actions even if we have no certainty of the outcome.

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93. Vaclav Havel, “Never Hope against Hope,” *Esquire*, October 1993, <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a12135/vaclav-havel-hope-6619552/>.