



(Unsplash/Robin Jonathan Deutsch)



by Michael Sean Winters

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@michaelswinters](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

November 4, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

We do not know whom the American people will choose to lead the country in tomorrow's election. We do know that half the country will love the choice and the other half will hate it. How should we, as Catholics, whose shared baptismal identity is deeper than any partisan affiliation, help unite the country when it is done?

[In his Spiritual Exercises](#), St. Ignatius famously states, "In order that both he who is giving the Spiritual Exercises, and he who is receiving them, may more help and benefit themselves, let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save his neighbor's proposition than to condemn it." That is, can we place the best possible construction on a vote that differs from our own?

Let's start with the harder case: Donald Trump. The essence of his political appeal is a rejection of elites and of elite attitudes, especially condescension towards the attitudes of working-class voters.

The concern of working-class voters has been the fear that cultural elites want to reshape society in ways that contradict values they think are important and without which they fear society will be destabilized. In this worldview, it is not just that abortion is wrong, but that it is totemic, it represents the rejection of family and natural bonds in favor of personal autonomy. Gay rights, the push for legalization of certain drugs, the popularity of revisionist histories that paint American history as a catalog of crime, these all fed the narrative that the elites did not think like working people.



A combination photo shows Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump speaking during a campaign rally in Atlanta Aug. 3, and Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris speaking during a campaign event in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Aug. 7. (OSV News/Umit Bektas/Erica Dischino, Reuters)

In his book, [*Democracy and Solidarity: On the Cultural Roots of America's Political Crisis*](#), James Davison Hunter argues that what put these populist impulses over the edge was the 2008 economic meltdown.

"Members of the highly-educated, professional upper-middle class were certainly surprised, even shaken, by the economic contraction," Hunter wrote. "They experienced a paper loss in wealth from the drop in the markets, but relatively few were traumatized by its harshest effects — indeed, as the stock market reemerged and resumed its bullish ways in the subsequent decade, the prosperity of the professional and managerial class improved. Not so for those in the less well-educated, nonprofessional middle, lower middle and working class who, through unemployment, foreclosure, and the loss of opportunity took the full impact of the economic collapse on the chin."

This combination of cultural fear with economic desperation gave birth to the tea party movement. Trump is the culmination and aggravator of something that had begun long before.

Advertisement

Can anyone truthfully believe that conservative, working-class people are entirely wrong in their concern about the effects of jettisoning traditional cultural norms?

Yes, cultures change. Yes, one person's fear is another person's emancipation. But can we deny that every ostensibly positive change comes with a cost? Can we admit that fears about family breakdown are real, even while we disagree about the cultural sources of those breakdowns? Can anyone defend bailing out banks but not working-class homeowners during the 2008 crisis?

So, if you are supporting Vice President Kamala Harris, and your neighbor is supporting former President Trump and he wins, try and place these or other sympathetic constructions on your neighbor's point of view, congratulate him, and let's hope Trump is not as bad as many of us fear he will be.

For me it is much easier to make the best possible case for supporting Harris: She will not subvert the U.S. Constitution.



An American flag frames a cross atop Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Cottonwood, Arizona, on Oct. 29, 2024. The parish hall of the church will be a polling station for voters in the Nov. 5 election. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

Our conservative Catholic friends raise serious objections. Yes, Harris has shown no appetite for questioning the elite opinions that are at the root of the culture wars. Yes, she routinely displays a professional politician's grating rhetorical contortions. Yes, her view of religious freedom is narrow, but those issues are resolved in the courts these days. Yes, her opinion on abortion is ghastly and her complete erasure of even a hint of moral significance being accorded to the unborn child is intellectually and morally repugnant.

Those are the things to acknowledge to someone skeptical about Harris, but they pale compared to the constitutional issue.

There are many positive reasons to be enthusiastic about Harris. During the campaign she has shown a pragmatic sensibility that might actually accomplish a great deal for the American people. She is obviously intelligent and decent. Harris seems to have figured out how to assemble a good team, one of the most important qualities in a president and one [she had not mastered](#) when she ran for president the first time in 2020.

We hope Harris' four years at Joe Biden's side helped inoculate her from neoliberal economics. Her political rise was furthered with [strong support from Silicon Valley billionaires](#). The last four years, she has seen how strengthening unions and focusing on working-class people leads to an economy that is more economically and politically sustainable than the neoliberal economic policies embraced by both parties for 40 years.

Need it be mentioned that our nation is long past due for electing a woman to the highest office in the land?

So, if you are a Trump supporter and your neighbor likes Harris and she wins, keep these thoughts in mind when you offer congratulations.

[In his first inaugural address](#), Abraham Lincoln closed with words we need to hear anew today:

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. [View the full series.](#)