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The Tablet is an independent Catholic weekly journal that has been published for an astonishing 180 years without interruption. It is allied with the bishops of the UK and generally has enjoyed a mutually enriching relationship with all varieties of Catholics including the hierarchy, but it is not subject to any kind of control by the hierarchy.

The UK suffers from the disease of clericalism as we do but in a far less damaging manner at least as I understand it, education and an appreciation of the history of theology and pronounced wholistic care for priests and bishops by other priests and bishops, perhaps, because of the National Health Service, makes treatment and evaluation of the psycho/spiritual health of the individual cleric more normal and more available and less expensive.

The UK also recognizes loneliness and the symptoms of loneliness as a serious health issue while in our country loneliness is more often a source of shame than a symptom of a culture out of balance.

The UK isn't perfect, but the Church seems to function with greater confidence in its mission and is less fractured over ideologies than the Catholic Church in our country.

In the August 15-22 issue there is an article entitled, "Dark arts in pursuit of the seat of Peter. "

It is concerned with two books that are circulating among certain groups of Catholics and lots of members of the clergy aimed at undermining the papacy of Pope Francis and advancing the cause of a careful selection of his successor so that we do not get another pope like him.

The enthusiasm for this sad project and an awful lot of the money appears to come from American Catholic business men who, I can only observe, are terribly threatened by the ideas of compassion and love that Pope Francis teaches particularly in his concern and moral teachings that critique their ideas and beliefs and practices that impinge directly on capitalism and the functioning of the economy.

They seemingly do not like that Francis talks about the grave conditions that income and economic inequality creates now but especially as we move toward the future. I doubt that they are very happy with the inclusiveness that Pope Francis talks about regarding women and other groups that are not identified as straight white men.

Directly related to this is the fact that Pope Francis has placed the earth and all of the resources of the earth including and especially the human person in the front and center of Catholic moral teaching and preaching not endorsing the preferred sexual/reproductive agenda popular in vocal Catholic groups in this country.

I cannot help but be saddened at the very self-conscious clericalism so very apparent in these developments and the official Catholic response to the Covid 19 pandemic with all of the consequences of that and the very idiosyncratic response to the moral issues that are raised as the nation tries to deal with all of the very complex, deeply personal, and divided response to our national recognition of systemic racism in law enforcement (note I say law enforcement and not law enforcement personnel, as this is not simply a police issue but a longstanding endemic condition that involves every one of us).

But, the almost non-response by Catholic leadership with no real presence or guidance in these right to life issues is in marked contrast to the response by Catholic leadership to other select questions and issues that are deemed to be essential to a faithful Catholic/ Christian life.

Going forward, I am increasingly unconvinced that we will simply “reopen” or “return” to our life that we left behind early last March. There is going to be a tremendous need for individual and community healing with one another given the personal stress and spiritual injury we are experiencing and the polarizing and politicizing of the disease.

Hard work and serious study are called for as we emerge into whatever a post-pandemic world will look like including a post pandemic parish.

I think Catholic clergy and Catholic leadership should be preparing for a gentle invitation to parish life and avoid at all costs the angry, judgmental tone of disapproval of those who are not at all comfortable with any kind of return to Mass.

They have a legitimacy beyond question in their concerns for their own lives and should not be victims of any kind of bullying and I think we have to get used to the fact that there will be many people, likely, to have decided to get on with their lives without any apparent need for a parish affiliation.

It is embarrassing to me to watch these displays of outrage and dissent by Catholic leaders who are simply asked to promote the public health of all, with capacity and presence protocols, as if being expected to care for your neighbor is an injustice.

Remember, we aren't through with this disease yet and the future is the future not a romantic version of the past.