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Can Sept. 11, 2011 lead to bipartisanship?

Mike Sweitzer-Beckman | Sep. 15, 2011

Last Sunday marked the 10-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks that killed thousands of Americans in Manhattan, at the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, PA. In a rare show of bipartisanship, former President George W. Bush and his successor, President Barack Obama, gathered together for a memorial service at Ground Zero in New York City on the 10-year anniversary.

Both presidencies have been shaped by the events from ten years ago.

This bipartisanship is unique, given all the positioning going on around the debt crisis. As Jesuit Fr. John Kavanaugh notes in his recent column in *America* magazine, ?Economic Engimas? [1]:

> Perhaps the game analogy does not best apply, in the end. At least games have rules and logic in their procedures. In politics today, there seems to be little rationality. The president, having voted against raising the debt ceiling during the Bush administration, is now asking the Republicans to vote in favor of it. The Republicans, having done it multiple times during the Bush administration now refuse to do it for Obama.
>
> Hardened partisans like Representative Walsh accuse the president of bankrupting our economy in three years, although anyone who looks at the evidence realizes that a rash rush to deregulation in 1999, an unneeded ?temporary? Bush tax cut, two trillion-dollar wars, a sweetheart, unmonitored deal with drug companies and a housing collapse all occurred before Obama took office.
>
> The president is accused of radical economic policies even though many of his advisors are hold-overs from the previous administration or transplants from Wall Street.

What should the American people expect of our elected officials? Is it possible to be more on the same page, like Bush and Obama were this past Sunday? Or once the Sabbath is over, should we expect our politicians to go back to the game of business as usual, pandering and positioning their parties for the 2012 elections?

I think we can expect the former, and I hope that our elected officials can try something different to get there.

On August 21, *The New York Times* ran a piece called ?If I Were President,? [2]where they asked a range of people what they might do if they were elected to the country?s top job.

Benedictine Sr. Mary David Walgenbach, prioress at Holy Wisdom Monastery [3], called for two new courses of action for our elected officials: ?I would require members of Congress to participate in a weeklong workshop on dialogue, negotiation and compromise before the next session. All sessions would begin with 10 minutes of silence.?

Her point-of-view has gotten some notice [4] from the president of the National Peace Corps Association, as

well as a former Capitol Hill CBS News Correspondent.

Similarly, the National Football League is commemorating the anniversary this Sunday through pregame tributes and a special ?NFL 9/11? logo that will be placed on every playing field and on every player?s uniform.

Dave Zirin critiques these moves in his piece ?The NFL Will Remember 9/11 in All the Wrong Ways? [5] in *The Nation*.

Zirin spoke with Rory Fanning, who served with former NFL player Pat Tillman, who died in a friendly fire accident in 2004, as a U.S. Army Ranger. Fanning has turned into an antiwar activist and walked across the country in memory of Tillman.

What does Fanning think the NFL should do? Similar to Walgenbach, he said, ?I would ask the NFL for an hour of silence for the hundreds of thousands killed after 9/11 in recognition of the criminally disproportionate response to that day.?

It is times like these that the monastic wings of our religious tradition can come alive. There are no easy answers for what happened ten years ago, nor with how to deal with the response

As is outlined in the Rule of Benedict, listening is the first and foremost quality for leadership. Here?s hoping that sagacious wisdom from 1,500 years back will be appreciated by our world leaders.

[Mike Sweitzer-Beckman helped launch the blog http://www.youngadultcatholics-blog.com/ [6] in 2008. He also blogs at http://sweitman-solutions.com/ [7] about technology.]

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