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It has been a while since I have waded into political waters here at Distinctly Catholic. And a lot has happened.

President Donald Trump blamed Jay Powell, whom Trump nominated to head the Federal Reserve last year, for General Motors' decision to close five plants and lay off 14,000 workers.

Trump refused to blame humans for causing climate change, denying a frightening report issued by his own administration.

Trump blamed the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, for "bedlam, chaos, injury and death" after a federal district judge, not an appellate judge, blocked his effort to prevent immigrants from applying for asylum.

Trump refused to blame the Saudi government, that is to say Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the brutal murder of U.S. resident and journalist Jamal Khashoggi, even though the CIA has determined the Saudi government was obviously at fault.

Do you see a pattern? Not since second grade has any of us encountered someone so completely unwilling to accept responsibility for anything at any time and on any subject. What is more, his eagerness to blame someone, anyone, for every challenge or difficulty is a characteristic thoroughly unique in the history of the presidency for being so devoid of complexity.

The president's approach to the world is essentially reptilian. He looks at the world and sees only personal threats and personal non-threats. He conflates his sense of his own fortunes with those of the country to a degree never witnessed in a democracy. Trump's aversion to reason gives Humean political thought a bad name.

I understand that presidents have long taken a, shall we say, complicated approach to responsibility. In 2007, after President George W. Bush gave a speech that simultaneously sought to accept, divert and redirect responsibility for the problems in the war effort in Iraq, David Greenberg offered a brilliant analysis in The New York Times on the subject of presidential mea culpas. John Kennedy was really not to blame for the Bay of Pigs, but he had to accept responsibility or look weak. Ronald

Reagan seemed clueless and cloudy when he accepted technical but not moral responsibility for the Iran-Contra fiasco.

Richard Nixon comes closest to Trump: Nixon's conspiratorial mind blamed everyone on the planet for his Watergate woes, except of course himself, until we got the tapes that proved he had been the spider at the center of the web all along. But, with Nixon, you may have been dealing with a crook, but he was an adult crook, one who, at times, was capable of far-reaching and even enlightened public policy and who cared about issues and ideas.

With Trump, his sense of irresponsibility is matched by a juvenile concern for appearances and image, with little or no sense that there is any depth of analysis or even awareness. Nixon read books. Trump reads his own gut.

Political leadership must be sustained, to be sure, even when a political figure makes a mistake. They must take moral responsibility, but do so in a way that helps replenish the moral capital of their office, if not themselves, if they are to truly serve the commonwealth. There was a certain moral repugnance in watching Attorney General Janet Reno "take responsibility" for the decision to raid the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, a raid that resulted in the deaths of 76 people, without also tendering her resignation. Politicians of both parties and both genders have done the same.

In Britain, their understanding of responsible government means that if something terrible happens on your watch, you resign. There are always many reasons why, for example, a military endeavor miscarries, or a policy decision yields an unexpected and unintended result that is catastrophic. It is enough that it happens on your watch to trigger your resignation.

I suspect the Brits' form of cabinet government has kept this more morally serious approach vibrant, even if for selfish reasons: The splinters and flames from the wreck tend to follow the officer of state who has resigned out the door.

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Regular readers know that I like to turn to history for analogies and quotations that I find apposite. Monday, I used a 1941 quote from Churchill about military strategy to discuss ecclesial differences, and I thought the quote was exactly on point. But when

trying to analyze Trump, my history books seem to be useless. Perhaps I need to read up on someone like Ivan the Terrible.

In the English-speaking world, you must go back to the latter years of the reign of Queen Anne, when Robert Harley and Abigail Masham contrived to direct the queen's passions, to find a political regime in which caprice figured so prominently. And even Queen Anne, Stuart though she was and mindful of her prerogatives, even she knew there were constitutional limits her whims could not pull down.

Trump's caprice is bolstered by his ignorance. He really does not seem to have grasped, for example, that just because he gets to hire and fire the attorney general does not mean that the attorney general works for him the way, say, a butler at Trump Tower works for him. His appointment of Matthew Whitaker as the acting attorney general is so bizarre, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Trump might have thought no one would notice the man's lack of credentials and conflicts of interest: Whitaker could get in the corner office, shut down the Mueller probe, and all would be well.

Certainly, Trump's petulance with the press indicates the degree to which he bristles at adult supervision, but he will learn, he will be made to learn, as other presidents and politicians have learned: A person's right to privacy is directly and inversely related to the amount of power he or she is given by the American people.

It is clear the Mueller probe is reaching its climax. In January, the president will have to contend with a hostile chamber in Congress armed with subpoena power. How will he handle all this? History offers no clues.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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