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2012 election failure by elite media

Tom Gallagher | Dec. 12, 2012 NCR Today

A compelling post-mortem election analysis has been produced by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, two of the most respected political thinkers in Washington, D.C. Here's a snapshot of their observations, from The Huffington Post [1]:

> But according to longtime political observers Thomas Mann [2] and Norman Ornstein [3], campaign coverage in 2012 was a particularly calamitous failure, almost entirely missing the single biggest story of the race: Namely, the radical right-wing, off-the-rails lurch of the Republican Party, both in terms of its agenda and its relationship to the truth.
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> Mann and Ornstein are two longtime centrist Washington fixtures who earlier this year dramatically rejected the strictures of false equivalency that bind so much of the capital's media elite and publicly concluded [4] that GOP leaders have become "ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."
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> The 2012 campaign further proved their point, they both said in recent interviews. It also exposed how fabulists and liars can exploit the elite media's fear of being seen as taking sides.

For Catholics, the Mann-Ornstein analysis implicates the U.S. bishops, especially the most vocal ones. Let me explain.

The historic model of bishops' engagement in national politics was a careful attempt to appear nonpartisan, to be measured and to engage both parties in addressing important issues of the day. This was the "above-the-fray" form of engagement. Those days are long gone.

This election cycle has introduced a new normal for the U.S. bishops, marked by a vocal and public relationship with the Republican Party and its tea party wing. This reality is combined with critical statements against President Barack Obama and Democrats.

The Mann-Ornstein criticism of the elite media is that they were so focused on being "fair and balanced" that they failed to demand evidence-based analysis that could withstand a modest amount of questioning. They allowed falsehoods and lies to be treated on equal footing to evidence-based statements.

With the U.S. bishops' support of Republicans and the tea party, they are not now able to hold Republicans accountable for their "off-the-rails" statements and policies.

When blatant misstatements about Catholic social teaching were applied in the public square by Republicans, for example, the U.S. bishops stood by and watched. At best, the flag of prudential judgment was rushed up the flag pole or "sweet nothings" were offered in public about the Catholicity of the Republican rather than addressing the falsehood with critical analysis. It took theologians and academics to present the nuanced but

clear analysis rebutting the Republicans.

Much needs to be done to bring our political discourse, both in the church and in the public square, back to where truth matters, where evidence backs up a position, where lies and falsehoods are identified and corrected, and then ignored.

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Links:
[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-froomkin/republican-lies-2012-election_b_2258586.html
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