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Maybe we can all get along

Robert McClory | Feb. 6, 2013 NCR Today

Last week I posted a blog [1], wondering if certain left and right commenters might consider ceasing to batter each other with abusive and insulting language. Could we try to understand, even respect a reader who doesn't agree with a deeply held position of another? I'm happy to report that among the responses, many agreed verbal bar-room tactics only make the situation worse. Here are excerpts from a few who not only agreed but carried the conversation further.

This, slightly edited, comes from justmaybe:

> "Can we disagree -- and be disagreed with -- without an inherent mandate that one of us be found un-Catholic at the end of the argument? Maybe we all are very Catholic on the basics, and are being childish and anti-intellectual by insisting on winning on a scoreboard where the Credo and the Conscience aren't even relevant.
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> "The liturgy, pelvic issues, who's in charge, gender differences, hierarchy vs laity and vice versa, and so much more can be topics for debate but not for divorce. Hans Kung and Bill Donohue, Charles Curran and George Weigel, Garry Wills and Michael Sean Winters, the USCCB and the LCWR, the priests and the laity, the celibate and the married, the parents of one and the parents of nine, the faculty of Ave Maria and the faculty of Notre Dame, the women and the men, gay and straight----------are all good Catholics until someone says they aren't!!"

dennism502 suggests we get back to the good old rules of rhetoric:

> "it is possible to disagree with respect? Yes, but sometimes it is very difficult, particularly when the differing opinion does not appear to be respectful. Is that an excuse? The art of 'rhetoric' has been around for millenia, and not surprisingly. It is not only an art, but a game, a tool, a hammer a disguise and a weapon. It is not only studied as with a rhetorician -- like say a politician, preacher, salesman; some come to it naturally, we all us it sometimes, somehow. So we should not be surprised that we bristle when we sense a ploy, a disguised innuendo, an unctuous statement that overlays a barely hidden sneer. Then there is the venomous attack that ignores the point but attaches a label -- like a target -- and shoots at the label as if it demolishes the point or reduces it to garbage. Of course there is the 'hijack' that inevitably draws a crowd, drags the conversation, not only away, but downwards."

John David wonders if we're hard-wired to respond a certain way:

> "I have come to believe that there is a link to our chemistry to how we see so many of these issues ...
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> "I had a friend who has always been very, very strident in his political positions. One time he made the statement to me that it is he who is open to change, as he once was a liberal and is now a conservative. To which I responded; "When you were a Liberal you had scorn for the other side, constantly made fun of them and their beliefs, constantly pointed a finger at them and hurled insults. Now you are a

> Conservative and you have scorn for the other side, constantly make fun of them and their beliefs, constantly point a finger, and hurl insults, so I am not seeing how it is that you have changed."
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> "It seems that he is wired to see the world thru a good/bad, right/wrong paradigm and he takes that with him no matter what side of the ideological divide he is on. And he may be attracted to whichever side is more successful in promoted this clear cut paradigm (when he was a Liberal, it was the liberals who were more successful in promoting this right/wrong paradigm than the conservatives were. When that reversed, he became a conservative)."

And Anonymous J responds about the hard-wiring issue, even providing a link to a very incisive article on the subject:

> "I actually think it's somewhat valuable, and could perhaps explain to some degree why folks are the way they are. Obviously there are many other factors that influence ones perspective, but the extensive use in the Conference of DNA sequencing is interesting! See what you think!
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> http://dateline.ucdavis.edu/dl_detail.lasso?id=10059http://dateline.ucdavis.edu/dl_detail.lasso?id=10059 [2]
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> "As Hibbing explained, geneticists who study behavior and personality have known for 30 years that genes play a large role in people's instinctive emotional responses to certain issues, their social temperament. Hibbing and his fellow researchers take that one step further, suggesting that genes prime people to respond cautiously -- conservatively -- or openly -- liberally -- to political issues.
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> "When Hibbing's research appeared in 2005, it earned placement in the profession's premier journal, The American Political Science Review, and in-depth coverage by The New York Times, FOX News and MSNBC, among other media outlets."

This doesn't really solve the original problem but may stimulate responders and bloggers to think about the way we think, why reactions tend to be so polarized and what we can do about it. My thanks to all who weighed in so respectfully on the subject.

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