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Poll: confidence in religion declines as confidence in military rises

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NCR Today

A few days back, Charles M. Blow's *New York Times* column "A Nation Divided Against Itself" included the following statistic among many others illustrating how the United States is divided:

According to Gallup, the percentage of Americans saying that they have quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in "the church or organized religion" went from 68 percent in 1975 to 48 percent in 2013. Over the same period, those expressing the same amount of confidence in the military has gone from 58 percent to 76 percent.

As a nation, we are more confident in the military and less confident in organized religion than we were 40 years ago. This is troubling news. What does it mean? How do we unpack it? What do we make of it?

When I consider my Catholic experience, what first comes to my mind is that we know today our clergy have feet of clay. They are human, sinful, like us. That's a confidence killer.

Second, we don't go to confession much because -- as I have read, and it rings true to me -- we don't think contraception is a sin. This fundamental moral disagreement about what is a sin has shaken us as much as the knowledge that our priests are sinners.

Third, we disagree with our bishops about whether to build a new cathedral, close schools, eat meat on Fridays, participate in our geographical parish, assist at Latin Mass. It's a long, contradictory list. The authority of the church has weakened.

Meanwhile, military authority reigns supreme. The Joint Chiefs of Staff faced down half a dozen elected

women senators on the issue of chain of command. They are said to have bullied President Barack Obama into the surge. They have considerably more diplomatic assets at their command for interaction with foreign governments than the Department of State.

You've got to admire the Pentagon, if only grudgingly, for getting its way over and over. Those soldiers know how to wield authority. No internal contradictions there.

Maybe the problem with the Gallup poll is that word "confidence." Yes, I am more confident that the military will achieve its goals than the church because the military goals are clearer and more attainable. The church's goals are pretty unattainable: the beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, "Love one another." I've set my sights on these goals, but I don't have much confidence I will attain them any more or less than the clergy. Sadly, the Department of Defense does not have peace on Earth as one of its goals.

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