Opinion



Cardinal Bernard Law is pictured in 1997 with children in Ecuador. Law, who had been one of the United States' most powerful and respected bishops until his legacy was blemished by the devastating sexual abuse of minors by priests in his Archdiocese of Boston, died early Dec. 20 in Rome at the age of 86. (CNS/The Pilot/Lisa Kessler)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Cardinal Bernard Law has died. He will be judged before history by his worst decisions, a standard by which none of us should like to be judged, but those decisions did more damage to the Catholic Church in the United States than any other by any prelate. I will try and remember the story of Cardinal Luis Aponte in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Hugo, needing priests to come with their cars to light up the airport because the airport still lacked electricity and Cardinal Law's plane was arriving with medical supplies and money. We commend him to our merciful God.

Two articles that make important and conflicting points about the sexual misconduct issue I wrote about yesterday. Ana Marie Cox argues that we should not fret about a lack of due process in the hounding of public figures and Ruth Marcus argues that we should. I tend to agree with Marcus that when there is an ethical inquiry going on, there is no reason to short-circuit it as a matter of justice; but Sen. Al Franken was forced out as a matter of politics, and that can happen to a politician.

And, relatedly, at Politico, David Greenberg warns against reading our current social mores into previous times, especially the impeachment of Bill Clinton. I am not sure I buy that we should be "agnostic" about the claims of sexual harassment against Clinton, but it is undoubtedly true that an historian must look at the decisions made through the lens of the values in play at the time, not subsequently. I think, however, that we should not dismiss the genius of Thomas Jefferson because he was a slaveholder in a slaveholding society, the men of his day knew slavery was wrong just as men who abused women when they thought it was socially acceptable to do so also knew it was wrong.

At Foreign Policy, Kori Schake says that if you grade Trump's national security strategy the way you would Olympic diving, the national security staff gets high scores for degree of difficulty, given the man they are working for, but that the dive, I mean strategy, still falls flat because there is no way to reconcile the president's views with America's interests.

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Finally, in the Washington Post, Charles Mathewes on the sorry state of white Christianity in America. (More on this next week in my year in review series.) The money quote:

> *When we've reached a place where good Christian folk think it's a matter of major theological principle not to sell pastries to gay people but are willing to give pedophiles a pass, I think it's safe to say that American Christianity today — white American Christianity in particular — is in a pretty sorry state.*

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

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