Opinion



by Michael Sean Winters

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @michaelswinters

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

April 17, 2018

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



Eunice Kennedy Shriver, a longtime advocate for children's health and disability issues, was a key founder of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; she is pictured March 3, 2008. (Wikimedia Commons/National Institutes of Health)

At The New Yorker, editor David Remnick interviews Ross Douthat about his new book on the pope. And, in The New York Times, Paul Elie authors the second most devastating review of Douthat's book. Brutal and deserved. The money quote:

> Left out is the fact that Catholics don't skirt the church's teaching on marriage just to make things easier for themselves; they say, "By what right do those child-abuse-indulging clerics tell me that my marriage is adulterous while twice-divorced, thrice-married Newt Gingrich is now a Catholic in good standing, living in Rome as the spouse of his ex-aide/girlfriend who is the United States ambassador to the Vatican?"

Bravo!

At ABC News, George Stephanopoulos' interview of James Comey is one of the outstanding interviews of our time, right up there with David Frost interviewing Nixon.

At RealClearPolitics, Peter Berkowitz writes on the vilification of Israel and how it is corrupting university culture. We can expect more of this in the weeks ahead as we get ready to mark the 70th anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 which was, in fact, one of the great achievements of modern civilization in the 20th century.

At The Guardian, Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Daniel Steinmetz Jenkins explore the resources of Christian democracy and whether or not these could serve as a bulwark against Trumpian populism. More on this later in the week.

At America magazine, the editors misunderstand the situation in Syria: There already is a war going on between the government and its people. Last week, I concluded there are no good options, but we have to avoid the myopia of a certain kind of peace activist that focuses overmuch on the need for the U.S. to not get

involved, as well as the myopia of certain interventionists who think "sending a message" by hurling Tomahawk missiles is a necessarily effective away to communicate.

In The Washington Post, David von Drehle argues that the Kennedy who might have had the greatest consequence may not have been one of the brothers, but Eunice Kennedy Shriver who improved the lives of people with disabilities. Who can doubt it!

Advertisement

How did I miss this? After President Trump's State of the Union address, Elizabeth Bruenig penned a column in The Washington Post about the president's honoring a police officer who saved a baby from his addicted mother, but the president did not mention the mother by name. This provoked some powerful and beautiful writing by Bruenig:

> Fast, dramatic changes made in the lives of morally unimpeachable people make for the simplest and most uplifting stories. But real human beings are notoriously morally compromised, and real change often takes long periods of time and repeated efforts to achieve. Moreover, the blameless and the blameworthy are threaded together, in life, in a web of inseparable interdependence. It simply isn't possible, in most cases, to maximally help the innocent while neglecting the accountable: The two groups are irreversibly entwined. They need one another. We all belong to each camp at various times in our lives, and we always need one another.
>
> These will be important things to keep in mind as the opioid crisis advances and its ramifications become more severe, and as the GOP considers welfare reform in the coming months. When it comes time to mete out benefits, there is always a temptation to act as a moral actuary, preserving programs that serve these innocent sets — children, the elderly, the cognitively disabled — and cutting away at those that help ordinary, working-age adults, who are imagined to have no business needing the help.

> Welfare isn't charity. But when we're making policy on how to help people, we would do well to maintain a charitable frame of mind: to remember that helping is hard and that it is good; that what someone needs ought to be considered before and above what we think they deserve; that if people can't destroy their own human dignity even with self-destructive acts, then it follows we should never fail to recognize that dignity in our laws and social programs.

Just splendid writing. (h/t to Kirk Kramer of the Current Newspapers)

Lastly, the Napa Institute's annual summer conference is coming up and they have posted the schedule on their website. There seem to be a lot of "speaker pending" slots, and not just for a breakout session, but for keynotes. I sure could use a nice, all-expenses-paid trip, and I am a fine speaker. Do you think they will ask me?

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

Editor's note: Don't miss out on Michael Sean Winters' latest: Sign up to receive free newsletters, and we'll notify you when he publishes new Distinctly Catholic columns.