Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Perhaps you had to be in seminary to appreciate this old but splendid essay in The Telegraph by A N Wilson upon the 2003 occasion when the Church of England nominated its first openly gay bishop. Wilson describes a subculture that I also experienced and which was certainly strange. It was also profoundly human and decidedly holy and often hilarious. I would add that I have never been surprised by the disproportionate number of gay men in the clergy just as I am not surprised by their over-representation in the arts: An experience of otherness seems to dispose one to the transcendent in both the religious and the artistic endeavors. I fear that experience of humanity, holiness and hilarity will be stamped out in the current witchhunt by the Jansenists and the earnest. It is a grave loss.

I cut survivors of clergy sex abuse a wide swath, but the attempt by one survivors' group, the Ending Clergy Abuse-Global Justice Project to smear Cardinals Oscar Maradiaga, Donald Wuerl and Kevin Farrell, citing articles in rightwing newspapers that earlier in this saga attacked NCR and defended Fr. Marcial Maciel, is reprehensible. Like all activists, they seem to have focused on one thing and one thing only for so long that their lens became distorted.

Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Robert Barron has decided to join the public discussion about how to respond to the "McCarrick Mess." He repeats the allegation that the former cardinal exercised "disproportionate influence on the appointment of bishops." Please explain. Did Theodore McCarrick help gain Barron's appointment? Does Barron know something about Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet that we do not know? I say it again and again: Accounts of McCarrick's influence in this papacy and the last are severely overstated.

President Donald Trump and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach launched a panel to study voter fraud and, surprise, surprise, the panel disbanded when it became obvious there was no widespread voter fraud in this country. The whole episode put me in mind of an old Joan Rivers routine that began, "A UFO has never landed at Harvard or Yale or Princeton..." In Trump's America, the White House has become a place where they spot UFOs.

Trump continues to criticize football players who kneel during the national anthem. There is something creepy about the fact that almost all the owners of the teams, the men who set policy, are rich and un-athletic white guys, but Trump talks about players and their rights the way Nero might have discussed a gladiator. Trump does this because it works politically: He is putting down wealthy, successful mostly black athletes. His obsessions with race are now too obvious. I predict as he is thrown from office his last words will be a rant about football players kneeling during the national anthem. Think of Ian McKellan in "The Da Vinci Code" being taken away by the police.

Several people have asked why I have not yet responded to Stephanie Slade's essay at America on the compatibility of libertarianism and Catholic Social Thought. This is a tougher assignment than usual because the essay is almost comically bad. But, I promise something in the near future.

Laura Ingraham is in a bit of hot water after a palpably racist screed against immigrants. I tune in to at least a little bit of her show most nights and this tirade is only different in degree, not kind, from her usual fare. Her show is despicable. It is unsurprising that she and EWTN's Raymond Arroyo are such frequent collaborators: They both spew a self-satisfied hate, combined with nostalgia for a past that never really existed, and both are repeatedly willing to distort or ignore Catholic teaching to suit their political agenda. And, at Politico, the uncle of presidential adviser

Stephen Miller says his nephew is a big hypocrite on the issue of immigration. Is anyone surprised?

In the New York Times, Thomas Edsall looks at "two futures" for the Democratic party, one more "progressive" and the other more "mainstream." Again, these terms do not define themselves. If the Democrats were to become more progressive on economic issues and less libertarian on social issues, they could become the majority party for a decade or more. Still, Edsall is always worth reading and he is more careful than most with the data he surveys.

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Last but not least, Michael Gerson argues that in order to save the Republican Party, they have to lose badly at the polls this November. I couldn't agree more. The money quote:

> *If Republicans retain control of the House in November, Trump will (correctly) claim victory and vindication. He will have beaten the political performances of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama in their first midterms. He will have proved the electoral value of racial and ethnic stereotyping. He will have demonstrated the effectiveness of circuslike distraction. He will have shown the political power of bold, constant, uncorrected lies. And he will gain many more enablers and imitators.*

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

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