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Arizona Rep. Martha McSally speaks with supporters at the announcement of her U.S. Senate campaign at the Swift Aviation Hangar in Phoenix Jan. 12. (Wikimedia Commons/Gage Skidmore)



by Michael Sean Winters

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I will be writing again tomorrow on the anti-Francis putsch that is being attempted, and do not want to bog down this links page with that, but the twitter feed of Tony Aiello shows Pope Benedict XVI greeting Cardinal Theodore McCarrick on the occasion of Benedict's resignation taking effect. If, as Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò alleges, Benedict had barred McCarrick from events like this, why is he smiling? And also in that line would be then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, who would have concluded what from this exchange? That Benedict thought McCarrick was persona non grata? Look at the picture.

At Vatican Insider, Andrea Tornielli looks at the Viganò dossier and reaches the same conclusion: The story does not add up. Tornielli also points to something that does not seem to have occurred to Viganò and his allies, or if it occurred, they do not care: The dossier implicates Benedict far more than it implicates Pope Francis and, most of all, it points to Pope John Paul II, who appointed almost everyone named in the dossier! Such is their hatred for Francis, they are willing to throw Benedict under the bus.

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Amid all this mess in the Vatican and at the White House, here is a video that will put a smile on your face: Texas Senate candidate Beto O'Rourke is asked what he thinks of NFL players taking a knee during the national anthem. The questioner makes it clear he finds the protests disrespectful. O'Rourke does honor to the man's point of view but goes on to explain his own position. The result? O'Rourke makes you proud to be an American.

Jerry Falwell Jr. states that his fellow evangelicals no longer support Attorney General Jeff Sessions. This is despite the fact that Sessions has long been a

champion of the causes evangelicals care about. Sessions, as required by Department of Justice policy, recused himself from the Russia investigation, and in so doing angered President Donald Trump. Falwell and his flock, relying on Fox News, cannot abide anyone who does not do the president's bidding. Falwell is a quisling of the first order and I use the word advisedly.

At The New York Times, Martha McSally originally hoped Trump would simply stay out of the Arizona Senate primary, but then she wanted his endorsement. Her predicament is only the latest example of Trump's extraordinary juice with the GOP base and how Republican candidates spurn him at their peril. Even if they don't speak Russian.

At Forbes, Panos Mourdoukoutas looks at the ways China is now acting in Africa in the same manner that the Western colonial powers used to act. The exploitation of the people of that poor continent is now done by companies with boardrooms in Beijing rather than Belgium, but it is exploitation nonetheless.

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

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