Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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First order of business: I want to call attention to an important event. In collaboration with the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University, NCR will be hosting a briefing for reporters covering next week's U.S. bishops' conference meeting. We have assembled an extraordinary panel: Fr. Clete Kiley, who was executive director of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Priestly Life at the 2002 Dallas meeting and began the implementation of the Dallas Charter; Cathleen Kaveny, who teaches both law and theology at Boston College and is probably the smartest person I know; Massimo Faggioli of Villanova University, who brings a wealth of historical knowledge and an outsider's eye to the study of ecclesiology in the U.S.; and our own National Correspondent Heidi Schlumpf and Vatican Correspondent Joshua J. McElwee. Reporters can sign up here: NCRonline.org/briefing.

At the Washington Post, a look at some of the ballot measures being voted on today. I am hoping the voters in Oregon and West Virginia vote to limit public funding of elective abortion. Yes, I generally think legal procedures should not be restricted based on ability to pay, but that moral principle is secondary to the recognition that abortion is an act so violent, it cannot be treated like other acts. And, I am also

hoping voters in Colorado, Michigan and Utah vote to establish independent commissions to redraw congressional districts at census time. So long as politicians choose the voters, democracy will be crippled.

At the irreplaceable FiveThirtyEight.com, Daniel Cox does a deep dive into the role abortion plays in the attitudes of voters, and the news is not good for us pro-life Democrats. Cox, who is a research director at Public Research Religion Institute, demonstrates the stranglehold the issue increasingly has on the Democratic Party and why the pro-life movement was always foolish to let the issue become a partisan issue. The abandonment of pro-life Democrats by the pro-life movement became official in the 2010 cycle when the Indiana Right to Life committee announced it would not be supporting Democrats even if they had a pro-life record.

Also at FiveThirtyEight.com, Geoffrey Skelley examines how the Democrats could secure a majority in the House on the strength of suburban votes alone. The breakdown of "dense" versus "sparse" suburban precincts is important: In Virginia, the bellwether precincts for years now have been the exurbs, not the close-in suburbs, and that trend appears to be going nationwide.

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An example of the left being so obnoxious and dumb: This commentary by Ian Millhiser at Think Progress on the Supreme Court's decision to grant cert on a case involving a World War I memorial in the shape of a cross, located in Bladensburg, Maryland. I do not expect that anyone would design such a memorial today, but that does not mean we have to ruin what was built in earlier times to appease The Humanist Society, does it? But what prompts me to call this article "dumb" is that, after noting that the Supreme Court itself hosts portrayals of Moses and Mohammed, Millhiser opines:

> *Moses and Muhammad are displayed along other historic figures such as King Hammurabi, Caesar Augustus, Napoleon, and former Chief Justice John Marshall. Thus, it is clear that Moses and Muhammad are depicted because of their contributions to the secular field of lawmaking, not because of their religious significance.*

You see the problem? Neither Moses nor Mohammed would have described what they were doing as "secular field of lawmaking." Of course, the court has itself indulged this kind of foolish and ahistorical analysis to avoid ordering the removal of historic images while maintaining an overly rigid view of separation. Idiosyncratic thought never ends in a good place and very smart people can think really dumb thoughts.

What does dumb look like on the right? EWTN's Raymond Arroyo interviews Bishop Martin Holley, recently removed as the bishop of Memphis. A real journalist would have asked a question like this: Bishop Holley, do you really think anything you had to say about Cardinal Donald Wuerl's fitness for office would have affected Pope Benedict XVI's judgment when Wuerl and Ratzinger have been friends since the 1960s? Arroyo led Holley on throughout the interview, and to what end?

At Zenit, Kishore Jayabalan, the Acton Institute's man in Rome, defends the legacy of St. Pope John Paul II, except the John Paul II he defends is the mythic, uncomplicated version of the late pope that was really a creation of American neo-cons. John Paul II himself was a much more complex thinker than Jayabalan can grasp. But, I was struck by this claim: "It is impossible to speak about JPII's legacy without addressing his record on clerical sexual abuse, most especially regarding former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick." That is undoubtedly true, but Jayabalan's article does not really address the record at all, just how indifferent to it many people are. Once again, the thing our friends at Acton care about is money and, now in the context of the clergy sex abuse mess, they add homosexuality among the clergy to the list. This is strange given the fact that the founder and president of Acton is Fr. Robert Sirico who was once a gay activist and while I have no reason to doubt he keeps his vows, he did not become a heterosexual.

On a lighter note, at the Washington Post, Roxanne Roberts on 20 things you need to know about the NPR news quiz show which is celebrating its 20th anniversary. I will add a 21st that NCR readers should know: One of my inventions made it onto the show in 2002. Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott was forced to resign after praising segregationist Sen. Strom Thurmond, saying the country would be better off if Thurmond has won the presidency in 1948. At the time, I was the general manager at Kramerbooks & Afterwords Café in Washington and so we ran a special to commemorate the resignation: The Trent Latte, separate but equal parts of coffee and steamed milk. NPR picked up the story and it became a question on the quiz

show. I should like this to be mentioned in any obituary when the time comes.

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

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