Opinion



Beto O'Rourke speaks at a rally at Pan American Neighborhood Park, Austin, Texas, Nov. 4, 2018 (Flickr/crockodile)



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March 19, 2019

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At Commonweal, Cathleen Kaveny joins the discussion about the state of moral theology today and brings a level-headed request for greater precision, as well as taking a step back to look at why moral theology has evolved as it has. Can we make Kaveny the first female cardinal?

In The Washington Post, Carlos Lozada examines recent books by President Donald Trump's, ahem, brain trust. Lozada concludes that none of them spend much time defending Trump: They prefer to simply, incessantly, routinely attack "the left." Which is why they make such great guests on Fox. One stands out for me: Victor Davis Hanson is not only a shill, he is a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. Don't his fellow fellows find this man embarrassing? Is there no mechanism for removing him from the roster of an institution that is serious?

Also at the Post, a look at the idea of "court packing" being floated in certain Democratic Party circles. Yes, I sympathize with the righteous anger at Sen. Mitch McConnell's decision to not even grant a hearing to Judge Merrick Garland when President Barack Obama nominated him. But, if Democrats get dragged into debating crazy ideas like packing the court, Trump will win. Self-discipline is not too much to ask when so much is at stake.

The Denver Post reports Gov. Jared Polis signed a law pledging that state's electoral college votes to the winner of the popular vote. Republicans immediately announced plans to reverse the law through a referendum. Eliminating the electoral college's bias is not as important as enacting non-partisan redistricting, but it is important.

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At Brookings, Bill Galston is very smart and very wrong when he argues that only a center-left approach to economic policy will work at the ballot box. The polling data he cites makes a caricature of different ideological positions, and there are creative ways for Democrats to talk about government regulation of the economy, capitalism and all the rest that push the envelope further to the left than Galston would want to go.

No, Chelsea Clinton is not responsible for the massacre in New Zealand. This back-and-forth shows how zany the politics of some campuses have become.

At Politico, Bernie Becker raises questions about proposals to increase taxes on the rich. He questions the degree to which they might be avoided, whether or not they are constitutional, and whether they will raise enough money to fund the expansive social programs Democrats are advocating. I say: Let the difficulties argue for themselves. Even if they do not raise as much as hoped, taking steps to decrease the ever-growing income inequality in this country is a good thing.

Jack Shafer, also at Politico, looks at the candidacy of Beto O'Rourke and unleashes his characteristic sharp analysis and imaginative prose. He coins the word "semigoguery" to describe O'Rourke's sugary approach to politics. The devastating money quote:

> If O'Rourke promised to seize all the tendrils of power, encouraged race or class war, blocked dissent or promised the impossible, we wouldn't hesitate to call him a demagogue, which he isn't. President O'Rourke is more likely to host the bands from the Vans Warped Tour in the Rose Garden then he is to order the 3rd Infantry Regiment to dissolve Congress at bayonet point. Think of him instead as a semigogue, a temperate politician who exploits the naiveté of the mob with his hollow yet passionate appeals to goodness, light and possibility. A demagogue traffics in fear. A semigogue peddles hope. A demagogue hoses gasoline onto a fire. A semigogue pours milk or maybe a craft brew. A demagogue bangs the table with a closed fist. A semigogue talks with fluttery hands. Because he never issues genocidal orders or establishes totalitarian regimes, the semigogue can also escape our deep scrutiny. Instead, he lulls his targets into political sleep with his eternal kindness, his overdone decency and his endless speeches.

Brutal, but spot-on.

At Bloomberg, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seemed to say that Israel's Arab citizens were not really citizens, then he equivocated, then he tied himself in knots. It is like watching GOP candidates try and massage an answer to the question whether they believe in evolution. Netanyahu's verbal stumbling is the result of his too long association with far right parties. It is time for the Israeli people to elect a

more centrist prime minister.

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

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