Opinion



by Michael Sean Winters

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At La Croix International, Robert Mickens raises some important questions relating to Msgr. Anthony Figueiredo and his recent release of emails he received from Theodore McCarrick over the years. I would add one more point to consider: Figueiredo helped coordinate the annual pilgrimage to Rome by the Papal Foundation. So he would be in touch with some of the leading opponents of Pope Francis. As for the emails themselves: They show only what McCarrick wanted his agent in Rome to know. As we now know, McCarrick was lying to himself for 50 years, so I think we can take these with a grain of salt.

From the Telegraph, a report on the Italian government's decision to revoke the lease of a former monastery to Steve Bannon which Bannon claimed would become a "gladiator school" for populists. I have a question: Isn't Matteo Salvini the interior minister? Couldn't he have stopped this? The story provoked the BEST tweet of the year, from Austen Ivereigh: "Hard to see now how Judeo-Christian civilization can be saved." Now, that is funny.

Democrats are talking religion again, but at FiveThirtyEight.com, Amelia Thomson-Deveaux and Laura Bronner look at some of the difficulties of moving beyond talk:

Not only are more Democrats completely secular, there is a great diversity of religions within the ranks of the Democrats compared to the Republicans. The rationale for religious framing of issues, however, has less to do with particular constituencies than it does with providing and language and logic that is compelling, especially when compared to the dry, technocratic approach of some on the left.

At Wired, Louise Matsakis on Mackenzie Bezos' announcement she will join with other plutocrats in the Giving Pledge, by which she promises to donate half of her $36 billion to charity. Matsakis raises important questions about the pitfalls of tech philanthropy, and I shall return to this topic: It is a good thing these rich folk are giving away their money, I suppose, but it also reflects a failure on our social structures that one person gets to decide how to allocate so much money. At least if we taxed some of that obscene wealth, all of us would get to decide.

At New York magazine, Jonathan Chait is at his best taking down Attorney General William Barr whose interview with Jan Crawford was deeply troubling. The money quote:

> By likening the Russia scandal to birther conspiracies, Barr is tracking the arguments made by the most fanatical members of the pro-Trump commentariat, who treat it as a complete hoax. In fact, the Trump campaign had dozens and dozens of contacts with Russians, cultivating and relying on their hidden and sometimes illegal support. For Barr to liken these connections to a completely fabricated theory about Obama as a secret Muslim agent boggles the mind.

There is more, but steel yourself. If the attorney general is not going to be the grown up in the room nor Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin nor Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is the grown up in the room?

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A new YouGov poll highlights some interesting ways of considering the Democratic electorate and the choices they are going to make. Interestingly, former Vice President Joe Biden is leading among women voters and Sen. Bernie Sanders is leading among male voters, but Sen. Elizabeth Warren is second in both categories and she comes in second, and just behind Biden, as the candidate voters are

considering. She is leading among liberals, but trails Biden, Sanders and Senators Kamala Harris and Cory Booker among black voters, who constitute a full fifth of the primary electorate.

In the forum of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church, Jesuit Fr. Grégoire Catta, of the Jesuit Faculties of Paris, looks at the Yellow Vest movement and how the magisterium of Francis corresponds to concerns the protesters are raising. As he notes, what can be said of the Yellow Vests and France can likely be said of many Western democracies.

Michael O'Loughlin has been researching the ways some Catholics responded to the HIV/AIDS crisis in its early years, and he shares some of what he has found at America magazine. If you are my age and remember those horrible times, do not read his article at a time or in a place where you would not want to be seen shedding tears: It brings it all back. O'Loughlin is soliciting others stories of Catholics caring for those afflicted by what was then an uncurable and always fatal disease.

At Hungary Today, Canadian masculinity guru Jordan Peterson met with nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban. They reportedly discussed, among other things, political correctness and how it is damaging Western education and thinking. I am not shy about my critiques of political correctness, but that does not mean the only alternative is Orban-style politics and Peterson-style cultural norms. Indeed, the opposite is the case: Political correctness spawns reactionaries like these two men. Remember that the next time you use some PC jargon to scold someone.

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

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