Opinion



by Michael Sean Winters

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This is the kind of thing Democratic candidates focus on that cause them to lose: According to a report in the New York Post, Sen. Bernie Sanders is trying hard to get the endorsement of Alyssa Milano. These kinds of endorsements do not help get anyone to the polls. Better to win the endorsement of a local county official in Iowa. Besides, average people do not like celebrities, and can you blame us?

At the Atlantic, Emma Green looks at First Things magazine and its embrace of nationalism in the Trump era. What is constant among so many of our friends on the right is the conviction that they are being persecuted. First Things' editor Rusty Reno says, "I'm kind of scheduled for ejection from society" because of his conservative views. The Republicans control the White House and the Senate, and it has only been six months since the Democrats gained control of the House. Trump appointed two new conservative justices to the Supreme Court, guaranteeing a conservative majority there except when Chief Justice worries about political fallout. Is this what ejection from society looks like? More on this tomorrow.

Relatedly, in The Washington Post, Michael Gerson takes a different angle on this cultural moment and what it means for evangelical Christians. The fig leaf that said

that Trump might grow in stature once in office is gone, and evangelicals are now "naked before the world." Gerson is a gem, and I wonder why there is not really a Catholic equivalent to him. Any ideas?

Also at The Washington Post, Diane Winston on the evolution of the gay rights movement since the Stonewall Inn riots 50 years ago. I am not sure I agree with everything she writes, but her conclusion is spot on: "Protesters at Stonewall fought for the freedom to be who they were and to live how they wanted. They wanted a revolution; they got rainbow Nikes."

At Brookings, Isabel Sawhill and Christopher Pulliam look at six facts about wealth. You will have guessed many of them; for example, there is now more wealth in the U.S. today than ever before and it is distributed more unevenly than is really imaginable. No need to imagine: They provide the data and, yes, the one percent has more wealth than the entire middle class.

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Relatedly, in The New York Times, Thomas Edsall on the two distinct white working classes and how Democrats can appeal meaningfully to at least half of them. He gives the Democrats a fair warning: Trump wants the election to be about race and immigration. Maybe some of our candidates should think about that before launching another week of ripping out Joe Biden's larynx because he has not learned to speak in modern forms of politically correct BS.

That was fast. At CNN, Sen. Kamala Harris walked back her commitment to do away with private health insurance during last Thursday's debate. She said she thought the question was a personal one, meaning, would she personally foreswear private insurance for government-run insurance, and to that the answer is "Yes." Nice try, Senator, but you do not get private insurance now. You are a senator. You already have government-run health care. And this is the second time she has gotten all tangled up in this issue. Am I the only one who thinks that beyond the amazing ability to tell stories, Harris is a bit of a lightweight on policy?

At Commonweal, Matt Sitman looks at last week's debates and gives a fine critique of the moderators, who let the thing get out of hand. Part of this is the fault of there being no way to keep a vanity candidate off the stage. Part of it was simply bad

moderating. I join him in calling for the Democratic National Committee to find a way to rapidly shrink the number of candidates on the stage so that the seriousness of the moment is not lost.

If you did not read the Holy Father's sermon on the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, take a moment to do so. Right at the top he said something that a friend commented on being one of the hardest things for us in the "performance-driven" West to appreciate, still less to believe:

… the starting point of the Christian life is not our worthiness; in fact, the Lord was able to accomplish little with those who thought they were good and decent. Whenever we consider ourselves smarter or better than others, that is the beginning of the end. The Lord does not work miracles with those who consider themselves righteous, but with those who know themselves needy. He is not attracted by our goodness; that is not why he loves us. He loves us just as we are; he is looking for people who are not self-sufficient, but ready to open their hearts to him.

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

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