Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Since 2004, when I worked on a congressional campaign that took me to small meetings of Democratic Party activists and was shocked to discover the venom directed against Israel, fortified by ignorance of the region's history, and repeatedly, effortlessly, frighteningly slipping into anti-Semitism, I have been sounding the alarm. Often, I have been dismissed and given a lecture by those who wish to champion the Palestinian people, but who somehow never seem capable of voicing an ounce of criticism of the political leadership of those same Palestinians. Now, we have aggressive and unabashed anti-Semitism in the U.S. and on a regular basis. Never have I been more disgusted to have been right, and nothing, not even our failing response to climate change, should so discourage all of us who care about what we mean when we say "Western civilization" as this renewed anti-Jewish violence. The viciousness we see was paved with cobblestones of naiveté.

In The Washington Post, E.J. Dionne Jr. writes a thoroughly well-deserved tribute to Bob Greenstein, the founder of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Greenstein will be stepping down at the end of 2020. He and his organization have changed the landscape where policy and social ethics collide and deserve all the

praise Dionne and others can heap upon them.

From the president and CEO of Christianity Today, Timothy Dalrymple, a defense of that outlet's editorial supporting the impeachment of President Donald Trump, along with a reflection about the relationship of politics and religion more generally. Obviously, the evangelical tradition approaches these issues differently from the way we Roman Catholics do, but there is much wisdom for all Christians in Dalrymple's comments.

At Commonweal, Massimo Faggioli makes the case that modern universities may be less removed from the lives of ordinary Catholics than seminaries, but not by much, and with different kinds of disconnects. Among many money quotes, my favorite is this: "The theological academy needs to be in contact with the people who will constitute the coming generations of Catholic clergy and lay ministers. To be clear: theology should *not* be done only to advise and support the bishops and the magisterium. But total separation is not good, unless Catholic universities want to have no role and no voice in the formation of those who will provide an education in the faith to the Catholic students who keep our Catholic universities going." As ever, words to live by.

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In The New York Times, David Leonhardt writes on the media's "centrist bias." It really is obnoxious when you see articles about the primary contest that do not mention Sen. Bernie Sanders, or articles about Sen. Elizabeth Warren's proposed wealth tax that fail to mention it is supported by a majority of Republicans. But the biggest evidence of centrist bias distorting the coverage of the Democratic primaries? Mitt Romney was the "centrist" in 2012, and John Kerry was the "centrist" in 2004, and Bob Dole was the "centrist" in 1996. All centrists and they all lost.

Some Democrats are criticizing Mayor Pete Buttigieg because in a 2011 campaign speech announcing his bid to become South Bend's mayor, he extolled his work at the McKinsey consulting company, saying he had helped the company "turn around" Fortune 500 companies. "Turn around" is Wall Street-speak for slash payroll. Now, these critics say, he has to be forced to mention he even worked at McKinsey. This is unfair. His change of perspective is reflective of nothing more than youth and should, in no way, keep people from voting for him to become, say, a state senator

or congressman.

"The guy is freaking evil." Also in The Times, Navy SEALs describe their former platoon chief Edward Gallagher, the man convicted of a war crime and subsequently pardoned by Trump and feted at Mar-a-Lago. Will this provide a crack in the support of military families for the president?

In the New York Post, never-Trump GOP strategist Rick Wilson has a gloomy and largely accurate take on the decade now closing out. I am not sure I agree with it all, and all the GOP never-Trumpers need to be more candid about their role in his rise, but I have to admit I have begun to wonder as Wilson does if we, as a nation, can pull ourselves out of our death spiral. Here is the money quote:

> Once trust is gone, once the very notion of truth has eroded, what do we have left?
>
> Little wonder we forgot who our enemies are, particularly in the last half of the decade, and abandoned our role in the world. Little wonder many of us embraced moral relativism when it came to Russia and China and North Korea. Little wonder we shredded our alliances and replaced the idea of America as a beacon of freedom with a kind of "Screw you, pay me" mercenary attitude.

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

***Editor's note:*** *Don't miss out on Michael Sean Winters' latest. Sign up and we'll let you know when he publishes new Distinctly Catholic columns.*