Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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In The Washington Post, a must-read interview with Sara Bloomfield, director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. As the last of the survivors die, it is critical that these museums continue to educate the next generations about the horror of genocide and the unique staying power of anti-Semitism in Western culture.

At The New Yorker, Masha Gessen translates the statement to the court in Moscow by Yegor Zhukov, a 21-year old university student accused of "extremism." He spoke of his hope for a society of responsibility and of love. He exposed the true nature of the Russian state, which claims to uphold "traditional values" but which, according to young Zhukov, only celebrates one traditional Russian value: autocracy.

What is it about former New York mayors running for president that they think they can ignore the good people of Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina, and still capture the nomination with a big win in Florida? Now it is Mike Bloomberg. In 2008, it was Rudy Giuliani, who had been leading in all the national polls, but ended up in third place in the Sunshine State. Why? Because John McCain already

looked like a winner before the contest got to Florida. Campaigns happen chronologically, which Giuliani's campaign consultants forgot. It is malpractice, however, for Bloomberg's campaign team to make the same mistake.

This map indicates which language, after English and Spanish, is the most common in all 50 states. I was not surprised to learn that Chinese was the most common in California or Portuguese in Massachusetts. But I was surprised that it is German in 14 states and Arabic is most common in both Michigan and Tennessee.

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Speaking of German, at People magazine, a report on the small town of Hallstatt being overrun with tourists seeking photos. Hallstatt was featured in a Korean travel show some years back, and it has been a favorite destination of Asian tourists ever since. Turns out "over-tourism" is a problem in many places from London to Dubrovnik. My advice: If you go to the Austrian lake region outside Salzburg, stay in Mondsee, which is not as charming as Hallstatt but it features the Basilica of St. Michael, which was used for the wedding scene in "The Sound of Music."

I am eternally hostile to any attempt to defend religion because it is good for society, or makes people more generous, or any other utilitarian rationale: Either you believe Jesus Christ is Lord of all and is risen from the dead, or you don't. But at RNS, I have finally encountered one such utilitarian defense of religious observance to which my heart warms: Atheists prefer cats and believers prefer dogs.

[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.*