Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @michaelswinters

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

March 31, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

When you write about the Catholic Church, you realize pretty quickly that unprecedented events are rare in an organization that has been around for more than 2,000 years and which values tradition more than innovation. So, I was more than a little surprised to see this statement from the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops. They offered an essentially anodyne call for ethical norms governing any allocation of scarce health care resources. Near the end, we read this: "This statement is signed by all the Catholic Bishops of Texas with the exception of Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler."

I am aware of times when a state bishops' conference cannot attain unanimity and no statement is issued. Also, times when the bishops on the losing side of a vote nonetheless defer to the will of the majority. Also, though more rarely, times when the bishops in the majority list their names, and if anyone notices a name or two is missing, you can conclude that they opposed the resolution. But, never have I seen bishops call out one of their brethren for failing to stand together like this statement.

Relatedly, though unsurprisingly, EWTN's Raymond Arroyo interviewed Strickland on his show last Thursday. He demonstrated that he completely understands the

concept of subsidiarity and Arroyo demonstrated that he misunderstands prudence. Arroyo is also not very astute about the way that viruses move through a population, echoing the president's briefly touted, now abandoned, idea that we approach social distancing restrictions county-by-county. It is no surprise that Arroyo is more interested in parroting White House talking points than shedding light on an issue. Also, no surprise that Strickland is the Roman Catholic answer to Mary Baker Eddy. In both cases, we can say with Sunday's Gospel reading — and Jesus wept. More on all this tomorrow.

Someday, someone will find a cure for this horrible virus. But, a cure for ideological blinders may be more elusive. At Vanity Fair, Bess Levin looks at the last-minute objection to last week's stimulus bill raised by some conservative senators such as Lindsey Graham, Ben Sasse, Rick Scott and Tim Scott. They were concerned that the additional $600 per week in unemployment insurance benefits would create a "disincentive to work." More on this tomorrow as well.

Nothing quite so American as the idea of one-party government. Oh, wait. That isn't American, despite the fact that President Donald Trump has admitted encouraging Vice President Mike Pence, who leads the coronavirus task force, not to deal with Democratic governors who are not sufficiently "appreciative" of what a "great job" the administration has done. Forbes has the story.

The president was upbeat by the end of last week, noting the market was having a good rebound. Of course, by the end of last week, the U.S. also surpassed China as the country with the most reported cases of COVID-19 and we learned that millions of Americans had lost their jobs. But, hey, so long as the market is going back up! Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi reportedly began a meeting on Capitol Hill last week by quoting Pope Francis, to which Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin replied, "While you are quoting the pope, I am going to quote the markets."

Advertisement

What a difference a year makes. In February 2019, the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, Archbishop Joseph Naumann, issued a statement in response to the passage of aggressively pro-choice legislation by several states. Normally, the national conference would not comment on state-level legislation but Naumann felt compelled to jump in. Where is the archbishop's voice now that other

state-level authorities are calling for the elderly not to let their right-to-life stand in the way of other people's right to make money?

Don't you love it when The New York Times becomes a caricature of itself and doesn't even realize it? This article by Maria Cramer — "A dilemma for some: Should you still hire a cleaner?" — should be a parody on how upper-middle class concerns dominate not just news reporting and analysis. Interesting, is it not, that they talk about the stress of living in a dirty house, but can't find a single social ethicist to comment on the situation. "Layered on top of public health worries is an ethical question about whether wealthier customers who cancel their service should still pay house cleaners, who are often immigrants and low-wage workers," Cramer notes but doesn't find an expert to clarify this "question." I shall make it easy. If you are nervous about having a cleaner enter your home, clean your damned home yourself but still pay the cleaner because *you can afford it.*

I can't say I am terribly surprised to find out that former South Carolina governor and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley is a philistine, but I was surprised that she shared that fact so obviously in a tweet:

Still, pay attention to Haley who might be our nation's first female president someday.

[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.*