Opinion



by Michael Sean Winters

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At La Civilta Cattolica, Jesuit Fr. Andrea Vicini draws on data and literature before articulating some of the ethical challenges of the moment. His comments on the "logic of the scapegoat" should be a must-read for Americans. But this is the money quote, demonstrating the link between reactions to the coronavirus and denialism about climate change:

> Uncertainty paralyses many because it reduces and inhibits the ability to control and act. Uncertain, one becomes powerless. For them, ethical commitment requires certainties. Without certainties one cannot act. A similar difficulty is experienced in another serious global emergency, where environmental sustainability is at stake and living conditions on the planet are threatened, not by a virus, but by our way of life, how we produce energy, how we consume and pollute. Even in the case of caring for our common home, there are those who take refuge behind apparent or real uncertainties, justifying inaction.

Few public acts, often undertaken by religious figures, have been more morally reprehensible than attempts to deny what science is telling us and to wrap that

denial in religious fundamentalism.

In a different vein, focusing less on ethics and more on the shape of pastoral ministry in a church that claims Jesus Christ as its founder and animator, here is an oldie but goodie from the late, great Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete in The New York Times on the limits of grief counseling.

How much do we miss Albacete, who could find humor even in the grimmest of human circumstances! But Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane, Australia, seems to be channeling the spirit of the Rector Magnifico at times: This tweet displayed the self-deprecating humor that we must somehow find a way to teach in seminaries!

Tweet from Archbishop Mark Coleridge, March 30, 2020

At Politico, a look at how the White House is throwing responsibility at governors but has yet to perfect the art of throwing resources at them. "That is a Darwinian approach to federalism," said former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley. As a former resident of the "Free State," I can attest to the fact that O'Malley was not only an excellent governor but, as an alumnus of Catholic University of America back when it was a great university, he was also one of the most intellectually gifted chief executives in the country.

If the relationship between the state and federal governments is Darwinian, in some states cursed with a libertarian Republican governor, the outlook is exceedingly grim and getting grimmer. In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis declined to issue a stay-at-home order until yesterday, and the number of infections is just starting to spiral upward. The situation in other states is grim, but nowhere are prospects so unnecessarily grim. The president's verdict? He said DeSantis "knows exactly what he's doing." QED.

Picking up on the questions I raised Monday, Lisa Lerer and Trip Gabriel in The New York Times look at some of the reasons President Donald Trump's approval rating has moved up to its highest ever. The key is people who are not very political. The problem for Democrats is that Joe Biden has not evidenced any aptitude for reaching such voters, and the whole thrust of progressive politics these days, with its fascination with identity politics, could scarcely be better designed to antagonize such voters.

Michael Gerson continues to demonstrate why he is such a national treasure, this time taking on, and taking down, Jerry Falwell Jr., the president of Liberty University:

> He [Falwell] blunders toward blasphemy by insisting that he is being persecuted for his religious beliefs. "We're conservative," he claims, "we're Christian, and therefore we're being attacked." But any path that ignores the truth and endangers the vulnerable can't be called the way of Christ. No, there is only one explanation: Falwell has laid down the cross to follow Trump.

Note to self: Never get on Gerson's bad side!

[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.*

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