Opinion



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

April 7, 2020

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

At the Atlantic, Adam Serwer makes a convincing argument that ideological polarization is not what ails our democracy but the conviction of Republican leaders that they alone are entitled to rule. They are certainly experts at hypocrisy to a degree Democrats have not mastered, but I would tweak his thesis a tad. The problem is not one of psychological entitlement. They know that the next time the rich white guys lose power, it will probably be for good, and like the energy companies wanting to cash in on every last drop of oil before they try and corner the solar market, the GOP stance is driven by greed more than pride. (h/t to Steve Russo)

In The New York Times, Germany seems to be avoiding the nightmare scenarios that have afflicted other countries. Why? The money quote:

> "Maybe our biggest strength in Germany," said Professor [Hans-Georg] Kräusslich, "is the rational decision-making at the highest level of government combined with the trust the government enjoys in the population."

Ergo, if you know someone who has, in the past four years, defended or made an excuse for the president's repeated attacks on "the deep state," ask them if distrust in government is, in this crisis, an asset. Obviously, asking about the "rational decision-making at the highest level of government" is, for us Americans, too ridiculous to contemplate.

At The Bias Magazine, Matt Sitman rips the bark off First Things' editor R.R. Reno and, more generally, the conservative intellectual elites, if they can be called such, that continue to find ways to distract from President Donald Trump's cruelty while mocking legitimate concerns about his incompetence. The key observation: "One thing this pandemic has not disrupted is the continued degradation of conservative intellectuals as they serve the forces of reaction, providing intellectual scaffolding for the right's slump towards Trumpism."

Advertisement

Attention Democratic campaign consultants: meet Capt. Brett Crozier of the USS Theodore Roosevelt. After demanding more help for his sailors as the coronavirus spread through his ship, Crozier was relieved of command. His sailors cheered him on as he left the ship. Democrats should make him a household name by November.

A conservative friend sent me this article from The Washington Post about the decision to sack Crozier. Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said he fired Crozier in part because: "I didn't want to get into a decision where the president would feel that he had to intervene because the Navy couldn't be decisive," Modly told [the Post reporter] in a telephone call from Hawaii at about 1 a.m. Sunday, Washington time. He continued: "If I were president, and I saw a commanding officer of a ship exercising such poor judgment, I would be asking why the leadership of the Navy wasn't taking action itself." So, our nation's military leaders are now proactively doing the wrong thing rather than risk the wrath of the narcissist-in-chief. Turns out that fear of the *caudillo* — other translations might work, too — is spreading as fast as the virus.

At Working-Class Perspectives, Sarah Attfield of the University of Technology Sydney makes a point also made last week here at NCR by Natalia Imperatori-Lee: If the virus has demonstrated anything, it is that the truly essential workers in an economy are the working-class people who drive trucks, stock shelves at grocery stores,

harvest vegetables on farms and nurse patients in hospitals and clean up afterwards. This is another reason Democrats should be demanding a $15 minimum wage — or higher.

In The New York Times, Mary Norris reviews Eliese Colette Goldbach's new memoir *Rust: A Memoir of Steel and Grit.* This looks like a must-read, not least for what the author has to say about her time at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio.

At The Hill, a report on religious groups that are battling stay-at-home orders. What they are doing is immoral to be sure. And, if Catholics join them, they can find no justification in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on religious liberty. The decree, *Dignitatis humanae*, explicitly states that public order and the common good are tempering principles that condition the exercise of religious liberty. Anyone care to bet that a certain bishop in Texas might break ranks with his fellow Catholic bishops and join with the Elmer Gantrys in reopening their churches early?

Note to readers: Tomorrow there will be no Distinctly Catholic column. Like Tenebrae, we shall be dark as I prepare commentaries of the Triduum.

[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.*