Opinion
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by Michael Sean Winters

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As journalists, we are responsible for what we say and write. This applies even to those cable news talking heads who are less journalists than cheerleaders but who still appear on networks with the word "news" in their title. And, when talking about matters of life or death, the consequences for passing along misinformation should be severe, and if you are someone invested with the aura of expertise because you have "Dr." in front of your name, the consequences should be criminal. Here is a look at just how irresponsible the "doctors" on Fox News have been.

But the queen of pseudoscience during this pandemic is Laura Ingraham, who mocked an actual expert on viruses who warned her that the hyping of hydroxychloroquine might be wrong-headed. She bolstered her stance by turning to Dr. Stephen Smith, who has been a regular on her show. Smith heads up the Smith Center for Infectious Diseases and Urban Health. I do not know where Ingraham learned how to be a journalist, but one of the lessons I learned early on is that if someone is an "expert" and he works at a "center" with no wider institutional affiliations and at which he is the only real staffer of consequence, be suspicious. This week, an initial look at the effects of hydroxychloroquine showed it did not

improve patient outcomes for COVID-19. What is the appropriate penalty for Ingraham? Is there a tort claim here? Isn't her behavior akin to shouting "fire" in a crowded theater?

At Medium.com, Jesuit Fr. Antonio Spadaro writes about Pope Francis and his rejection of the language of apocalypse. The money quote:

> And in this context his is and he wants it to be essentially a spiritual and evangelical vision of international relationships. Francis presents the Church as the sign of contradiction in world accustomed to indifference. In the face of the crisis of global leadership in the western world, **Francis resists the temptation of intending Catholicism as a political guarantee, "last empire,"** inheritor of glorious ruins, bulwark to decline. Bergoglio intends freeing pastors from feeling at war in defense of an order whose fall would lead to the apocalypse of Catholicism and perhaps of the world.

If you think of the stance of the U.S. bishops' conference in the years of the Obama presidency, you will see how very different the pope's approach is.

If you are on the email list for Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Robert Barron's Word on Fire Institute, then you have been getting solicitations for donations, noting the millions of people who are viewing the daily Masses it is broadcasting from the bishop's chapel. I wonder: Might not the bishop put in a good word about the need to send your envelopes to your local parish? Nah. He is building a media empire, actually a religio-political media empire. This article by Barron takes issue with a throwaway line from New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo. I wonder if Barron will pen an article that criticizes these idiot governors planning to reopen their states before the pandemic allows? Or of the president and his tardy response to the pandemic and how that failed response undercuts his pro-life stance? Nah.

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If you had any doubt that the pro-life movement has lost its way, look at this article in The New York Times about the conservative groups that are organizing these protests at state capitals, demanding the repeal of public health restrictions. Susan

B. Anthony List is one of the groups urging Attorney General William Barr to intervene on behalf of the protesters! The libertarian takeover of the GOP is complete: I expect book burnings of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* any day.

Also in the Times, if you have any doubt that pandemics expose underlying inequities — and iniquities — in our social structures, turns out that the impoverished island of Puerto Rico lags behind the rest of the country when it comes to virus testing capabilities. The poor get poorer, and President Donald Trump, his ego bruised by San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz, who criticized the lack of federal assistance after the hurricanes in 2017, is happy to let the island sink further into poverty. I hope the Puerto Ricans who have immigrated to Central Florida help to flip that state, and with it the White House, blue come November.

From Raw Story, a look at how some of the stimulus money that went to the iconic Ruth's Chris Steak House corporation is not going to its franchise partners, let alone to the waitstaff, busboys, dishwashers and cooks at those locations. Other large chains have gotten a lot of money also. We need congressional oversight to make sure the bulk of the money, our money, goes to the workers who need it.

At Working-Class Perspectives, the blog of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Lane Windham looks at the ways the COVID-19 crisis is a "perfect storm" for many women workers. Women accounted for 60% of those who lost their jobs, according to Windham, and they account for half of all workers in the gig economy, which has been hit very hard by this crisis.

[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.*