Opinion



by Michael Sean Winters

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April 30, 2020

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At America magazine, editor-in-chief Jesuit Fr. Matt Malone demonstrates a certain cluelessness about why last weekend's call between Catholic leaders and President Donald Trump was so wrong. I will stipulate that the bishops were right to talk to the president about the urgent need of getting aid for Catholic schools. But who has ever heard of a working call with 600 attendees? However this call started, at some point it became a mini-rally and a public event. Bishops talk privately with politicians all the time and they do not need to berate them on issues privately every time. But a public call is a different thing. New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan's intention to bolster the president politically was made even more obvious the next day from the pulpit and on Monday when he went on "Fox and Friends" and sang the president's praises again.

At Politico, Zack Stanton looks at the ways this November's election could turn into a nightmare in an interview with University of California, Irvine School of Law Professor Richard L. Hasen. The role of the courts is especially worrisome here because of the number of precedents were decided on a 5-4 vote, and former Justice Anthony Kennedy was the fifth vote. Although Hasen does not raise the issue, it is unlikely that the current majority cares as much about the equal protection reach of the 14th Amendment as one might hope when it comes to reviewing election processes.

Sometimes, a foreigner can better express the situation we Americans are living. Think of Alexis de Tocqueville in antebellum America. Fintan O'Toole, writing in the Irish Times, nails the current moment: "However bad things are for most other rich democracies, it is hard not to feel sorry for Americans," he writes. "Most of them did not vote for Donald Trump in 2016. Yet they are locked down with a malignant narcissist who, instead of protecting his people from Covid-19, has amplified its lethality. The country Trump promised to make great again has never in its history seemed so pitiful."

Tuesday night, I watched "Inside the Vatican," a two-hour special on PBS. It was exceedingly well done, showing the ways Pope Francis has already altered the culture of the place and how its traditions persist in good ways and not-so-good ways. My colleague Christopher Lamb of The Tablet is one of the more frequent commentators throughout the show, and he does an excellent job. My only complaint about the show? They should have also interviewed my NCR colleague Josh McElwee!

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Congressman Justin Amash of Michigan was a hero to many of us when he broke ranks and voted to impeach Trump, but now he is planning on running for the Libertarian Party's nomination for president. The move will undoubtedly help Trump win four more years because Joe Biden's path to victory requires him to be the only alternative to Trump. There was a lot of attention paid in 2016 to the spoiler role played by Jill Stein of the Green Party, but she only captured 1% of the vote. The Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson captured over 3%.

At The Hill, Joshua Sandman from the University of New Haven warns that Trump could again win the presidency in the Electoral College while losing the popular vote. I do not think, as Sandman argues, that Hunter Biden is going to be a key factor in the race, but he is absolutely correct about two items: First, the unwillingness of traditional Republicans to even consider voting for someone other than Trump is an enormous hurdle; and, second, Biden needs to appeal to non-college white voters if he is to have a prayer.

These are grim times for the country. But I confess that I find some measure of equanimity when a Republican elected official indicates his or her sheer stupidity,

and does it on Fox News no less. This time it is Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, and the Fox News challenger is, as usual, Chris Wallace. But say a prayer for the good people of Oklahoma, some of whom will die unnecessarily because of incompetents like Stitt.

Tomorrow is May Day, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, and it comes when, more than anytime in my lifetime, we are being invited to consider the role of work in our society. Similarly, never before has there been a better time to sing: *Debout, les damnés de la terre*! The original lyrics are filled with a revolutionary fervor I do not share, and later verses become downright anti-religious. Billy Bragg's English translation if "The Internationale" is excellent, but I do not like his voice. So, here it is in the original French:

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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