Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Do you ever read something and catch yourself wondering if this is some kind of parody, something The Onion would run because no right-thinking person would write or say such things, yet there is a kind of logic of insanity within the discussion that makes you realize it is real — deranged, but real? That is how I felt late last week when the "Appeal for the Church and the World" made its way into my inbox. The opposition to Pope Francis decided to label public health measures a "pretext" for tyranny and repression. Right. Then, the story got weirder: Cardinal Robert Sarah said he never signed the thing, and Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò said he had a recording of Sarah's agreeing to sign it. As it says in the Acts of the Apostles: When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.

Only slightly less crazy was Raymond Arroyo's opening segment last Thursday with Harmeet Dhillon, a GOP national committeewoman. She complains about the restrictions on religious gatherings in California, noting along the way that fewer people have died from this virus than die in a normal flu season, which is not true. I liked it when Arroyo asked if any Catholic bishops were backing her lawsuit against California Gov. Gavin Newsom, and she had to admit that they were not but that she had some Pentecostal churches supporting her. She accused Newsom of

"gaslighting" the people of California. Arroyo compares this pandemic to AIDS and notes that nobody was sheltering in place during the AIDS crisis. Does he know how it was transmitted? He makes the claim that "this Chinese virus" has turned us all into "Chinese worshipers" because we have had to "go underground." What the hell is he talking about? Some Chinese people of faith experience genuine oppression from a government that wishes to restrict opinions to those approved by the ruling class. We Americans have been temporarily inconvenienced so that we do not make more people ill and overwhelm our health care system. Where is the analogy? Continuing to air this program is irresponsible in the extreme.

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In The Washington Post, a report on the Trump administration's decision to turn down an offer to manufacture millions of protective masks here in the United States. This is one of many decisions that are difficult to explain and, taken together, they suggest a Joe Biden ad campaign entitled "Why?" Just run these headlines, citing the key dates, and show President Donald Trump *on that same day* talking about how great his response to the virus is.

Also at The Post, E.J. Dionne surveys the Senate races and ventures the thought that there could be a real Democratic wave this autumn. Perhaps the virtue of hope is leading the analysis here, but I think Dionne may be on to something. It is not just that the Democratic candidates are serious people while Republicans are tied to what Dionne calls the "Trumpian circus-plus-horror-show." It is that, as Republicans start to distance themselves from a president who is increasingly unpopular, he will start attacking them, and then an unvicious cycle begins in which they just bring each other down.

In The New York Times, a look at Generation Z Republicans and how many of them dislike Trump, or break with GOP orthodoxy on LGBT rights or climate change but that one issue keeps them firmly away from pulling the lever for a Democrat: abortion. Remind me why being more of a big tent party on that neuralgic issue is bad politics? It isn't, and the sooner the Democrats stand up to NARAL absolutism, the better.

Every once in a while, Twitter proves its worth. This past weekend, on a cold Saturday morning, I came across this tweet from Commonweal's Matt Sitman, in which he reminded us of words he had written before Trump had even been sworn

in:

Tweet on May 8, 2020, on Matthew Sitman's account

When I grow up, I want to be Matt Sitman.

George Weigel, at First Things, pokes fun at Cardinal Cláudio Hummes for some exuberant comments about the Synod on the Amazon. I agree that Hummes' remark about the historic nature of the synod were a bit excessive. But how can Weigel invoke Orwell while penning these sentences: "Some will remember that the roster of synod participants reflected a narrow bandwidth of Catholic opinion. Some will remember the rather stifling atmosphere within the Synod Hall, which reinforced the impression created by the synod's managers that (to vary Orwell) some viewpoints were more equal than other viewpoints." Synods conducted under the leadership of his hero St. Pope John Paul II were completely stage-managed events, with set speeches and no real dialogue, with certain points of view verboten, and he knows it. Weigel's dishonesty now matches his hubris.

Speaking of bishops, Fr. Louis Tylka of Chicago was named the coadjutor bishop of Peoria, Illinois, yesterday. Last month, Fr. Michael McGovern of Chicago was named the new bishop of Belleville, Illinois. In a related development, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich announced there would be no Chrism Mass in Chicago next year because there will be no priests left to attend. A source close to the cardinal said, "He is such a generous person." (Just joking!)

A remarkable speech by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, marking Victory in Europe Day last week. I encourage you to read the entire thing, its emphasis on the relationship between Germany's reckoning with its past as the precise condition for the flourishing of its democracy in our time, its reminder that a united Europe is a peaceful Europe, but most especially for its warning:

> "8 May was a day of liberation." In my opinion, these famous words of Richard von Weizsäcker's have to be reinterpreted today. When they were spoken, they constituted a milestone in our efforts to come to terms with our past. But today they must point to our future. For liberation is never complete, and it is not something that we can just experience passively. It

challenges us actively, every day anew.

In 1945 we were liberated. Today, we must liberate ourselves.

From the temptations of a new brand of nationalism. From a fascination with authoritarianism. From distrust, isolationism and hostility between nations. From hatred and hate speech, from xenophobia and contempt for democracy – for they are but the old evil in a new guise. On this 8 May, we commemorate the victims of Hanau, of Halle and Kassel. They have not been forgotten in the midst of COVID-19.

[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.*