Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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What is going on at America magazine? I was shocked by this hit piece by Jesuit Fr. Bill McCormick trying to paint Villanova University theologian Massimo Faggioli as an opponent of Pope Francis — and, indeed, reducing complicated ecclesiological discussions to a question of who and how to root for the pope. McCormick neglects what Faggioli actually wrote:

> *This is not the complaint of an academic who thinks that God created theological faculties to announce the Gospel. This is not the expression of disappointment, voiced by another liberal who expected Francis to create a "brave new Church." That tabula rasa Church does not exist.*
>
> *These concerns and reflections are those of a lay Catholic whose life — as a member of the Church, as a parent and as a scholar — has been transformed profoundly by Pope Francis in many ways. Together with many others, I am and always will be deeply grateful for this. But I feel the duty, in filial devotion to the pope, to help my Church understand the urgent need of reform.*

Faggioli doesn't sound like an enemy of the pope to me.

At The New Republic, Matt Sitman on why the coronavirus is driving conservative intellectuals crazy. Excellent analysis, but I would have started by pointing out that it was not very far to drive. Still, this line about First Things' editor R.R. Reno's introduction of hyper-affective language hits the nail on the right-wing head about as any I have ever read: "It is a way of brushing aside difficult questions for dramatic rhetoric about civilizational decline."

My nomination for most irresponsible op-ed from an academic this year? Lincoln Mitchell of Columbia University at CNN who dishes up really insidious lines such as this: "Putting a white Midwestern woman like [Sen. Amy] Klobuchar on the ticket would send a message from Biden that white working-class voters are the key to his coalition while downplaying the importance of African American voters." Klobuchar is not a member of the Klan for pete's sake. He points out that Klobuchar might be able to deliver a swing state, Minnesota, although there is no evidence in my memory of any veep candidate making the difference in their home state. More demographic nonsense.

Contradicting the Mitchell thesis is this short video from the show "Lovett or Leave It ," hosted by former Obama speechwriter Jon Lovett, in which a young black man, Kyle, is posed a difficult question. Lovett informs Kyle that he will get help from a "resident expert." Sen. Elizabeth Warren's webcam comes on and Kyle's face erupts in a smile and he shouts out, "No way! Oh, my God! Hi! It's so nice to meet you! I love you!" People are more complex than the color of their skin, no matter what you hear in the faculty lounge.

If I were on President Donald Trump's reelection team, this is the article that would worry me enormously: From The Washington Post, older voters in Florida (and elsewhere) are turning on the president, largely because of his poor handling of the coronavirus. If Trump continues to cheerlead for those pledged to reopening the economy come what may, this disaffection will grow deeper and wider.

One new White House staffer, press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, epitomizes the dumbed-down culture of sycophancy that Trump has created in the West Wing. As Aaron Blake explains in The Washington Post, her briefings are exercises in "massive false claims, gaslighting and whataboutism." And the funny thing is, she is not very good at it.

In The New York Times, a report on the GOP primary in Iowa's 4th Congressional District. Incumbent U.S. Rep. Steve King was removed from all committee assignments last year after he claimed white nationalism was not offensive. It was the straw that broke the back of the racist-tolerance-camel for GOP leaders, but it comes after nine terms of anti-immigrant racism. Turns out, King is being challenged in the primary by four other Republicans, which means he well might survive. I hope so. Let him be the face of Republicanism in Iowa.

From The Tablet, the choristers of St. Paul's Cathedral recorded Mendelssohn's anthem "Lift Thine Eyes" for a website set up to remember those who have died during the pandemic. The choristers recorded their parts from their homes and it really is remarkable that they were able to coordinate this. Still, there is value in 17th century architecture that the 21st century lacks: The voices are a bit harsh because they lack the cavernous space of Wren's cathedral to blend them into a softened and harmonious whole.

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

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