Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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President Donald Trump watches Fox News, so I hope he caught this story that calls disgraced Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò a "Rome archbishop" as if he had some influence. In the event, he is not even in Rome and his influence is zilch. But, as I mentioned the other day, if Viganò and Trump become pen pals, look for the president to start telling his next rally about the third secret of Fatima. Buckle up!

From our friends at Catholic Charities USA and half a dozen other charities, a letter to U.S. Rep. Don Beyer asking for a revision to the Trump tax code changes that restricted the charitable deduction. While tax simplification is always a good thing, it is not the only good thing. An expansive charitable deduction helps fund agencies that put flesh on the societal aspiration for solidarity and community, those intermediate social bodies that help inoculate a culture from both runaway individualism and government overreach. Let's hope the Congress listens.

Obianuju Ekeocha's pro-life, pro-woman and pro-Africa witness is commendable, but she was profoundly misguided in her attack on Congressional Democrats for wearing Kente-cloth scarves, given them by the Congressional Black Caucus, as they knelt for 8 minutes and 46 seconds to display their solidarity with the family of George

Floyd and the black community. She called it "virtue signaling." Author Frederick Joseph called it "cultural appropriation," which he thinks is a bad thing, even though it is, in fact, the most American of things and a fine thing at that. I drive to get Chinese food listening to a Spanish soprano singing an Italian opera about an Egyptian queen, and I say to myself, "Is this a great country or what?"

Most people like it when others want to delight in a culture different from their own, even if it is sometimes clumsy. In this case, there was clearly nothing malicious about House Speaker Nancy Pelosi wearing the scarf, and it was Congresswoman Karen Bass, chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, who gave Pelosi and the others the scarves. Is Bass guilty of conspiracy to commit cultural appropriation? This is all silly. Doreen St. Félix at The New Yorker was even harsher: She not only criticized the Kente scarves but said the kneeling was wrong, "assuming a pose that mirrored that of Derek Chauvin," the policeman who knelt on Floyd's neck, killing him. Wow.

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Pelosi did not take semiotics at Brown University, so I am not sure she ever attended a lecture on virtue signaling, but she has displayed virtue on countless occasions and on a variety of issues. To accuse her of "virtue signaling" is to suggest a lack of sincerity that nothing in Pelosi's career justifies asserting. I do know that Pelosi has knelt all her life at church and that the "taking a knee" posture has been used by many protesters to mirror Colin Kaepernick, not Derek Chauvin. I also know that if you treat your allies this way, don't be surprised if you do not have many going forward. Thank God activist April Reign joined the discussion, tweeting back to Ekeocha: "I just hope we don't miss what happened after the performative part, which is that legislation is being introduced. Keep this same energy for the Rand Pauls who will vote No."

In The Washington Post, columnist Dana Milbank says "once a bully, always a bully," as he looks at an article about Attorney General William Barr's youth. I am not such a fan of armchair psychology, but what jumped out at me was that Barr did not share the Pentagon's misgivings about sending in soldiers to police U.S. citizens. It will surprise no one that Barr, like so many political bullies, never served in the military. We could call him a chicken hawk, but that would be an insult to chickens, and I like chickens.

At La Croix International, historian and theologian Massimo Faggioli on synodality and "ecclesial distancing." He cites a 1968 article by Benedictine scholar Patrick Granfield that said, "The use of electronic equipment opens up new possibilities for the *consensus fidelium*." And new dangers because communications advances have made increased sectarianism a fact of ecclesial life in ways impossible to imagine. I agree with Faggioli about the need for synodality, but I wish to point him to the trinitarian ecclesiology of *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's constitution on the church. Yes, we had to replace the Catholic reformation "*societas perfecta*," but it is important to see the church not only as "the people of God (the Father)," but as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit as well. Ormond Rush makes this point in his extraordinary book *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles*. At a time when our society and our church feel like they are fracturing, we can only rebuild the unity of the church, and so become a sacrament of the unity of the human race, if we remember that, made in the image of a triune God, we are called to imitate the unity they achieve.

Finer points of ecclesiology are all well and good, but they mean nothing when seminaries produce clergy capable of delivering sermons like this one from a priest in La Crosse, Wisconsin, attacking Archbishop Wilton Gregory for his distancing the church from Trump's photo-op at the shrine of Pope John Paul II. There were so many other egregiously terrible things in this sermon, I stopped counting at eight. Bishops: Remove the faculties to preach from such hateful people.

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

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