Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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July 9, 2020
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Over at Fox News, former New Hampshire Gov. John Sununu makes outrageous claims about Joe Biden and other Democrats: "They're going to put him in the basement and policy will be enacted by [Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts, and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vermont] and the rest of the socialists that the Biden election would empower." For every "Project Lincoln" Republican, there are half a dozen like Sununu. He was also White House chief of staff under George H.W. Bush, that is to say, he moved among respectable Republicans once upon a time.

A similar attack on Biden came from the Republican National Committee, which complained that Biden — or his staffers — had attempted to change the meaning of the Declaration of Independence. "His woke staffers changed it to, not all '*men* are created equal,' all '*people* are created equal,' and are guaranteed equality throughout life," said RNC spokesperson Liz Harrington. Now, I am about as unwoke as a Democrat can be, but I think it is a good thing that we included women in our constitutional framework. Furthermore, while Biden is getting on in years, he was not in Congress when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed women the right to vote. N.B.: RNC spokeswoman Liz Harrington is obviously not a

descendent of Michael.

Who are you going to believe about the importance of the World Health Organization: President Donald Trump or Mercy Sr. Mary Haddad, president of the Catholic Health Association? Haddad issued a statement in response to the president's decision to withdraw from WHO. I have questions for all of Trump's pro-life followers: Will his decision save lives? Or is he merely looking for a scapegoat to cover up his own failed response?

Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the former Vatican ambassador, viewed the coronavirus as part of a satanic plot in his letter to Trump. The bishops of Minnesota broke ranks with their fellow bishops nationwide and challenged their governor's public health measures, citing religious liberty concerns. The New York Times now reports that churches have become, as predicted, a significant source of new coronavirus cases. Any Catholic in Minnesota who gets the virus at a church service should sue that state's Catholic conference. (They won't get much because most Minnesota dioceses are bankrupt.) Viganò is beyond the reach of a subpoena, but he will have to answer before the throne of judgment.

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The Daily Beast had an article that highlighted different recipients of government aid under the Payroll Protection Program, suggesting some were inappropriate recipients. As I noted yesterday, apart from the ideological reckoning that some should undertake, no one should complain about anyone else participating in this program. Getting people into the program was a good thing, for all of us. Solidarity in the midst of a crisis means you look out for people with whom you would normally not share much in the way of mutual concern.

From The Washington Post, protesters in Portland, Oregon, topple a statue of Thomas Jefferson. "There should be a line at the Civil War. Every forefather prior to that should be considered a Confederate," said one of the protesters. Benjamin Franklin? Samuel Adams? John and John Quincy Adams? I need hardly add that this kind of indiscriminate foolishness plays right into the hands of Trump's reelection effort.

Relatedly, it is not a moment too soon that, at Harper's, a who's who of liberal luminaries have signed an open letter reminding us all that liberalism is a word with a meaning and that the current, laudable focus on racial and social justice should not, and must not, turn to illiberal means:

> The free exchange of information and ideas, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted. While we have come to expect this on the radical right, censoriousness is also spreading more widely in our culture: an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty. We uphold the value of robust and even caustic counter-speech from all quarters. But it is now all too common to hear calls for swift and severe retribution in response to perceived transgressions of speech and thought. More troubling still, institutional leaders, in a spirit of panicked damage control, are delivering hasty and disproportionate punishments instead of considered reforms. Editors are fired for running controversial pieces; books are withdrawn for alleged inauthenticity; journalists are barred from writing on certain topics; professors are investigated for quoting works of literature in class; a researcher is fired for circulating a peer-reviewed academic study; and the heads of organizations are ousted for what are sometimes just clumsy mistakes. Whatever the arguments around each particular incident, the result has been to steadily narrow the boundaries of what can be said without the threat of reprisal. We are already paying the price in greater risk aversion among writers, artists, and journalists who fear for their livelihoods if they depart from the consensus, or even lack sufficient zeal in agreement.

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

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