Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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In The New York Times, Elizabeth Dias has a superb article about evangelicals and their support for Donald Trump. She details the ambivalence of the Latino evangelical, the concern that Christianity and religious freedom are under assault, and the desire to maintain traditional social norms. The money graph, to which I offer one caution, is this:

> Evangelicals did not support Mr. Trump in spite of who he is. They supported him because of who he is, and because of who they are. He is their protector, the bully who is on their side, the one who offered safety amid their fears that their country as they know it, and their place in it, is changing, and changing quickly. White straight married couples with children who go to church regularly are no longer the American mainstream. An entire way of life, one in which their values were dominant, could be headed for extinction. And Mr. Trump offered to restore them to power, as though they have not been in power all along.

My caution? It is not true that white evangelicals have "been in power all along." This conflates traditional white Christian American experience with white evangelical history, and the conflation is not Dias': The white evangelical community has conflated them as well. But I would argue that the sense of persecuted grievance that was so pronounced in the life of Jerry Falwell Sr. and his generation is a key part of the contemporary white evangelical psyche, one that disposed them not only to Trump, but to the whole "Christianity is under siege" narrative.

Speaking of prostituting religion for politics, Fox News interviewed Cardinal Raymond Burke, and the cardinal repeated the line about religious liberty being under threat. Newsflash: The latest Supreme Court religious liberty decision was 7-2. I would not say that the editors at Fox really understand whom they were interviewing. They refer to him as "perhaps the most powerful American in the Catholic Church." Not.

I would voice a similar concern about the diocesan newspaper in Brooklyn, New York, The Tablet, which has a story about a "COVID cure" on the front page of its Aug. 1 issue. Hyping hydroxychloroquine is best left to Laura Ingraham and other Trump sycophants. In fact, the drug has not proven to be an effective treatment against COVID-19. How sad that the Brooklyn Diocese, which was home to the first known priest to die of COVID-19 in the U.S., Fr. Jorge Ortiz-Garay, would publish this nonsense.

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Protesters this summer have occasionally indulged what we in the publishing business call "clickbait," adopting catchy headlines or hashtags that are imprecise but sure to attract traffic. Turns out, some New York City Council members are pushing back against efforts to "defund the police," a slogan that was politically stupid and not the least bit representative of the kinds of reforms we need in the nation's police departments. But, in a reminder that the sins of the right always make the sins of the left seem puny, Politico reports that Republicans are going to try and demonize the Black Lives Matter movement between now and the election in an effort to win back suburban women. Just what America needs: 10 weeks of race-baiting. It is despicable.

Being on vacation last week, I did not have a chance to confront Trump's charge that, if elected, former Vice President Joe Biden would "hurt God." It is hard to be ridiculous and blasphemous at the same time, yet Trump managed to pull it off. E.J. Dionne, at The Washington Post, provided the necessary takedown.

The images of destruction coming from Beirut, where explosives stored improperly in the port set off a massive explosion, are staggering. Also in The Washington Post, author John Bacon recalls a similar disaster in Halifax, Nova Scotia, more than 100 years ago.

Readers are welcome to join a nationwide fast and prayer today for those workers who have lost their job and who now, through the failure of the U.S. Senate to extend the $600 weekly stipend to those on unemployment, risk losing the money they need to feed their families and pay the rent. The event is sponsored by our friends at the Catholic Labor Network. The virtual Prayer Service will be at 3 p.m. EDT. More information can be found here.

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

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