Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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From MSNBC, Brian Williams interviews one of my favorite academics, Columbia University's John McWhorter, about President Donald Trump's primitive and occasionally adolescent speaking style. Brutal, hilarious, devastating.

Just as brutal and devastating but even more hilarious is this takedown of Jeff Bezos at The New Yorker by Jeremy Beiler. The coup de grace? "For a minute, I thought it was getting way too big. LOL. Like that's a thing."

In The New York Times, Elizabeth Bruenig examines the historical record of Fr. Junípero Serra and achieves one of the most balanced and thoughtful accounts of the controversy surrounding the toppling of his statues and his canonization. NCR has a similar article here. Bruenig's money quote on the core problem with the culture wars:

> Because Father Serra has become a contested property in the culture wars, and thus been declared either flawless or irredeemable for reasons that have more to do with current events than colonial history, I thought the issue they raised was worth addressing.

Relatedly, at the "Go, Rebuild My House" blog sponsored by Sacred Heart University, Fordham's David Gibson writes about Catholics and "cancel culture," pointing out that its vintage is not exactly recent. He contrasts it with Pope Francis' invocation of *parrhesia*, at the beginning of the 2014 synod and subsequently, meaning "to speak freely and boldly." I am for that.

In a similar vein, at Fordham University's Sapientia, which is published by Gibson's Center on Religion and Culture, Fr. Louis Cameli has written an extraordinary essay on the controversial issue of the faith and anti-racism. There are too many excellent quotes to pull just one. Cameli reminds us that our Catholic tradition is rich with resources to grapple with racism and also with the important need to look forward and beyond racism to the beloved community to which the Master calls us as Christians.

In The Washington Post, David von Drehle gives a bracing, positive and largely accurate appraisal of the United Arab Emirates' decision to recognize the legitimacy of the state of Israel. More emphasis needs to be placed on Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu's decision to abandon his plan to annex parts of the West Bank, a stunning and hopeful reversal. If the UAE can bring other Arab states to join it, the Palestinian leadership might finally get serious about peace negotiations.

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It is difficult not to conclude that climate change is becoming the most urgent — might one say "preeminent" — pro-life issue of the day. A new study out of Ohio State University suggests that the melting of the icecap in Greenland has passed the point of no return. As a consequence, sea levels are expected to rise 3 feet in coming years. Forty percent of the U.S. population who live near the coasts will be affected, but the millions of poor people around the globe who live near the coasts will be devastated. CNN has the story.

From the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, President Barack Obama's close friend Marty Nesbitt would vacation with the Obamas at Christmastime in Hawaii. Now, he is seeking to develop a property by seeking an easement that causes environmental damage. Easements are granted by governments, and we can hope that Nesbitt is not getting any special treatment but, more to the point, this is the kind of "laws for thee but not for me" approach characteristic of some rich folk that paves the way for

Trumpist populism, the irony and hypocrisy notwithstanding.

In The Washington Post, Michael Gerson looks at Sen. Kamala Harris' disturbing statements and stances regarding religion. Gerson urges Joe Biden not to bury his head in the sand, like certain cheerleaders for Harris who refuse to acknowledge how extreme some of her positions on religious issues are to millions of fellow citizens. Gerson hopes Biden will be a genuine liberal, and so do I. The money quote:

> There will be, however, periodic, unavoidable issues related to religious liberty. And it is not too much to ask for Biden to provide assurance that he respects the rights of religious institutions and individuals, even when he strongly disagrees with them on divisive matters. This is what pluralism at its best is about. At least some Americans are hoping for the kind of Biden landslide that buries polarization — not merely a victory for the opposite ideological pole.

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

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