Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Is Pope Francis watching the Democratic National Convention? I am sure not, but as the saying goes, great minds think alike. At yesterday's general audience, the English translation of the pope's catechesis included this: "Our desire for a return to normality should not mean a return to social injustices or to a delay of long overdue reforms. Today we have an opportunity to create something different: an ethically sound economy, centered on persons, especially the poor, in recognition of their innate human dignity." The headline writers at Vatican News were even more Bidenesque, changing "something different" to "something better." Vice President Joe Biden's central campaign theme is "Build Back Better."

On the other hand, my colleague Christopher White's look at last weekend's Napa Institute conference read like an early draft of next week's Republican National Convention: Christians under siege; no mention of the almost 200,000 people in the U.S. who have died, many of them unnecessarily, from coronavirus; Rick Santorum misunderstanding the relationship of values and prudential judgment; a false characterization of the current state of race relations; etc. One big difference between the Napa Institute gathering and next week's RNC? New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan was not at Napa this year.

Kudos to John Gehring, whose op-ed in The Washington Post tackles the reduction of Catholic moral concern for human life to the single issue of abortion, and to a single political and legal approach to that issue. In a similar vein, kudos to our friends at Network, the Catholic social justice lobby run by Social Service Sr. Simone Campbell. They invite people to become a "Pope Francis Voter" and offer a quiz to see if the label fits. I am normally allergic to efforts to wrap our politics in religion, and on the left, this usually means minimizing our Catholic defense of the unborn. One of the questions on the quiz made me nervous: "Do you believe being pro-life encompasses more than a stance on abortion?" But when you click on the "learn more" feature, it reads:

> Catholic teaching is clear: being pro-life means rejecting violence, caring for the vulnerable, and prioritizing care for the unborn. As Pope Francis says, these are "equally sacred" priorities. The singular focus on abortion has led many legislators to ignore effective pro-life policies that protect the unborn: health care for pregnant mothers, paid family leave, the WIC Program, nutrition assistance, housing, and affordable childcare.

And that seems like a pretty good summation of Catholic teaching on what it means to be pro-life.

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Also at Network's website, Meghan Clark, associate professor of theology at St. John's University, has an excellent article about what it means to be voting under the sign of the cross, and how solidarity is the inescapable public value that emerges from Catholic social thought. Commenting on Francis' insistence that there are issues that are "equally sacred" to Catholics as protecting the unborn is, Clark writes: "Equally sacred is not a capitulation or deflection. It does not deny the specific reality of injustice, the way 'all lives matter' dismisses the need to specify Black lives matter. Instead it is a desire to be faithful to the Gospel, to standing with the crucified." Lots of good insights here.

This ad from the group Meidas Touch plays on the disquiet in the country at President Donald Trump's mishandling of the pandemic. It has a dual message: First, the country has lost tens of thousands of souls that might not have been lost if we

had done the things other countries did to safely reopen the economy and, second, no football this autumn because of that mishandling of the response to the virus. In parts of the Midwest and the South — the ad features shots of Ohio State's famous horseshoe stadium — canceling college football is like canceling Easter. Let's hope these fans hold the president accountable.

CNN reports that Patricia and Mark McCloskey, the St. Louis couple who pointed guns at Black Lives Matter protesters this summer, will be speaking at next week's Republican National Convention. Better they speak there than at the installation of St. Louis' new Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski, which is next Tuesday! Many people have sent congratulations to Rozanski on his appointment to "the Rome of the West," but I would like to offer my congratulations to the people of St. Louis, who are getting one of the most pastoral bishops in the land, someone who was singing from the Francis hymnal back when Francis was still Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio.

A new survey indicates that 3% of Hispanic Americans use the neologism "Latinx" and most Hispanics have never even heard of it. Spanish, like all romance languages, is gendered and Latinos like it that way. (So do singers, who prefer words that end in vowels!) According to the Pew study, most Hispanics prefer the designation Hispanic, with Latino a strong second. I stand with them against "Latinx," which is clearly an act of colonialist cultural aggression coming from elite Yankee institutions.

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

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