News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Later today, I will be joining Boston College Professor M. Cathleen Kaveny and Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, on a webinar titled "The Church and Catholic Voters in the 2020 Election." Jesuit Fr. Mark Massa, director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, is co-sponsoring the webinar with the Greenberg Center at Trinity College and the New Hampshire Institute for Politics at St. Anselm's. This is the first of three webinars focusing on the role of Catholicism in this year's election. Be sure to join us.

I had already written and submitted my column for Monday, calling on the bishops to speak up on behalf of our democracy, when this essay by Ed Condon appeared at the National Catholic Register. Condon, the Washington bureau chief for Catholic News Agency, displays a deep ambivalence about democracy and wrongly asserts some kind of moral equivalence as to sources of the threats facing democracy. I don't buy it. I have plenty of disagreements with the Democratic Party and with the political left generally, but they are not the threat to democracy that Donald Trump is, and Condon knows it. One other point needs to be made here. Conservative Catholics object when senators ask questions about the views of Catholics who have been nominated for a position that requires confirmation. Sometimes, senators do traffic in what amounts to modern-day nativism. But if prominent Catholic

commentators like Condon are going to publicly question democracy, no one should be surprised when senators ask questions about the effects of conservative Catholic thought on a potential nominee's conduct in office.

At Politico, a report on voter registration in Pennsylvania explains why Trump might well win reelection — and a lot about the degree of disaffection that Democrats ignored for far too many years: Since 2016, 198,000 citizens of the Commonwealth have registered as Republicans, compared to only 29,000 Democrats. They want to join Trump's party because he speaks to their anxieties. What he promises is illusory or evil or both, but at least he speaks to them.

Also at Politico, one of the reasons Biden is doing relatively poorly among Latinos may be the flood of disinformation and extreme rumors being hurled at the Latino community through social media and radio. One meme claims Joe Biden is involved with a pedophilia ring. Let's hope that Facebook and other social media providers have lots of Spanish-speaking censors looking for this nonsense.

At The Hill, Catholic University of America professor John White provides a historical perspective on the voting behavior of Catholics and how the selection of a Catholic nominee for the presidency has shaped that behavior. The most relevant comparison for today is between Biden's public embrace of his faith and the reticence shown by 2004 nominee John Kerry.

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At NPR, incumbent Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa is in a tight race to keep her seat, a seat she won easily six years ago. One of the reasons it's closer now? She publicly embraced the conspiracy theory that hospitals are inflating the number of deaths related to COVID-19 in order to increase their reimbursement from the government. There are lots of reasons to vote for or against someone, but embracing QAnon conspiracy theories in a pandemic rises to the top of the list in my book, and I hope it does for the good people of Iowa.

In The Washington Post, a report on the administration's decision to send undocumented immigrants to a detention center in Virginia, as a means of transporting ICE troops to Washington. A COVID-19 hotspot erupted. Almost everything that is morally repugnant about this administration, in one story: misuse

of governmental authority for partisan objectives; indifference to needs of migrants; failure to reckon with the danger posed by the coronavirus.

Also in The Washington Post, a look at a key demographic in the upcoming election: white women, especially in the suburbs. They are turning away from Trump, and every time he doubles down on his overt racism or engages in some coronavirus denialism, they move further away. If Trump does not figure out how to address this, it could not only cost him the election but serve as the key to a Democratic landslide.

On the culture beat and from The New York Times, in Venezuela they have a sandwich called the "patacón," which sounds a lot like the "jibarito" that has become popular among the Puerto Rican community in Chicago, which I mentioned last week . No need to fight over who devised the idea of switching out the bread for fried plantain first. The important thing is that someone thought of this brilliant idea and it is spreading. Culture question: Is there a menu item that has become popular in the last 50 years that is not, in some significant way, dependent for its inspiration on the cuisine brought to this country by immigrants? I doubt it.

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

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