Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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Stop what you are doing, sit down and watch this: CNN's Elle Reeve looks at a dune buggy rally for President Donald Trump. I have nothing but sympathy for down-and-out working-class people who live in towns destroyed by globalization, neoliberal economics and bad trade policies. But these wealthy supporters, with their Horatio Alger myths, their expensive toys and their libertarian ideology are beyond the reach of my sympathies.

At U.S. Catholic, Stephen Schneck, the executive director of the Franciscan Acton Network, does an excellent job updating the demands of the seamless garment approach to life issues. The piece is uplifting and celebratory, but I have to share his incisive comment about how the term "pro-life" has been abused:

> The year 2020 is an election year, and each election year sees the term pro-life weaponized among American Catholics for political effect. When deployed politically, the term is reduced to meaning merely opposition to laws and policies that allow or enable women to choose abortion and, by extension, opposition to politicians who allow such laws. The possibility of

> a pro-life theology is undercut when the term is twisted into a wedge issue in America's culture wars.

Spot on. And the critique has real juice coming from someone whose pro-life credentials are as stellar as Schneck's.

Speaking of authentically pro-life leaders, Melinda Henneberger, in the Kansas City Star, chastises Attorney General William Barr for reinstating the federal death penalty and, specifically, ordering the judicial murder of a deeply troubled woman on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. This was the man honored by the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast? Henneberger details the violence-ridden county where the underlying crime took place, and we can all be grateful not to have grown up with such violence and dysfunction. More killing will not bring justice, still less healing.

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In The Washington Post, Greg Sargent has a really worthwhile interview with David Wasserman from the Cook Political Report. Wasserman has been looking at district-level polls, which most of us never see. In 2016, they began showing a huge surge for Trump in districts with lots of white working-class voters. This year, Trump is not matching his numbers from 2016. The polls also show Trump doing better in some districts with large numbers of Latino voters but falling even further behind in districts with lots of college-educated white suburbanites.

At Working-Class Perspectives, the blog of the Kalmanovitz Center at Georgetown University, Angelina Del Rio Drake and Mark Popovich write about the exposure to COVID-19 faced by domestic workers who, as you might imagine, tend to be undervalued for their hard work in the first place. The church has been focused on the plight of domestic workers for years. I recall that in the late 1960s or early '70s, the mayor of Washington appointed a special committee to study domestic worker wages. It was co-chaired by Gloria Steinem and a young Franciscan friar named Fr. Sean O'Malley!

In The Atlantic, Ruth Barrett has a great story about the lengths some parents put their children through in niche sports in order to secure a better shot at the college of their choice. If you do not find Michael Sandel's arguments against meritocracy

convincing on their face, Barrett's essay will help you see why his criticism is so spot-on.

Some of our Canadian friends are upset with a skit about a Canadian news show on "Saturday Night Live." This just goes to prove that Canadians worry way, way too much about what Americans think of them. For example, you will often hear Canadians say something like, "Well, we prize our differences because we do not want to become the 51st state." In my 58 years on this planet, with literally millions of conversations, I have never heard a U.S. citizen spontaneously say, "Hey, I have an idea. Let's make Canada the 51st state." Have you? That said, there is a tiny Catholic angle in this story. The headline invokes a common Quebecois swear word: "*Tabarnak*!" It is one of the strangest things about that lovely province that they use religious words like "tabernacle" as swear words, as explained in this essay at Atlas Obscura.

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

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