



French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel attend the informal meeting of European Union leaders in Sibiu, Romania, May 9. (CNS/Olivier Hoslet/pool via Reuters)



by Michael Sean Winters

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@michaelswinters](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

May 23, 2019

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Last week, I wrote about the [challenge of reconstructing Notre Dame Cathedral](#) after its tragic Holy Week fire. Since then, the great modern architect [I.M. Pei has died](#). Pei designed, among other things, the glass pyramid that is now the entrance to the Louvre. As you can imagine, there were many complaints about his design, as there were about the other *grands projets* in Paris during the 1980s. I think most people have come to appreciate that pyramid as a splendid addition to the great museum. May he rest in peace.

In the Washington Post, [a look at the empire builder Leonard Leo](#), of the Federalist Society. He is the central driver of the conservative effort to remake the courts and likely the most powerful Catholic in the country. In this great free country of ours, there is nothing to stop Leo and his ilk from pursuing this approach to politicizing the courts, but let's be clear: It is not what the founding fathers intended and the fact that his empire is funded with dark money is an existential threat to our democracy. There are many types of corruption and Leo's type may be the most sophisticated, the least grubby, but it is still a type of intellectual and moral corruption.

At Patheos, Rebecca Bratten Weiss wants a reset on the entire way we [frame and discuss the abortion issue](#). I think she is right on many things, although she clings too strongly to the issue of bodily autonomy and is much more willing to make excuses for pro-choice advocates than for pro-life ones. The Catholic left has long been guilty of this excuse-making. If we had been more stiff-necked over the years, perhaps we would not find ourselves in this very embarrassing position in which some Republicans are distancing themselves from Alabama's extreme abortion law, but no Democrats have done the same about New York's extreme abortion law. In fact, former Vice President Joe Biden has now renounced the last vestige of compromise on the issue, [the Hyde Amendment](#), which prohibits federal funding of abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or to protect the mother's life. There has been no change in the policies that flow from the amendment. No profound change in moral calculus in society. What has changed is Biden is now a candidate again,

and while he could get away with supporting the Hyde Amendment 20 years ago, today he can't. That is not progress.

At Democracy Journal, Gene Sperling has a very important essay on the [need to change the way we discuss and conceptualize economic policy](#), focusing not on growth in the abstract but on the "economic dignity" conferred by different policies. This should be mandatory reading for all Democratic Party candidates, and their staffs. But, I confess I had the temptation to send Sperling a note: Did you know *Quadragesimo Anno* had already been translated into English? That is, Sperling's approach is profoundly consistent with Catholic social teaching.

At the New York Times, the [upcoming European elections](#) are seen as a referendum of competing visions, that of French President Emmanuel Macron vs. that of the nationalist-populists like Italy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini. There is a third option, but it sadly has not found political expression yet: a solidarity-based populism that leans more to the left than the right, and places people and communities ahead of corporations. Call it the Pope Francis option. Strange that it has not emerged on this side of the pond either.

I do not agree on virtually any issue with U.S. Rep. Justin Amash, the libertarian Freedom Caucus member from Michigan. Nor do I think it is appropriate for a journalist to donate to a campaign. But, Amash is the first, and so far only, Republican to have read the Mueller Report and concluded the obvious: The president should be impeached. He has now been [condemned by the Freedom Caucus](#). If I could, I would send that young man some money for his re-election effort.

Abolish the priesthood? Nah. Check out [Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley's blog last week](#). The picture of the cardinal working a weed wacker is splendid, as are the photos inside the Lateran Palace. But, go to the end: O'Malley ordained 13* new priests May 18 — and a 14th will be ordained later this year. This is the largest class in decades. And it is not just Boston. In Chicago, Cardinal Blase Cupich ordained eight new priests.

Advertisement

At Splinter, [Paul Blest on the effort by Charles Koch to rebrand himself](#). Blest is having none of it and neither should you: The brothers — David is now retired from public life — have thrown millions of dollars at conservative causes and, more than anyone, have contributed to rising income inequality, legitimizing libertarianism, voter suppression efforts, climate change denialism, etc. Principled entrepreneurship, my tuchus.

At the Center for Migration Studies, [Donald Kerwin and Robert Warren argue](#) that additional funding for border enforcement is throwing good money after bad, and ignores the real changes in our immigration system that are needed, like creating more and better pathways to legal immigration and helping the countries of origin stabilize their societies and confront the violence that sends so many northward in flight for their safety.

At the Go, Rebuild My House series published by Sacred Heart University, [David Gibson explores some too often overlooked nuances](#) in the charge that clericalism is the principal culprit in the sex abuse crisis, and the nature of clericalism itself. He especially captures the way a normal *esprit de corps*, or "village mentality," can be a good thing as well as a bad thing, and that the process of corruption from the former to the latter is supremely human.

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

**The number of new priests ordained has been corrected.*

Editor's note: Don't miss out on Michael Sean Winters' latest: [Sign up](#) and we'll let you know when he publishes new *Distinctly Catholic* columns.