

## My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 47

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One of the most persistent threats to Catholic education has been the growing influence of Marxism through liberation theology and postmodern critical theory. Beginning in the 1970s during the Vietnam War, the antiwar left began to move from pacifism to embracing the North Vietnamese cause and a communist victory in the South. I personally witnessed this drift at the Catholic Worker in Milwaukee. Dorothy Day originally conceived the Catholic Worker movement as an antidote to Marxist organizing by aligning Catholicism with social justice. However, as the Vietnam War went on, the interaction with the radical antiwar left moved Catholic social justice advocates steadily in the direction of Marxist social critiques. Their political cooperation blossomed into intellectual discourse and cultivated a theoretical common ground, as the Catholic left radicalized their conception of Jesus. The foundation for the American Catholic shift towards Marxism was laid a few years earlier, in Latin America, where we see the rise of the Colombian revolutionary priest, Camilo Torres, and the aligning of Marxist and Catholic social justice rhetoric in the writings of the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez. These writings and actions significantly influenced the Latin American Jesuits, who already involved themselves in working with the poor and marginalized throughout Central and South America. Marxist social critique provided them with the intellectual framework for revolutionary social change, though they camouflaged their intentions as a "preferential option for the poor."

Thus, my theology courses at Marquette University in 1970, taught by Jesuits, were heavily laced with the emerging liberation theology. As easily as Jesus changed water to wine, they transformed Jesus of Nazareth to Jesus the Revolutionary, an intoxicating elixir for self-righteous young minds.

Despite the eradication efforts of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, this strain of social justice theory remains viral in the ecclesial body, and the "preferential option for the poor," is very much a part of

mainstream Catholic social teaching. Once the Marxist dialectic of struggle found its way into the Catholic tent, other postmodern critical theory followed closely in its trail. Marcuse, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida became the basis for a new gnosticism in Catholic humanities departments. Thus, increasingly the teaching of literature began to move away from a classical orientation and the Western Canon, to a more fragmented approach conducive to the pedagogy of identity politics, raising the consciousness of social injustice and various oppressions. This Marxist philosophical orientation migrated from the university to the high school as waves of new university graduates became Catholic teachers.

Of course, Catholic theologians have long mined secular philosophy for theological resources, as Augustine drew from Neoplatonism and Aquinas from Aristotle. There are philosophical comfort zones that exist between Foucault and Augustine, for instance, skepticism of political power structures. The distinction between the current and the prior intellectual endeavors lies in the emphasis and the weight given to the borrowed philosophy. The danger, as I see it, arises when Christianity finds itself in the service of Marxist or postmodern ends, rather than the other way around. When a theology of forgiveness and reconciliation gives way to an angry politics of resentment, when - in the most extreme example - a priest chooses to pick up a rifle to advance revolutionary ends, then the Gospel message has simply become an opportunistic cover for radical political intent.

In the high school setting, this shift towards identity politics and a "pedagogy of the oppressed" (Gutierrez) can be seen in the changing content of the curriculum. As in the universities, the classical texts are abandoned in favor of literature which emphasizes the oppression of minorities and struggles against social injustice. Or the history texts distort the American narrative by failing to place the institution of slavery into a world historical context. Though I am fully in favor of expanding the range of choices in literature, and examining the sins as well as the triumphs of the American experiment in history, when these efforts are used to cultivate a left wing political consciousness, then faculty are abusing their trust and position.

When I first began teaching Homer, Plato, Augustine, and Dante, I did so with solely a literary motive. These were the texts I loved and I felt them to be foundational for an understanding of Western Civilization. However, my curriculum was perceived as being political and in a sense, the critical perception of others awakened me. As a result, I began to introduce articles and books that exposed my students to the underlying premises of postmodern theory, and the havoc it wreaked on our culture, politics, and society. When I taught American literature, I intentionally included Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," because of postmodernist contempt for the text. When asked to teach American History, I supplemented our rather anemic text with British historian Paul Johnson's magisterial, "A History of the American People." As I gained confidence in my teaching, I included True Father's speech, "God's Hope for America," in a curriculum unit with Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. These complementary visions of America inspired my classes and gave them a sense of history not otherwise being taught. I wanted to inoculate my students against the prevailing insanity of our age.

If this is what our Saul Alinsky progressives refer to as "reactionary," then I will proudly claim the title.

The politics of resentment are the politics of social and cultural destruction. If we wonder how and why our streets have suddenly erupted in violent protest and looting, as the binding narrative and symbols of our American nation are denounced, denigrated, and destroyed, as police officers are no longer perceived as protectors but damned as oppressors, free speech suspect, and safe spaces required, we only need to look as far as our classrooms for the source of this descent into self-loathing and chaos.