

## My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 68

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In the Autumn of 2015, I began taking classes at the Graduate Theological Union's Pacific School of Religion ("PSR") at UC Berkeley. My initial goal was to obtain a Masters Degree in Social Transformation. I arrived at this option after a period of reflection on my experience teaching, my rationale being that the most profound growth I had seen in my students came not through their academic disciplines but when they engaged in community service, "living for the sake of others." Thus, I selected an academic degree which complemented Cardinal Newman's Community Based Service Learning Program ("CBSL"). While I was aware of PSR's reputation for being the most radical of an already left wing Theological Union, I really had no idea what that meant. I soon began to find out.

My reticence to embrace Liberation Theology in 1973, in part, had brought me to the Unification Church. The theology I encountered at PSR shared the same spirit and root as Liberation Theology, with a Marxist focus on alienation and struggle. The difference between Liberation Theology and the Social Justice ideology at PSR, was that the primary focus of the struggle had evolved from class to race and gender. In social and political effect, however, they remain quite close: the nuclear family must be rooted out; capitalism is oppressive and must be overthrown; classical liberalism embodies bourgeois values and must be discarded; and finally, culture must reflect and espouse the goals of the revolution. For instance, a central social justice tenet is that heteronormativity and the traditional family are the bulwarks of a toxic patriarchy which exploits women, oppresses LGBTQ+, and devalues persons and cultures of color by its very existence. What particularly shocked me was the animosity exhibited to the classically liberal values which underpin the American Republic and our system of justice. It was at PSR that I first encountered the Marxist shibboleth, "systemic racism," and its correlative concept that the entire system is irredeemable. Moreover, these social justice warriors embraced a revolutionary ethic quite authoritarian in character. Certain ideological assumptions simply were beyond the bounds of discussion; they were to be acted upon to effect transformation and were not open to consideration.

My "Spiritual Leadership" class was co-taught by two professors, a Korean woman and an African American woman. I was the sole heterosexual white male out of 35 students. After a lecture by our Korean professor on "cultural appropriation," I took issue with the entirely negative light in which she had addressed the subject. Rather than use the Unification Movement as an example, I attempted to employ a case less likely to immediately inflame ideological passions, and spoke of the work of Shunryū Suzuki Rōshi in bringing Japanese Zen Buddhism to the United States. I emphasized Suzuki's role as an apostle of peace to a former enemy nation. I addressed the fact that he expected Zen Buddhism to change as it was adopted by Westerners, particularly Americans, and the positive benefit we in the United States had experienced as the result of the introduction of Zen Buddhism, a pillar of Japanese culture. My comments seemed all very anodyne to me. I had no idea what I had unleashed. I had crossed so many ideological lines, I had all but declared myself an insensitive loud and unreconstructed white bigot. In particular, out of my view, several Japanese American women in the corner of the class were seething.

When we withdrew to our small groups for discussion, it was my turn that week to speak on a spiritual practice that had been central to my personal growth. I had prepared remarks on Cistercian Trappist spirituality and "prayer of the heart," but, on a roll, I decided to shift to my more than 40 year practice of Zen meditation. As I began to warm to my subject, one of the Japanese American women who had been in the room's corner, jumped up, worked herself into tears, and cried out that I had no right to appropriate a Japanese spiritual practice. When I noted that Zen originally came to Japan from China, enraged, she ran from the room evidently seeking a "safe place."

While I found her behavior melodramatic and possibly psychotic, our professor saw nothing wrong with the young woman expressing a sense of profound offense at my "triggering" comments. The content which I had attempted to convey appeared irrelevant. She had successfully disrupted the flow of academic discussion, and with a bit of drama, had instead made her point about cultural appropriation being offensive. After class, I sought her out and being a classically educated gentleman, I apologized for anything I might have said that offended her, indicating that certainly was not my intention. She proceeded to tell me that I should have prefaced my remarks in class with a warning that they may be "triggering." She managed to be friendly.

The following week, the professor showed video clips on "micro aggression." As the sole straight white male in the room, I could not help but notice, each of the violators in every video shown was a straight white male. The irony of the reversed power relationships in our class setting seemed to escape everyone's notice. I was being re-educated.

Thus, I have tasted firsthand critical race theory and identity politics under the guise of Christianity and "social justice." I found PSR's ideological certainty authoritarian, insufferable, and suffocating. Judged based on the color of my skin and not the content of my character, my "whiteness" and heterosexuality made most of what I had to say "triggering." Whereas Saint Paul emphasizes "love takes no offense," our classes served up exactly the opposite: a pedagogy of "offense" and micro aggression; a politics of resentment in place of the gospel of love.

Paradoxically, in my one on one interactions, I nearly always found myself able to break down barriers and engage in heartfelt conversation. People intuitively respond to love. In group settings, an opposite dynamic emerged of ideological rigidity and psychological manipulation. While a student at UC Berkeley in the 1980s, I had listened to numerous stories shared by visiting professors and researchers at UC San Francisco, who had been victims of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Even though they were now working in the US, the professors continued the same relational dynamic. In private, they were open and forthright. In public, because of the terror of unpredictable violence and personal betrayal, they always hewed to the Communist Party line, never knowing whom they could trust.

At PSR, there were moments when I honestly felt as though I had been dropped smack into a nightmare loop of "struggle sessions." My fear is that a growing proportion of Americans would think this is just fine.