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A Profound (and somewhat accurate) Criticism of Obama

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 11, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

A wise monsignor once told me of a quote from Jacques Maritain to the effect that we are born into the world with either a liberal heart or a conservative heart, and that either way there is little we can do about it, and that the goal of a genuinely humane education must be to try and understand the widsom unique to the kind of heart you were born without.

This is why I read everything that Peter Berkowitz writes. Along with Rick Garnett of Notre Dame who appears in Q & A with some frequency, Berkowitz always writes articles that make me smarter, even -- perhaps especially -- when I disagree with him.

Berkowitz wrote a review [1]of a new book about Obama for *The Wall Street Journal*. The phrase "shining self-image of the progressive intellectual" is worth the price of admission, but the whole review is worth a read.

My disagreement with Berkowitz is that I suspect Obama perceives more of the "dark side" of his own intellectual background than Berkowitz admits, although the author of the book being reviewed, James Kloppenberg, may not. I have not read Kloppenberg's book, but I have had to suffer through dinners with liberals who are self-congratulatory in a way that is grating as well as intellectually unsatisfying, so I do not have any reason to doubt Berkowitz's diagnosis.

But I do not detect any air of self-congratulation in the President, although there are whiffs of self-satisfaction to be sure. Ever met a politician of whom that could not be said?

Still, Berkowitz raises an important question for all of us, no matter our ideological predilictions. What is the dark side of our approach? What is the light side of our opponents? And my question for Berkowitz is this: However insufferable a certain type of liberal academic can be, is it true that their myopia is any more dangerous than the myopia found on the right? And which side of the ideological divide is more open to persuasion?

There is, as Berkowitz suggests and Pope Benedict XVI states explicitly and repeatedly, a dictatorship of relativism among many on the left today. But I am equally concerned with the authoritarian sensibilities one can easily discern on the right, sensibilities that seem to have greater effect in American culture today than the foolishness of a few professors.

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