

Lord, deliver us from Newt's nonsensical comparisons

Robert McClory | Jan. 26, 2012 NCR Today

You really have to wonder who is most out of touch with America when you hear the vitriol-laced invective of Newt Gingrich.

He regularly employs guilt by association, spurting out sound bites that turn out to be nonsense on investigation. One of his favorite rants is connecting President Barack Obama with community organizer Saul Alinsky, as if nothing more need be said to establish the evil designs of the president.

Anticipating the State of the Union message Tuesday, Gingrich fired a typical barrage: "You always have to wonder when Obama speaks, which country he thinks he's talking to. You also have to wonder what his source material is. You can really understand him best when you understand that he is a Saul Alinsky radical who taught radicalism in Chicago. I'm an old-fashioned American, and I think the primary documents are the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Federalist Papers."

Huh? Reread that slowly, please, and tell me how those words hang together.

As a Catholic who knew Saul Alinsky, I'm particularly offended that the man gets thrown into the discussion as if it's self-evident he is the incarnation of evil. In fact, Alinsky was a community organizer who spent 40 years in poor communities of Chicago, New York City, Michigan and California, helping people unite to battle racism, poverty and political impotence. In Chicago, he worked hand-in-glove with Msgr. Jack Egan in South Side neighborhoods, aiding pastors and parishes to confront social problems head-on rather than waiting for government to respond.

I saw his dedication in the area around St. Sabina Church, where I was an assistant pastor in the 1960s and where a valiant effort was under way to build a racially integrated community. Alinsky was daringly creative and innovative in his tactics, and this stirred the resentment of advocates of the status quo.

But no one could doubt the sincerity of Alinsky's conviction that ordinary people could solve their problems if they worked together. Long before the Catholic church began stressing the principles of social justice, Saul Alinsky was doing and teaching social justice.

Newt Gingrich, "an old-fashioned American," tries to wrap himself in the "primary documents" like the Declaration of Independence in order to stand apart from Alinsky's "radicalism." He doesn't even have a clue that those documents were pretty radical themselves and were the foundation of the sort of people's democracy Saul Alinsky was trying to build.

What kind of a future will America have if our next president turns out to be Newt?

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