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What is Wrong Here?

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

I was appalled to read an essay by Dr. Mary Hunt at the online journal Religion & Politics, not least because I am on the advisory board there. I wish to assure my readers that I was not asked for any advice on publishing this article. Let us take one paragraph that jumps out at me:

The controversy over then Cardinal Bergoglio's role in the kidnapping of two Jesuits during this period is instructive. As a Jesuit leader, Padre Jorge, as he liked to be known informally, opposed liberation theology and the ecclesial model of base communities that was consistent with it. In my view, he opposed the most creative, politically-useful, scripturally-sound way of thinking about how people who were made poor by the avarice of others could change their context and bring about justice.

First, there is the factual error: Cardinal Bergoglio was not a cardinal when he was the provincial of the Jesuits. In fact, he was not named a cardinal until 2001, long after the troubled times in Argentina under the junta. But, it is the order of the adjectives with which Hunt describes liberation theology that I find instructive: "the most creative, politically-useful, scripturally sound...." Creativity can be employed for good or evil ends. But it is the prioritization of "politically-useful" ahead of "scripturally sound" that illustrates exactly what was wrong with the kind of liberation theology then-Father Bergoglio opposed: It collapsed the eschaton into a political platform and valued political effects more than theological orthodoxy. As comments from Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino have made clear, Bergoglio was not indifferent to the poor, nor to the need to liberate them from unjust structures of sin. But he did, correctly, oppose those strains in liberation theology that either ignored the transcendent dimension of salvation by equating it with a political program, or the proposed an inadequate moral anthropology of the kind that afflicts neo-con Catholic economics as surely as it affected certain liberation theologies.

The rest of the essay is just as bad, but I am having a good day and have lots to do, so I will not dissect

them line and verse. I am reminded of something I was told on the day of Pope Francis' election: "X thinks he is an ideologue." (I place a "X" here because the conversation was private.) Of course, X, in this case, was a fierce ideologue, too, albeit of a different stripe. So, if you peruse Dr. Hunt's essay, consider the source. Hell, she appears to want a pope who advocated for abortion and, yes, that is a hellish prospect. I am reminded of the conversation I had with a television producer, in advance of a potential appearance on a show, who asked if "the new pope would take a more progressive stance on abortion." I replied that the Church has the true progressive stance on abortion, the stance that gives voice to the voiceless, defends the most vulnerable, and confronts those who think one person should be able to decide the fate of another. Needless to say, I was not invited on to that show. That producer, of course, may not be a Catholic, may have accepted the pro-choice drivel about human autonomy, ignored the now obvious indicators that fetal life is human life, and can be excused perhaps for not knowing any better. What is Dr. Hunt's excuse?

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