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Background

In the past I have written some (at least partially) “tongue in cheek” commentary about Obama’s Messiah complex. I was inspired by statements of his such as:

In early 2008, the candidate Obama told Dartmouth students: “..... a light will shine through that window, a beam of light will come down upon you, you will experience an epiphany, and you will suddenly realize that you must go to the polls and vote for Barack.” In his victory speech he proclaimed: “I am absolutely certain that generations from now we will be able to look back and tell your children that this was the moment – this was the time – when we came together to remake this great nation

I was really just taking a stab in the dark with my earlier comments. Over the past several months I heard frequent references, by Obama as well as conservatives, to concepts such as *liberation theology*, *collective salvation*, *social justice*, *collective redemption*, *reparation*, *restitution*, and the like.

I had some “fits and starts” in trying to understand how this all fits together, if at all, in a philosophically formative way for our President. Eventually, I concluded that it really does seem to fit. These concepts really define his religious beliefs which, I now believe, are not superficial. The religion he has been exposed to and enthusiastically accepted over the years is very different from the traditional Christian theology I have been exposed to. I originally considered Obama as theologically shallow, but I was wrong. I just didn’t know where he was coming from. I understand a bit better now, and I find no comfort or reassurance in that knowledge.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, which existed primarily in late 20th century Latin America, is a movement which construes the teachings of Jesus in terms of unjust economic, political, or social conditions. Some describe it as “an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor’s suffering, their struggle, and hope.” Sin is defined as the cause of poverty. Therefore fighting the oppressors, often the holders of wealth, is how sin is ideally eliminated and *collective redemption* is achieved. Thus poverty is eliminated through *restitution* (wealth redistribution) and *collective salvation* can be claimed.

Liberation theologians base their social strategies on the portions of the Bible which has Jesus “bringing the sword” (or social unrest) rather than those which emphasize Jesus “bringing peace” (social order). This is evidenced in the movement’s emphasis on “class struggle.” Critics often make the assertion that there is a connection between this emphasis and Marxism. More on that connection later.

Black Liberation Theology

Liberation theology includes black liberation theology as found in the U.S. James H. Cone, the “father” of black liberation theology has stated: “The concept of liberation is not one among many themes in the biblical tradition; it is rather the essence of God’s revelation in history, and other emphases should be interpreted in light of liberation.” He states that he developed this theology by bringing together Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Thereby, he brought together civil rights and black power. Malcolm is the “blackness” part and Martin is the “theology” part.

Black religion expert Jonathan Walton wrote: “James Cone believed that the New Testament revealed Jesus as one who identified with those suffering under oppression Cone argued that Jesus reveals himself as black in order to disrupt and dismantle white oppression.”

According to Cone, *redemption* can’t happen unless the oppressed or exploited are given back that which was taken in the first place – thus dovetailing with the concepts of *reparation* and *restitution*. He doesn’t see salvation as an individual thing, but rather it is societal, or collective.

Collective – What Does That Mean?

It’s really not very complicated. It means “We are all in this together – no exceptions.” The “collective mindset” doesn’t see individuals as having an identity, but sees only groups with any identity. Therefore, individuals can and must be sacrificed for the benefit of the group. I think that’s a theme that we see in progressive movements today.

Social Justice – Who Started That?

What’s the big deal? Shouldn’t there be justice in our society and the world? Yes, but the definition of *social justice* is slightly different than we are used to. I interpret from what I have

read that *social justice* is achieved only by eliminating economic and other oppression, and is a prerequisite to *redemption*. I can't effectively separate the concept of *collective redemption* and *collective salvation*. I believe liberation theologians will never admit victory unless there is truly equal distribution of all wealth and resources. They may claim victory in small skirmishes, but they will never be satisfied as long as some differences exist.

So, if complete social justice is never achieved, how can their theology permit a claim of collective salvation? Good question. I don't know for sure but I read somewhere that in liberation theology, the word redemption (or salvation) is largely replaced by liberation. This is seen, in the context of history and class struggle, as a process of progressive liberation. Does that answer the question? I'm not sure, but at least it would be an admission that their goals can never be achieved, thereby continuing the movement. Saul Alinsky would praise the strategy of developing this "catch 22" as justification for continuing the movement.

In a Nutshell

Under liberation theology, Jesus is extremely important because He was sent to reveal and represent all the disadvantaged, oppressed and exploited in the world. Salvation is achieved only collectively by making societal restitution to all the oppressed and exploited individuals in the nation and the world. This accomplishes redemption and collective salvation. The proper interpretation of the message of Jesus demands that you take into account the social issues and realities of the time in which it is being interpreted.

To me, it seems this theology discounts a structure of beliefs in favor of a series of required actions, all of which are designed to achieve collective redemption/salvation. I believe that the concept of social justice, as defined by liberation theology, can't be separated philosophically from the Marxist concept of class struggle and redistribution of resources until total equality is achieved.

So the I see the liberation theology continuum like this:

Dominance begat the oppressed, who begat (the need for) Jesus, who begat liberation theology, which begat class struggle, which begat restitution (reparation), which begat wealth redistribution, which begat social justice, which begat redemption, which (will) begat (they hope) collective salvation.

That's my summary in a TINY nutshell.

What Have Others Said About Social Justice and Collective Salvation?

For what it's worth (all relevance aside) here is what some other notable or infamous people have written about "social justice."

CS Lewis wrote his classical book "The Screwtape Letters," way back in 1942. The book is presented as a series of letters from a devil/demon named Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood.

These letters deal with instruction about how to “woo” a Christian away from God. In these letters, God is always referred to as "The Enemy." An excerpt: “..... we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a means; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything—even to *social justice*. The thing to do is to get a man at first to value *social justice* as a thing which the Enemy [God] demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce *social justice*. For the Enemy will not be used as a convenience. Men or nations who think they can revive the Faith in order to make a good society might just as well think they can use the stairs of Heaven as a short cut to the nearest chemist's shop. Fortunately it is quite easy to coax humans round this little corner.”

Reverend Sun Myung Moon (you remember him? – the “Moonie’s”!) wrote: “Now is the time for all these old church or church-related signs to come down; a new form should emerge. The church era focuses on *individual salvation*; however, it is time to *rise from the individual level of salvation to the family level*, because the family is the cornerstone or basic unit for building a nation.”

Commentator *Glenn Beck* had some comments (of course): “Collective salvation, unless we all are saved, none will be saved, okay? Jesus came to save you, okay? Lucifer says, ‘I’m going to save all of them. Just give me the glory.’ And God says, no, I don’t think so. And He selects, he selects the plan of Christ which, I’m going to send a savior down and he will save each individual, okay? That’s why God came down and saved the — saved us all because of individual salvation. You accept the atonement of Jesus Christ and you are saved. *Collective salvation is, I can’t be saved on my own I have to make sure and ensure everyone else’s salvation and then we’re all saved together this is the root of social justice. Social justice has to happen because we all are in this together.*”

Those are all “for what it’s worth.” Relevant or not? – you be the judge!

Even Pope Benedict XVI Has “Weighed In”

Pope Benedict XVI (as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) became one of liberation theology’s staunchest critics in the 1980s as head of the Catholic Church’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He silenced theologians associated with these radical scriptural interpretations and appointed traditional bishops. Based upon what I’ve read on this, his objection was based on his objection to a Marxist-inspired political analysis which he saw as behind this theology.

In an important statement Cardinal Ratzinger also wrote: “*Wherever politics tries to be redemptive, it is promising too much. Where it wishes to do the work of God, it becomes not divine, but demonic.*” Is this what our progressive politicians are now trying to do?

As Pope Benedict XVI, he wrote of his long-held opinion that liberation theology is radically Marxist: “...[under liberation theology] *the world must be interpreted in terms of the class struggle and that the only choice is between capitalism and Marxism.*” He feels that this theology teaches that the only legitimate people of the Church are those who participate in class

struggle and that it is a theology of bloody political revolution. He feels that all of Christian reality is thereby reduced to politico-social liberation action thereby making the Bible subject to a Marxist view of history.

How About Traditional Christian Theology?

Christians have continued, in their own way, the Jewish tradition of “atonement” which is celebrated and religiously observed on Yom Kippur, “The Day of Atonement.” The Christian message in the Gospels is that God sent his Son Jesus to die for our sins and thereby wiping the slate clean. This reconciles us as humans with God – it atones.

This reconciliation occurs through Jesus taking the punishment for all of us individually by being put to death and experiencing damnation and hell. The triumph over that, through the resurrection, is important in that it means our individual human debt has been paid. But that’s not enough. Salvation only comes after we make claim to salvation. This means personally and individually repenting and accepting the gift through expression of belief and having faith. This only happens by the Grace of God – nothing else. There is nothing we can individually do to deserve the gift of salvation. But we can individually have faith and thereby receive salvation. This is the concept of “by Grace we are saved through faith.”

See the difference? It’s an individual relationship. It doesn’t “take a village.”

Collective Redemption – Have We Seen Any of this in New Legislation?

The concept of redemption expressed by Rev. Cone is that there is no redemption until that which was taken from the oppressed is returned. This has everything to do with the progressive support for reparation or restitution. Another way of saying this is that progressives support significant redistribution of wealth and resources as part of any program or legislation. Consider their preferred tax policies. Consider the existing or proposed energy treaties and global warming legislation. They are all inherently redistributive in nature not only domestically, but many support redistribution of wealth from the U.S. to countries across the globe.

And we can’t forget about the health care reform which is now the law. Donald Berwick, the recess appointment to be head of Medicare and Medicaid is quoted as saying the following on redistribution of wealth:

“Any health care funding plan that is just, equitable, civilized and humane must redistribute wealth from the richer among us to the poorer Excellent health care is by definition redistributive.”

That says it all!

Does Obama Really Embrace This Approach to Collective Salvation?

To answer this I merely point to what he has said, consistently, over the years:

From the mid 1990s: "...certain portions of the African American community are doing as bad, if not worse, uh, and recognizing that my fate remains tied up with their fates, uh, that *my individual salvation is not going to come about without a collective salvation for the country*. Um, unfortunately I think that recognition requires we make sacrifices and this country has not always been willing to make the sacrifices necessary to bring about a new day and a new age."

The following is from 2008 (I transcribed this from a video interview): "I've got a core set of values that, I think, have to be advanced – and *that my individual salvation depends on our collective salvation*."

Also from 2008, while standing in for Senator Edward Kennedy and delivering a commencement address at Wesleyan University , *Obama urged the graduates to look past material gains and work for the "collective salvation" of the United States*.

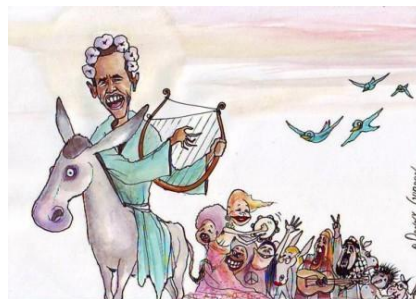
From Obama's book "The Audacity of Hope":

"In the history of these (African people's) struggles, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death; rather, it was an active, palpable agent in the world."

Obama explains further that it was Wright's (and presumably Cone's) peculiar form of Christianity that he found palatable: "It was because of these newfound understandings (at Trinity under Wright) that religious commitment did not require me to suspend critical thinking, disengage from the battle for economic and social justice that I was finally able to walk down the aisle of Trinity and be baptized."

Wright's vision of Christianity was perfectly appetizing to Barack Obama; he didn't need to change a thing.

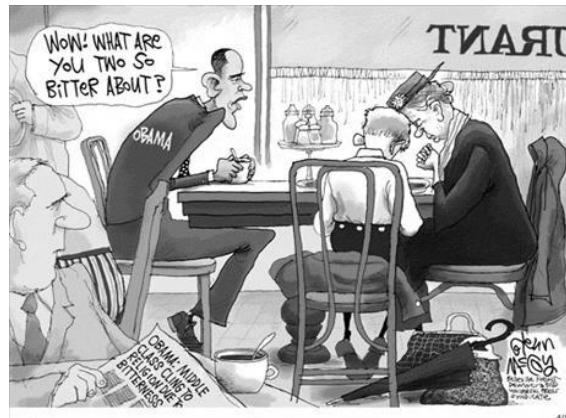
So, now the community organizer takes over big-time. He's President of the United States. He has power. He is positioned to transform the U.S. into a vessel for achieving his theological charge of progressive collective salvation. He is a community organizer – a bit of a "Pied Piper."



From American Thinker (Obama is kind of a "Pied Piper")

As a modern day Pied Piper he will, from his lofty position, make possible all of those things he passionately believes in – whether we like it or not. He’s totally sincere! He’s totally grounded in the religious philosophy he has embraced. Just like Carter, Reagan, and Bush were grounded in theirs.

Take a look at some of the statements and innuendos he has made. For example he implied that many devoted Christians cling to their religion out of bitterness. And he implied that he understood that.



From Townhall.com

Then I did the reading for this project and I came to realize he views Christianity through the prism of liberation theology which is full of class struggle rather than peace and social order. He assumed away the possibility of being motivated by peace and order in favor of assuming traditional Christians are motivated by their struggles against victimhood.

I Stand Corrected

I must admit that I misunderstood and “mis”-underestimated the President. He most certainly understands what he believes. And he does want to be a messiah of sorts. I now see that, in a way, that’s the role of a community organizer in the world of liberation theology. As he has stated, he can claim salvation only by bringing about social justice, redemption, and collective salvation.

Part of the problem is that he doesn’t understand what WE believe and therefore can’t bridge the differences. I don’t think he understands how significantly different his theology of “collective salvation” differs from the traditional concept of individual “atonement.” On the other hand, we “don’t ‘git’ him” either. Perhaps the ‘twain shall never meet.

While I’m glad I understand things better, I don’t feel good about the revelation. This gives me no comfort.