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Obama and New Evangelization

Michael Sean Winters | May. 20, 2009 NCR Today

Leave it to Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, the spiritual leader of Communione e Liberazione in America, to take a refreshingly different approach [1]to the President?s speech at Notre Dame.
He, like George Weigel, focused on the President?s mention of the late Cardinal Bernardin but saw this as the best part of the speech.

(Albacete, in fact, points out that Weigel?s take is unfair, unfair to Obama, to Cardinal Bernardin?s memory, and to Cardinal George.) President Obama?s telling of how he became a Christian through his work alongside committed Christians when he was a community organizer shows, according to Albacete, the ?method through which the Christian faith spreads and bears fruit, namely through the witness of someone in whom we are struck by an attractive ?different humanity.??

This ?method? was at the heart of Pope John Paul II?s call for a new evangelization. It is at the heart of Pope Benedict?s concern that an extrinsic moralism can actually hinder the propagation of the Gospels. The ?method? of the Christian must be the ?content? of Christianity which is love. That is why the anger and meanness of the anti-Obama protesters seemed so out-of-place at Notre Dame and why Father Jenkins? proffer of friendship seemed so appropriate. I have pictured Our Lady in many different postures, but never with am angry poster of protest in her hand or a shaking fist. ?Ostende? is the Latin word we use in the Salve Regina for the posture Mary takes, ?holding out? and ?revealing? her Son. The Blessed Virgin can?t clench her fists because her hands are full, holding out Jesus for all of us to embrace.

I think the significance of the word ?attractive? in Albacete?s column should not be missed. Albacete, like Giussani and Benedict XVI, is deeply influenced by von Balthasar?s treatment of beauty and aesthetics as theological categories. Attractiveness is no mere pleasantness, it has positive theological content. Beauty, truth and love are rooted, to these thinkers, in one reality, the reality of the Mystery of God. My hunch is that our culture will respond better to this ?method? than to the smug scolding of Weigel and his neo-con friends, but the efficacy of the method is not what most commends it. It corresponds to the ?method? of Jesus when He walked the earth. And, that is what discipleship is all about.

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