

in the model of Jesus of Nazareth will be capable of discerning in his own heart the motives of his commitment and self-giving” (“Being Creative,” Buenos Aires, during Lent, of the Year of Our Lord, 2003).

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**Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Progressives in England After Vatican II*.
University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.**

Jay P. Corrin’s *Catholic Progressives in England after Vatican II* examines a coterie of radical Catholics associated with the periodical *Slant* in the 1960s. Corrin argues that these intellectuals were part of an “unappreciated but significant” (ix) movement in the Catholic Church, who constructed a fresh synthesis of Catholicism with the most seminal secular thinkers of the modern era.

The small group, led by Bernard Sharratt, Adrian and Angela Cunningham, Terry Eagleton, Leo Pyle, Martin Shaw, and Neil Middleton, was centered at Cambridge University, and had a close relationship with the Dominicans, in particular Laurence Bright and Herbert McCabe. Associated with the New Left movement, they were involved with nuclear disarmament, the Communist Party, and antiwar protests, but they were distinguished from other leftist entities by their commitment to Catholicism.

Their ambitious goal was to blend Christianity with the thought of Marx, especially his early works, which were seen as more humanistic. Advocating for a complete revolution in the church and political sphere, they criticized the moderate left, including liberal Catholics associated with Vatican II and politicians of the Labour Party. In their view, the institutions of the church and party system were corrupt and supported the liberal, bourgeois, capitalist world order. The *Slant Manifesto* declared, “Christians can never be conservatives, or liberals or even right-wing socialist; they must fight capitalism as evil; they must align themselves perhaps with all those traditional enemies of the Church, left-wing socialists and atheistic Marxists” (217). That is, they were outside the liberal and conservative divide, and looked to overturn the foundational structures of society through a long revolution, creating a system based on humanistic socialism and participatory democracy, and supported by a new common culture of the oppressed.

In order for the Church to act as a catalyst for revolution, the *Slant* group sought to dismantle two forces: the power of the curia and the influence of neo-Thomistic philosophy. Predictably, the hierarchy in England and Rome was the main target of their writings. On a more local level, Pyle envisioned individual churches controlled by parish councils, and Eagleton postulated the eventual elimination of the priesthood. In addition, a revolutionary church needed a new, community-oriented liturgy in the vernacular. The central attack on neo-Thomistic philosophy focused on the distinctions between body and soul, material and spiritual, and political and theological. The *Slant* movement sought to blur these divides, and they wanted a more politically engaged Church that would speak with the same moral clarity on colonialism, nuclear weapons, and economic inequality as it did on sexual matters.

Prospective readers should be aware that the title is misleading, with only the third section addressing progressives in England after Vatican II. The first part explores the intellectual and religious climate in England prior to the council, which Corrin describes as “insular, apolitical, or at least politically conformist, highly authoritative, and out of touch” (19). The second part reviews progressive Catholicism on the continent in the years prior to and through the council; particular attention is given to Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Küng, and John XXIII. For the uninitiated, Corrin’s overview provides context for events unfolding in 1960s England, but it is tainted by his partiality to progressive Catholicism. Hilaire Belloc’s main legacy, in the view of Corrin, is Catholic support for fascism. His portrayal of Pius XII as a “remote, austere autocrat” is unjustifiable. Corrin attempts to make his case by relating anecdotes about Pius XII, as when the pope insisted that Cardinal Montini learn how to read and yelled, “take him into the next room and begin by having him recite the alphabet” (68–69), after Montini delivered a telegram that was addressed to someone else.

Corrin paints a picture of the pre-conciliar Church as run by despots and “primarily concerned about protecting the prerogatives of privilege and power” (86). Catholic readers familiar with Distributism and Vatican II, but curious about the Catholic New Left, should focus their attention on the third part of the text. Even the last section does not move far beyond Vatican II. The *Slant* movement started to fracture with *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, and the journal ceased publication in 1970. In short, the book is a narrow read of English progressives after Vatican II.

The impact of the *Slant* movement was limited by its proponents’ focus on theory and their lack of activism, with writers providing few details on how to initiate a socialist revolution. The movement was also an elite group, composed of intellectuals using language inaccessible to the

vast majority of English Catholics, and while they allied with many leftist movements, they were always on the fringe. Without *Slant*, would English Catholicism or English politics have been markedly different? I think not. The synthesis of Marx and Catholicism failed for a variety of reasons, though mainly due to Marx's atheism. To McCabe, the gap was unbridgeable unless "Marxists abandon their atheism or Christians their belief in the Father" (298). By the 1970s, Martin Shaw, Bernard Sharrat, and Neil Middleton left the Catholic faith, and those who remained Catholic were never fully accepted by their Marxist peers, proving the synthesis unobtainable even on a personal level.

Thoroughly researched, Corrin's work breaks new ground in his examination of the Catholic New Left. He not only expounds on the theories contained in *Slant*, but he also provides an outline of reformist thought from Distributism to Liberation Theology to Radical Orthodoxy. For American Catholic readers, the work of the *Slant* group complicates the convenient relationship between orthodox Catholics and the Republican Party, and emphasizes Catholic objections to capitalism in a radical fashion. Their writings additionally point to the problem of an apolitical church, and as history has shown, a passive church is open to being implicated in the evils of fascism and poverty. In contemporary Catholicism, Corrin's book provides a framework for the thought of Pope Francis, and more generally, with Catholics from the developing world who have a more sympathetic view of Marx than do American Catholics.

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Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutierrez, *In the Company of the Poor*. Orbis Books, 2013.

Some Catholics may be tempted to automatically dismiss any work presenting a theology of liberation as little more than Marxist thought repackaged as Catholic theology and condemned in its entirety by Pope John Paul II thirty years ago. In reality, liberation theology—an interpretation of revelation that emphasizes the need to change structures that oppress the poor—is neither a monolithic body of thought nor was it ever condemned outright. Indeed, it has experienced a resurgence of late, thanks in part to the continued work of Gustavo Gutierrez, OP, and the Pope Benedict XVI-appointed head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF),