

Father Mitch Pacwa on Community Organizing
EWTN Open Line Radio Program - April 29, 2009

Hello, Doris. How are you doing? Hi, Father! I'm pretty well today. Good, What's up? I am concerned about a group in our city that calls themselves an interfaith community organization. What city are you in? I'd rather not say. That's fine. It is a medium sized city—it's not a real big one like Milwaukee. I think I know what city you're in—go ahead. Our parish, our pastor wants us to belong to this group and he's meeting and so on, and I thought I'd get on the internet and find out what they are about. I wasn't happy to see they're linked to a foundation that connected to Saul Alinsky and that style of community organizing. And that also seems they're tied to political activism; and so it seems like they are really into liberation theology. Isn't that incompatible with Catholic social teaching? Do you know why? I would like to hear it from you. Oh, sure as a matter of fact, also you can go to EWTN's website, type in liberation theology, and there are some documents from the Vatican—a little truth in advertising here. I myself learned Saul Alinsky community organizing way back in 1969 and 70; and I was doing some of that so I saw this stuff first hand. So for me it's not just a theory. I also saw it's a problem with a liberation theology too, which I worked on down South. The difficulty with Alinsky and his style of organizing is that he said this is the way you have to do it—you go into an area and you identify what the problem issues are and there's nothing wrong with that and analyzing what is the problem in our particular area. But then the next thing is that you have to organize people around the issue and the only way to get them motivated is to identify who the enemies are so you say "this guy is our enemy" and then you take some action they suggest you start out with a small issue taking action of the group to go in and you force the enemy to go ahead and correct the situation so for instance we were organizing protests at the houses of city officials of public housing commissioners of Chicago housing Commission. So you go to his Church you know you have signs saying this guy is a slum lord and that all this kind of thing. And you embarrass him enough to force him to meet your demands. Then once people have a victory over the enemy, then you go to another issue. Find what the issue is, who the enemy and organize better and this gives power to the people. That was Alinsky's style. Now, what do you find problematic with that as a Christian? Uh, it is uncharitable. And also you'r playing off of enemies, vying against each other, and it's the same thing with liberation theology. What it does is it says you have to pit this class against the other class. The lower classes against the middle or upper classes, and class warfare was inherent because you have this with Marxist analysis—they tried to separate it from Marxist atheism but they still have a Marxist economic analysis in that you pit classes against classes. And you have to have

class warfare in order to get things done. Again, you are establishing enemies and then trying to defeat them. Whereas a Christian approach and this is easy to do this; that is one of the reasons why the Pope by the way was against us going to war in Iraq...we're establishing enmity and one of the things that is inherent in war isn't it and one of the problems that we have is instead of seeing a solidarity with these other people something like Pope John Paul would talk about that he learned when they just started praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet in front of the convent where Faustina was buried he would go there for the Chaplet after work. He was made to do slave labor for the Nazis and while he was forced to work out of school his professors were executed, his friends killed because they were Jews, etc. He said we have to learn to have a solidarity with our enemies they too are redeemed by Christ, they too are human being so we have to seek solidarity rather than enmity and that was the problem with liberation theology and of course with Saul Alinsky's style organizing. So that would be the critique I have and the thing that I would say. How is it that we are developing in a Christian Parish, a Catholic Parish a solidarity with these people who are for oppressors because they're citizens and so am I and what do we do in terms of the solidarity with the poor and the oppressors...we're all in this together and what other means we can use to bring about a change. Change has to go on in the social situations to be sure. There needs to be improvements but establishing that from enmity is wrong. Does that help you?