

When I was thirteen, I had a year-long relationship with a fifty-year-old man named Karl. It started when I read his pamphlet, the Communist Manifesto. He was awe-inspiring – magnificently pedantic, and often unintelligible, yet able to incite revolution with his economic theories. I saw Karl Marx as a modern prophet, a trafficker in truth.

Yet, as can often happen when we fall for a thinker, I mistook confidence for prophecy. I had been attracted to his boundless faith, his capacity to condense monumental questions into dissolvable difficulties, but I ignored the consequences of his philosophy.

For a while after I read Marx, I lived in a reconstructed past, one in which the promise of global communism was still alive. As Ukraine turned towards the West in the Revolution of 2014, I turned my attentions to the Bolshevik-style revolution that had taken place in the same country a century earlier. I started to challenge the preconceived notions of my classmates, instructing them on the historical inevitability of communism. Sometimes, these moments were socially misplaced. I told my catechism teacher he was peddling the “opiate of the masses” and that “the coming emancipation of the proletariat will render my relationship with the Church untenable.” He was not amused.

I was, however, still obligated to go to my weekly catechism classes. Sullen, I would await my “indoctrination.” During these times I often stared up at the stained glass windows of St. Thomas More. On one side were the saints; on the other were the martyrs. The caricatured bliss and agony in their faces spoke to me. In spite of myself, I couldn't help but think that their struggles had succeeded in some peculiar way. Rome, Byzantium, and Moscow had, each in turn, been consigned to the dustbin of history. The Church remained. And this endurance was not exclusive to Catholicism. Buddhism survived Maoism; Judaism survived Nazism; Islam survived Imperialism. I knew this meant something, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

My revelation came slowly, and like most good revelations, saints were involved. The agony and ecstasy in their stained-glass faces reflected something deeply human. Despite the Church's attempts to place them outside of the realm of lived experience, they remained individuals, not cogs in some vast societal machinery. They were not products of esoteric social theories or historical inevitabilities – they lived distinct, meaningful lives. Marxism's fatal flaw is that it ignores the individual, painting history as a titanic clash between monolithic classes. Marx, in a flight of arrogance, wrote a history populated by a million copies of himself: rational automatons that would cast off the yoke of oppression if given the opportunity. This said more about Marx than about history.

When I visit the church now, I dwell on one image in particular: St. Ignatius of Loyola, my namesake. As a young man, he hoped to make a name for himself in combat. A cannonball dealt him a crippling blow before he had the chance. During his long convalescence, he took to studying scripture, which prompted him to dedicate his life to God. He founded the Society of Jesus – known commonly as the Jesuits. His message was simple: listen to your heartbeat, to the sound of your feet as they hit the pavement, to the ache of your muscles, to fortunes made or lost, to the vagaries of life, to the dialectic within you; in short to everything that makes you an individual, for that is the will of God.

Marx demands you to read him and to agree. The likenesses of the Saints, projected onto the stone floor, invited me to listen. As long as you are willing, you will hear something greater than doctrine but simpler than language: I was here, I am here, I will be here.