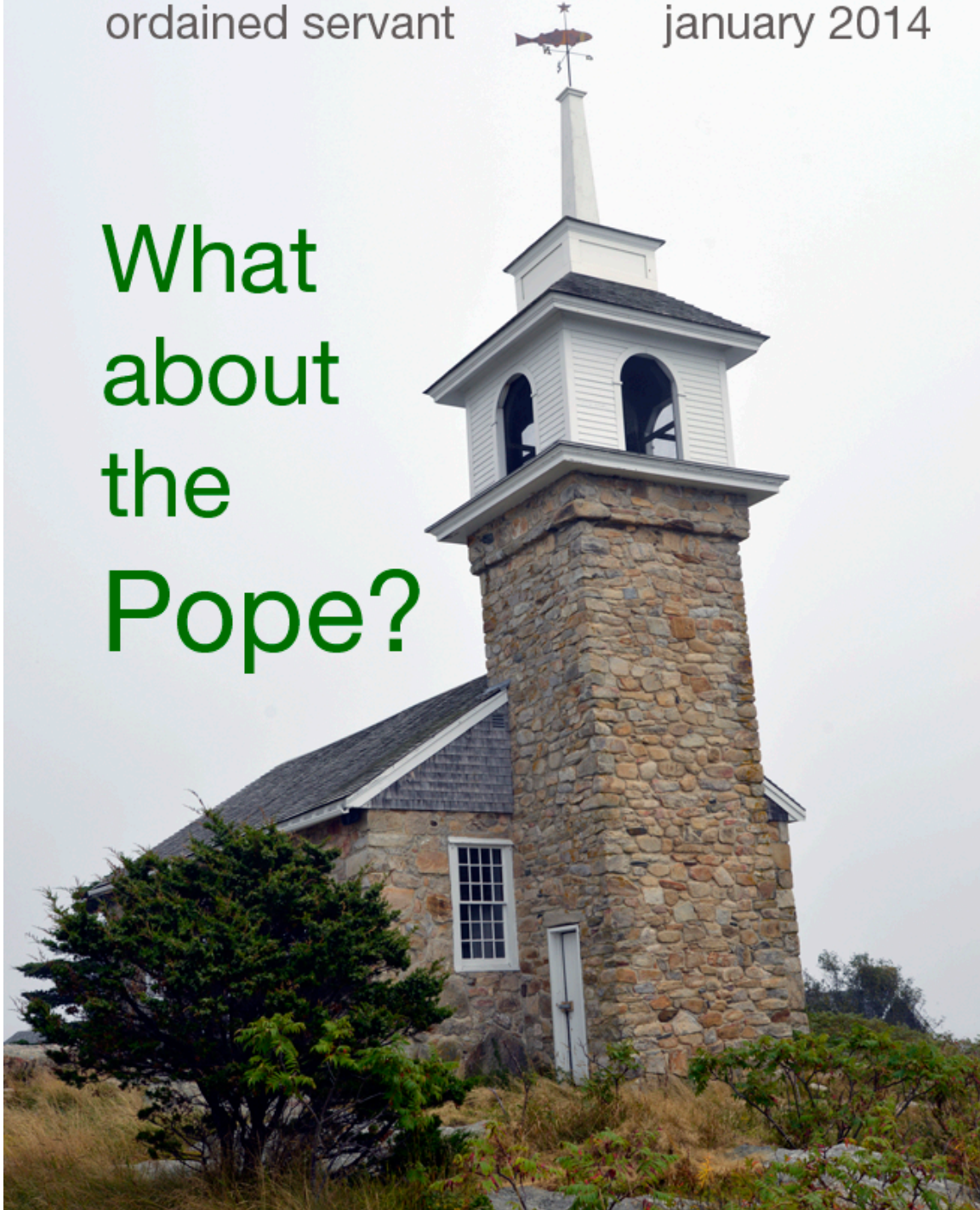


ordained servant



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What about the Pope?



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From the Editor

As we continue to think about church government, a very relevant topic presents itself with the election of the 266th Roman Catholic pope, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Francis I. The typical evangelical response is almost unanimously positive. The important questions about papal doctrine and the papacy are not normally being asked. While we should always be thankful for any leader who appears to be humble, generous, and intelligent, this should never distract us from asking the more fundamental questions—in this case religious, theological, and ecclesiological questions. This month two venerable OPC church historians, Daryl Hart and John Muether, look at the new pope in terms of his relation to the theology and practice of Vatican II.

In my two-part article “Democracy and the Denigration of Office,” I explore ways in which egalitarianism has diminished the biblical view of church office, and offer some remedial suggestions.

Riley Fraas offers six excellent reasons to read a new biography of Calvin’s forgotten colleague, Pierre Viret.

Finally, usher in the new year with some edifying humor from Eutychus II; a special, sweet poem by Robert Herrick: “The New-yeeres Gift.”

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Thoughts

Democracy and the Denigration of Office, Part 1

Gregory E. Reynolds

Americans are not given to use the word *democracy* pejoratively. Hence, the title of this essay will be disturbing to some. In common usage the word loosely describes a system of government in which the rights of citizens are protected and their voices are given a fair representation in public affairs. Careful students of history, however, will be quick to make certain cautionary distinctions in order to remind us that majoritarian democracy, such as that found in Periclean Athens, and constitutional republicanism, which we often loosely refer to as “democracy” today, are quite different in many important respects.

Our present American system is, in fact, a corruption of the government of our Founding Fathers. While most may naively think of the popular franchise as the essence of the democratic ideal, we do well to remember that the essence of this form was a system of carefully defined, limited, and distributed federal powers designed to keep civil order and foster individual and corporate responsibility at the state and local levels. Furthermore, it assumed the internal constraints of true Christianity, which are now rapidly disappearing in the Western world.¹

It is not, however, the purpose of this essay to reflect on democracy as a political system in its relationship to church government. It is democracy as a popular ideal, as a major strand in the fabric of the American mind, as that ideal impinges on the idea of church office, that is the subject of this essay. President Wilson encapsulated this American ideal in giving the rationale for our entrance into World War I with his slogan: “The world must be made safe for democracy.” This theme has been reiterated in President George H. W. Bush’s preachments about a “new world order.”

The popular imagination, increasingly disconnected as it is from its Christian and Reformation past, tends to read “democracy” as a cultural catchword which conjures up a series of narcissistic notions such as: “I have rights; my opinion is as important as anyone’s; I am equal to others in every way; I have a right to education, peace, prosperity, healthcare, and recreation; I may believe and say what I like; and I may do what I like as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone.”

It is not my intention to denigrate the democracy embodied in the founding documents and institutions of our nation or to dismiss all present popular ideas about democracy. It must not be overlooked, however, that in its contemporary popular

This essay is adapted from chap. 13 in Mark R. Brown, ed., *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers* (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993) 235–55.

¹ Claes G. Ryn, *The New Jacobinism, Can Democracy Survive?* (Washington: National Humanities Institute, 1991), esp. 19ff. Here is an excellent primer on the points made in my first two paragraphs.

conception, the egalitarian instinct is destructive to the very institutions that have made our country great. But most importantly, the biblical idea of office has been denigrated in church and state by this idol of egalitarianism. As evangelical Anglican John Stott pointed out many decades ago: “There is much uncertainty in the modern Church about the nature and functions of the professional Christian ministry.”² It is my contention that this uncertainty has in large part been fostered by a growing egalitarian mentality. Egalitarianism tends to equalize God with man and then man with man, and as a result, office of every kind is destroyed. Authority in all of its God-given forms is radically undermined. When it comes to the government of the church, we tamper with its God-given order at our own peril. Thus, I have chosen generally to use the word *egalitarian* to denote the negative, destructive aspect of the democratic mindset that I am concerned to expose.

My intention is to make a case for a view of church office which has been clearly articulated by Presbyterian and Reformed churches since the Reformation. The “three office” idea (minister, elder, and deacon), though substantially embodied in the standards of most American Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, has fallen on hard times in recent history. This is due in large part to the egalitarian ideal which pervades the American mind and its contemporary institutions. In order to correct this problem as it is manifested in the church, we need to appreciate the cultural forces which have undermined the proper biblical idea of church office. An example that reveals this mind-set can be observed in the way in which ministers are often sought. The process is referred to as “candidating.” In many churches the resemblance of this process to contemporary political candidating is striking and tragic. The prevailing “two-office” view (elder and deacon, for some Presbyterians this means there are two functions of elder—teaching and ruling) is a concession to the egalitarian agenda, even if there is no intention to compromise biblical principle. In fact, it is especially where this compromise is unintended that it must be reckoned with. The traditional three-office idea, on the other hand, properly understood and practiced, will help to overcome all of the deleterious tendencies of the democratic spirit, while promoting the full range of pastoral ministry envisioned in the New Testament.

No doubt both two- and three-office proponents will find a large measure of agreement in assessing the threat which egalitarianism poses to the biblical view of office. Those who claim the two-office view among Presbyterians are usually functionally three-office.³ They will also agree, in the main, on the function of church office. But beyond this it needs to be appreciated that the two-office view, especially in its pure form, is, wittingly or unwittingly, egalitarian in its conception and effect, and, therefore, tends to undermine the ministry of the church in our day.

The Historical Roots of Egalitarianism

It should be recognized at the outset that the fundamental spiritual and moral principle of egalitarianism is not equality but autonomy. Put another way, the primary motivation of this democratic spirit is found in its assertion of equality or identification with God.

² Geoffrey Thomas, “The Pastoral Ministry,” in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952–1984, Essays in Honor of Edmund P. Clowney*, ed. Harvey M. Conn (Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 74.

³ Larry E. Wilson “How Many Offices Are There? Practical Concerns” *Ordained Servant* (April 1992): 38.

Thus, egalitarianism has its roots not in the Enlightenment, but in Eden. Adam's assertion of autonomy in God's world is the ultimate cause of the democratic mentality in its contemporary expression. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century is the proximate historical source, which gave egalitarianism its present form.

The word *office* comes from the Latin *officium*, a work or service performed. Biblically, office is a position of specific duty assigned to a person by the Lord through his church. Each believer has a calling to general office. The minister is called to be a servant of the Lord as his spokesman, a minister of his Word. Paul needed to remind Timothy of his office. "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership" (1 Tim. 4:13–14). The teaching office is God's gift to the church. It is also commanded. Sietsma asserts: "The essence of office depends on the divine mandate."⁴

Man, created as *imago dei*, was given the office of a servant of God. Under God, Adam was called to be a prophet, a priest, and a king—a vice-gerent over God's creation. God's mandate was for his servant to cultivate all of the rich and varied potential of his creation to the eternal glory of God. In challenging the sovereign authority of God to define man's meaning and role in history, Adam forsook his office. He became the first egalitarian by declaring his equality with God in defining his own meaning and role in history. The modern manifestation of this problem should not surprise us. It is at the heart of the thinking and motivation of fallen man in whatever form it may be historically expressed.

At the beginning of our history as a nation, this spirit was clearly present. It must not be forgotten that our nation was born in the twilight of the "age of reason." As a true child of the Enlightenment, Thomas Paine confidently declared "my own mind is my own church." Paine's *The Age of Reason* was a virulent attack on the integrity and authority of Scripture. Several of the Founding Fathers held similar deistic ideas, however more subtly they may have stated them. Autonomy was on the march.

As sociologist Robert Bellah points out in his brilliant analysis of individualism, there are "three central strands of our culture—biblical, republican, and modern individualist."⁵ According to Bellah, the American quest for "success, freedom, and justice" comes to expression in each of these three strands throughout her history.⁶ Benjamin Franklin was the quintessential individualist of the founding era. He was the heroic poor boy made good, who pulled himself up by his own bootstraps and lived by the utilitarian interpretation of Christianity captured in his famous statement, "God helps those who help themselves." The moral maxims of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, such as, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," were rooted not in God and his Word, but in personal utility.⁷ As with Thomas Jefferson, whose *Jefferson Bible* was an attempted reduction of Scripture to its purely ethical teachings, morality was loosed from its Christian moorings. Man was the measure as well as the master of reality and history. God and his Word became the servant of man.

⁴ K. Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, translated by Henry Vander Goot (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1985), 24.

⁵ Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 28.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 32.

Given this ascendant utilitarianism, it was not difficult for equality before the law, guaranteed by our constitution, to subtly become an equality of individual success. Enlightenment men like Franklin and Paine became exemplars of the American dream. Every man can succeed, given the opportunity and the will. With this shift toward a more anthropocentric view of life, the biblical idea of office began to disappear. Man lives for his own glory. He is no one's servant. He is a law unto himself.⁸ The Enlightenment notion that governmental authority is derived from the people was a secular distortion of the covenantal idea, in which the people of God were called to respond to the sovereign initiative of their Lord. When authority is delegated by God, both government and people have mutual responsibilities. But God's law is king, not the king or the people's law. As authority shifted to the people, the will of the majority became king, and God was simply invoked to bless the popular will (or the will of politicians, as we are reminded at every inauguration).

Though often billed as a reaction to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century Romanticism was really its offspring, or at least its younger sibling. Men like Walt Whitman and Washington Irving despised the materialism of the Enlightenment-inspired Industrial Revolution. Autonomy, however, was as much at the heart of the romantic movement as it was of Enlightenment rationalism. Whitman's "Song of Myself" says it all in the first line: "I celebrate myself."⁹ The romantic poet and the rationalist philosopher-statesman were singing different parts to the same tune. The transcendentalist essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed this theme when he asserted: "Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string."¹⁰

Romantic man thought himself able to plum deeper than the Newtonian geometric-mathematical portrait of reality. The mysterious, emotional, and irrational element of man's nature needed to be appreciated. The logic of the scientist-philosopher was to be replaced by the genius of the artist. The precincts of calculation were to be transcended. Form was to be superseded by life. The authentic individual had to pursue Shelley's "desire of the moth for the star."¹¹ With man's reason having been set up as the final arbiter of reality and meaning, the romantic focused on the inner feelings, longings, and aspirations of the individual. In the nineteenth century, reason set out on a new voyage amidst the mysteries of life.¹²

It should not surprise us to see rationalistic science and romantic individualism appear together as brothers in the twentieth century. Squabble though they may, they are still kin. The internal combustion engine and the electronic impulse, consummate products of reason, have been harnessed to serve the individual in an unprecedented way. Timothy Leary, a leading proponent of the expansion of the individual consciousness via psychedelic drugs in the 1960s, applauded the new technology, called "virtual reality" (VR), commenting, "I hope it's totally subversive and unacceptable to anyone in power. I am flat out enthusiastic that it is for the liberation and empowerment of the individual."¹³

⁸ Sietsma, *The Idea of Office*, 40.

⁹ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹¹ Crane Brinton, "Romanticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 7: 207.

¹² Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought, Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1650–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 283–301.

¹³ Glenn Emery, "Virtual Reality's Radical Vision," *Insight on the News* (May 6, 1991), 25.

This reminds us of President Clinton's recent assertion that the purpose of government is "empowerment" of its citizenry. As new technologies propelled by egalitarianism reshape our institutions, the individual is rapidly replacing the authority of God, his Word, his church, and the idea of office. As spontaneity and informality express people's devotion to the idol of egalitarianism,¹⁴ individual authority and expression assert themselves with increasing boldness in the church. It is thought by many that in the absence of such self-assertion the church as an institution lacks authenticity and is "morally hypocritical."¹⁵ Thus, the sadly prevailing sentiment is "There's nothing in it for me." Increasingly, the conviction that the church exists to "meet my needs" is held by ministers and people alike as they use the church as a vehicle for their own success.

The Effects of Egalitarianism on Church Office

The immediate precursor of the American War of Independence was the Great Awakening. Despite the spiritual good it generated, it has proved to be a major influence in kindling the egalitarian impulse. Revivalists within the Presbyterian Church of that period were mostly a "force battering at the ecclesiastical structure."¹⁶ The Rev. John Thompson, an Old Side Presbyterian, opposed itinerancy by positing the federalist idea that ruling elders fairly represented the people.¹⁷ But this idea stood against a tide of unrestrained leveling.

One of the plainest popular manifestations of egalitarianism is anticlericalism together with its offspring, anti-intellectualism. Ever since the Reformation, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has been misinterpreted by the radical wing of that movement, the Anabaptist (referring to their rejection of infant baptism). During the Great Awakening, revivalist Herman Husband, glorying in his lack of learning, confirmed the anti-revivalists' worst suspicions by boasting, "My Capacity is not below them of the first and greatest Magnitude."¹⁸ Some, according to anti-revivalists, even claimed to be "abler divines than either *Luther* or *Calvin*."¹⁹ In claiming the right to question and judge all, the extreme revivalists denied the idea of special office altogether. A genuine experience of God's grace was, for them, the only prerequisite for preaching. James Davenport's "repentance" during the Awakening consisted of burning his books and his clerical garb. He encouraged the laity to assume ministerial authority.²⁰

In a well-intended effort to assert the priesthood of all believers and genuine religious experience over against the rationalistic elitism of some of the New England clergy, revivalists, in many cases unwittingly, undermined the authority and integrity of biblical office, especially the teaching office. The tendency to find the source of spiritual authority in the individual rather than in God-ordained office was present in American Reformed churches from the earliest times. Men like Jonathan Edwards, along with his

¹⁴ Cf. Charles Dennison, "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in Worship Services," *Minutes of the Fifty-eighth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1991), 290.

¹⁵ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 64.

¹⁶ Alan Heimart and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), xxx.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113–14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 646.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

Calvinistic contemporaries and forefathers, carefully rejected the egalitarian impulse in the Great Awakening, without denying the authentic work of God's Spirit in that movement. Charles Dennison, late historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, summed it up cogently:

The new tone sounding from the Presbyterians harmonized well with the spirit in the new nation in which the democratic ideal blended with the rising evangelical movement. The evangelicals traced themselves straight back to the charismatic aspects of New Testament worship (Ilion T. Jones, *A Historical Approach to Evangelical Worship* [1954], 150). Their perspective had been promoted in part by the Great Awakening and more conspicuously by the triumphs of Methodism. . . . With most, there was a deliberate attempt to keep ministers and layman on the same plane (Jones, 155).²¹

In the nineteenth century, this tendency simply spread. No one exemplified it in Presbyterianism better than Charles Grandison Finney. He was a member of the New School party from his conversion in 1821 until 1836, when he became a Congregationalist. "Finney and his colleagues had drunk deeply of the new ideals of democracy and sought to devise new means to reach men like themselves."²² Finney's "new measures" focused on the individual decision of seekers. Others gave more attention to the emotions.²³ New School author Albert Barnes, in opposing the doctrinal strictness of the Old School, had great zeal for "freedom of the spirit."²⁴ But the net result was the same: the individual was king.

Old School Presbyterian Thomas Smyth saw the dangers of the "democratic form" in congregational churches:

Experience, however, proved, as it still proved in Congregational churches, the inexpediency of such a course, its impotency and inefficiency on the one hand, and on the other hand its tendency to produce parties, schisms and disturbances, and even tumults and open ruptures in the church.²⁵

The egalitarian spirit, however, did not find Presbyterianism to be the happiest of hunting grounds, due to the latter's strong and clear view of the importance of special office. Through the office of ruling elder, the laity already played a prominent role in the government of the church. Furthermore, the priesthood of all believers was taken seriously and insured each member a vital part in the worship and edification of the church without giving quarter to egalitarianism.

Presently, however, the power of the democratic ideal in the American mind threatens to overwhelm all institutions which dare to stand in its way. In the church a distorted version of the priesthood of all believers has been reinforced by interpreting Ephesians

²¹ Dennison, "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons," 290.

²² Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America* (Richmond: John Knox, 1967), 47.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵ Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of the Reverend Thomas Smyth, D.D.*, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan, 1908), 4:18–19.

4:12 to refer to ministers of the Word equipping church members for ministry. T. David Gordon presents a convincing exegetical argument against this prevailing interpretation:

To sustain such a translation, three things must be proven: (1) that the three purpose clauses, so obviously parallel in their grammatical structure, have different implied subjects (thereby disrupting the parallel); (2) that *katartismos* is properly translated “equip” here; and (3) that *ergon diakonias* refers not to acts of service, in the general sense, but to the overall “Christian ministry.”

If any one of these three is not proven, the entire argument unravels, for the “lay ministry” translation of this passage requires all three conclusions.²⁶

Gordon concludes,

Further, insofar as these “gifted ones” are appointed for the edification of the body, it is detrimental to the health of the body to diminish or otherwise alter the role of the gifted ones. That is, it is a sin against all three components of Paul’s metaphor, not merely against one, to diminish the role of the gift. It diminishes the thanks that are properly due the Giver for his gracious provision. It diminishes the range and degree of edification that the body might otherwise experience. And it diminishes the honor that ought to be given to those we are commanded to honor doubly.²⁷

In his recent impassioned and witty plea for America to return to the behavior and ideals of its WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) heritage, Richard Brookhiser unintentionally made a very important point about egalitarianism. In commenting on the power of WASP America to assimilate a wide variety of nationalities and viewpoints, Brookhiser noted:

It is one of the pleasant surprises of the Irish experience that Catholicism adapted so well. The reason is plain. The Catholic Church in America became Americanized—that is, WASPized. The Catholic Church arrived as the one true faith, outside which there was no salvation, and it became a denomination. It was still the one true faith, of course, but then so were all the others.²⁸

Here is the power, not of the WASP, who is living off borrowed capital and about to declare bankruptcy anyway, but of egalitarianism aimed at religion. All religions are created equal. It is not a big step from that assertion to declare that because all church members are created equal, the idea of office is rubbish—or, worse, that, because it stands in the way of equality and self-fulfillment, it must be abolished altogether.

Where office formally exists in church and state, it is often used more for personal aggrandizement than for service to God or man. The celebrity has replaced the servant as a major mentor in our culture. Every man has the potential to be a star. If that fails, watching TV will provide vicarious stardom. In the church, this translates into the

²⁶ “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/1 (March 1994): 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁸ Richard Brookhiser, *The Way of the WASP* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 23.

mistaken notion that participation in worship requires a spotlight on the individual. So special music and “sharing times” proliferate. Why should the preacher own center stage? Thus, church office often degenerates into a stage for the display of one’s gifts, rather than a means of ministering God’s grace to God’s people. When it comes to opinions and ideas, many people feel that their thoughts have not been “heard” until they have been heeded. As Christopher Lasch rightly concludes, the value of self-restraint has been replaced by that of self-indulgence.²⁹ This is egalitarianism come into its own. Whether one worships in church or in the woods, the individual prevails.

While the view that diminishes the distinction between the pastor and the ruling elder, known as the two-office view, may not be the lineal descendent of egalitarian thinking, it is significant that it was first explicitly articulated in American Presbyterianism in the romantic nineteenth century. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that this view is predominant in our egalitarian present.

If egalitarianism is in the business of leveling distinctions, particularly where authority and office are involved, the two-office view falls prey to this instinct by obliterating the distinction between ruler and pastor. Its tendency is to bring down, not to elevate. At its worst, the preacher is thought merely to be paid to do full-time what the elder does for free. Thus, whatever distinction remains, it is not qualitative and official, but quantitative and practical. But then, ironically, this equalizing instinct brings down in order to elevate itself. In true *Animal Farm* fashion, “Some are more equal than others.” Pure egalitarianism always opens the door to pure dictatorship.

The defenders of the three-office view in the nineteenth century were quick to pick up on this irony in the two-office view. Charles Hodge pointed out that as a consequence of the two-office view, “we are therefore shut up by this new doctrine to abolish the office of ruling elder; we are required to make them all preachers.”³⁰ The very people the two-office theory purports to help are deprived of the putative pastoral connection. Hodge continues:

This doctrine is, therefore, completely revolutionary. It deprives the people of all substantive power. The legislative, judicial, and executive power according to our system, is in Church courts, and if these courts are to be composed entirely of clergymen, and are close, self-perpetuating bodies, then we have, or we should have, as complete a clerical domination as the world has ever seen.³¹

As Edmund Clowney asserts, to limit rule to those with teaching gifts creates a distance between church officers and the church, and it denies the use of men who are gifted to rule.³² So, while the three-office idea is often billed as clericalism or elitism, it turns out actually to be just the opposite.

A further irony lies in the fact that where the two-office view prevails, the plurality of elders in a congregation tends to diminish the importance and therefore the quality of the

²⁹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), 177.

³⁰ Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 269.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

³² Edmund P. Clowney, “A Brief for Church Governors in Church Government” (unpublished paper, 1972), 17.

teaching office. This was not lost on one of Hodge's mentors, Samuel Miller, whose classic work *The Ruling Elder* set the agenda for the nineteenth-century debate on the eldership. He lamented that the effect of the two-office view

would be to reduce the preparation and acquirements for the ministry; to make choice of plain, illiterate men for this office; men of small intellectual and theological furniture; dependent on secular employments for subsistence; and, therefore, needing little or no support from the churches which they serve.³³

The two-office idea, then, in its purest form, ends up denigrating both the teaching and the ruling offices. The biblical system requires both as separate offices in order to preserve the full range of ministry mandated in the Scriptures. In fact, most two-office proponents in Presbyterian churches do hold to a distinction between teaching and ruling elders, as species of one genus. This is often popularly referred to as the "two-and-a-half-office" view. But does this not really represent a transition from the three- to the two-office view? As Iain Murray noted of Thornwell and Dabney in the nineteenth century, "When in writing on the call to the ministry they make plain that they are *not* discussing ruling elders—a position hardly consistent with their case" (i.e., for the two-office view).³⁴ The logic of the two-office position is bound ultimately to do away with any distinction between the pastor and the ruling elder.³⁵

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³³ Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1831), 187.

³⁴ Iain Murray, "Ruling Elders—A Sketch of a Controversy," *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, no. 235 (April 1983): 9.

³⁵ Instructive in this regard is the transition made by G. I. Williamson from a two- to three-office view. G. I. Williamson, "A Look at the Biblical Offices," *Ordained Servant* (April 1992): 30–37; "The Two- and Three-Office Issue Reconsidered," *Ordained Servant* (January 2003): 5–6. See also Mark R. Brown, "Why I Came to a Three-Office View," *Ordained Servant* (January 1995): 17–19.

ServantHistory

What to Think of the New Pope

by Darryl G. Hart and John R. Muether

Introduction

Papal watching has been a popular spectator sport among American evangelicals for thirty-five years now. In 1978, when the 455-year Italian monopoly was broken by a Polish priest who became an instant celebrity, Protestants began to warm in their attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church. The thaw continued when the respected biblical scholar Joseph Ratzinger succeeded John Paul II in a 2005 election that overcame rivals from the liberal wing of the church. Now the word on his successor, the first non-European Pope since the eighth century, is that if you liked John Paul II and Benedict XVI, you are going to love Francis.

What's not to love about this humble priest from Buenos Aires? We are not sure whether to classify him as a liberal or a traditionalist, and his Jesuit background may not serve to clarify matters. But under his leadership, the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires was decidedly evangelical-friendly, easing long-standing tensions especially between Roman Catholics and charismatics. And this pope can preach—in fact, he does preach, and that daily, we are told; sermons, moreover that are Scripture-saturated and Christ-centered.

And with Francis, it's not all talk. If his predecessors maintained the trappings of a haughty and inaccessible Roman Catholicism, Francis is signaling a solidarity with the poor in a lifestyle that seems to be a clear break from the past. Shortly after his election last spring, Francis conducted a Maundy Thursday service in a prison, washing the feet of several prisoners including a Muslim woman. His anti-papal practices, including modest apparel, humble living conditions, and use of public transportation, are rendering him more populist than John Paul II, and he resonates even more strongly with the young. In short, Francis “gets it” in ways that eluded Benedict and even John Paul II.

Indeed *Roman* Catholicism is sounding like an anachronistic phrase. Months before Francis took office, George Weigel suggested that we are witnessing the dawn of a new *evangelical* Catholicism. Weigel could scarcely have imagined a better torch-bearer for his vision for the church. With Francis, we are far removed from the clutches of Rome and have broken into leadership from the new world and the global south. Evangelization and conversion are priorities in this magisterium that promise to heal the deep wounds of the church and the turmoil since Vatican II.

Protestants have been reluctant to take issue with assessments like these. Last November, when Sarah Palin voiced her concern over the liberal sounding rhetoric of Francis, she apologized in short order for rushing to judgment against this “sincere and faithful shepherd” of the church. Instead she blamed a more reliable villain—the media.

But best-in-evangelical-fawning award goes to Timothy George,³⁶ who wrote in *Christianity Today* that, for evangelicals, the new Pope is “our Francis.” His “Christ-like rhetoric” is more widely accepted than that of any of his predecessors. Whatever doctrinal or moral continuity he represents is second to his profound pastoral instincts. His “servant leadership” is precisely what has connected Francis to our cynical age. “He is breaking the rules in the right places: where they shouldn’t exist.”

Is this truly the dawn of an era of “evangelical Catholicism?” As much as Francis promises to be a pope for the twenty-first century, there are considerations from the past that still haunt the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Here are three that especially confront the new Pope.

Three Considerations

The first concerns Francis’s appropriation of the conciliar impulse that the Second Vatican Council had tapped. Ever since the fifteenth century, popes have been bashful about calling church councils. The reason owes mainly to the papal crisis of the fourteenth century when the Roman Catholic Church experienced its so-called “Western Schism.” Between 1378 and 1417, the papacy had at least two rival claimants to the papal office, one located in Rome, the other in Avignon. When cardinals sought to end the crisis by electing a suitable pope, they wound up with five years (1409–1414) when the Roman Catholic hierarchy had three rival popes. To break the stalemate, the Council of Constance sorted through the rival popes and elected the legitimate successor to the See of Rome, Martin V. To do this, the council’s bishops claimed for councils an authority higher than the pope’s. Conciliarism was a prominent theme of late medieval reformers—that is, the idea that a better way to oversee the church was by a body of bishops than by the rule of a monarchical papacy. The Council of Constance also called for a regular convening of bishops—every ten years, much like the Church of England’s Lambeth Conference which gathers every decade. But Martin V and his successors never reconvened the council of bishops. It fell to Martin Luther in his appeal to the German nobility to call for a council to reform the Western church. It also took John Calvin to propose Presbyterianism—a form of church government that would rely on church councils or assemblies.

Of course, Paul III convened a council in 1545—the Council of Trent—to respond to the challenges made by Protestants. Paul was ambivalent since he wanted to repudiate Luther and other Protestants, but Charles V, the Emperor, hoped for reconciliation between Protestants and Rome. The awkward nature of Trent meant that participation by bishops was weak. Only thirty-one were present for the opening session. The council met on and off for almost twenty years and only swelled to 270 bishops by the end. Four popes held office during the Council, and none of them attended. Instead, they orchestrated the proceedings through legates. Some bishops believed the papacy placed restrictions on open discussion. Even though papal supremacy was a major Protestant objection to Rome, Trent delicately avoided discussion of the contested matter of papal or conciliar authority.

From 1563 until 1870, the Roman Catholic Church never witnessed another council. (To put this in some perspective, the national synod of the Dutch Reformed churches did

³⁶ Timothy George, “Our Francis, Too,” [posted 6/4/2013 8:30AM]
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/our-francis-too.html>.

not convene after the Synod of Dort for two centuries—1618–1818.) But at the First Vatican Council, the chief item of business was to underscore papal authority and supremacy, and the bishops did so by making papal infallibility a matter of church dogma. The specific context was a Europe in which political revolutions like the one in France in 1789 or calls for democratic reform in 1848 challenged the pope’s temporal and spiritual authority. In reaction, the First Vatican Council highlighted papal supremacy: “We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses . . . that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.”

But when John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the mood in the church at large was less about how to resist changes in European society than about how the church needed to embrace and affirm the contemporary world. Along with this transformation were the Second Vatican Council’s explicit calls for a more conciliar arrangement between the Bishop of Rome and the church’s bishops. The word used to describe this aspect of church life was collegial. The Second Vatican Council described the pope and the bishops as being “joined together,” and in communion “with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace, and also the councils assembled together, in which more profound issues were settled in common, the opinion of the many having been prudently considered.” These were signs of the “collegial character” of the episcopate and of the “hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body.” At the same time, the Council was quick to affirm the pope’s primacy: “The college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head.” The reason was that the “pope’s power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact.”³⁷ In effect, the Second Vatican Council wanted to involve the bishops and the laity in church life but could not challenge the standard of papal supremacy.

What ensued after the Second Vatican Council was dramatic. Traditionalists complained that everyone did what was right in his own eyes. For that reason, John Paul II and Benedict XVI tried to correct some of the excesses that developed after Vatican II by resurrecting the teaching office of the papacy and by restoring coherence with the liturgy and church discipline. But Pope Francis’s initial moves suggest that he is following the conciliar spirit that animated Vatican II by abandoning a model of pope as monarch over the church. Some reporters have commented that unlike Benedict XVI who preferred a “smaller, doctrinally purer church,” Francis stresses the Vatican II notion of “the church as the people of God.” The pope has also signaled an interest in promoting a more conciliar approach to day-to-day affairs. He has formed the so-called “Council of Eight,” a group of cardinals who will assist in reorganizing of the Vatican bureaucracy

³⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* Solemnly Promulgated By His Holiness Pope Paul VI On November 21, 1964.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

and, in Francis's own words, "help me with governance of the universal church."³⁸ These tendencies dovetail with Francis's "common man" approach and his refusal to use the privileged trappings of the papacy. What this means for the Roman Catholic Church in the long run is impossible to tell, but it does suggest that the spirit of Vatican II is alive and possibly well.

A second consideration for evaluating Francis is his own attitude toward the doctrinal and disciplinary ambiguity that Vatican II introduced. Prior to 1960, papal teaching had not only stressed the supremacy of the papal office but also the danger of departing from Rome's doctrinal formulations. In reaction to the social and political forces that disrupted nineteenth-century Europe, Pius IX issued a "Syllabus of Errors" which condemned all modern developments that threatened the church. Canon 80 summarized the tenor of the syllabus: it condemned the idea that "the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization." This opposition to modern life led later popes to issue sharp condemnations of liberalism in society and the church. Leo XIII, for instance, in 1898 issued an encyclical that judged Americanism to be a heresy—this was the idea that the church needed to adapt to the democratic setting of the United States. Leo's successor, Pius X, followed up in 1907 with an encyclical that condemned theological modernism—that is, theological efforts to adapt Christian teaching to evolution, biblical criticism, and modern philosophy.

Vatican II, however, took an almost opposite stance by following John XXIII's call for the church to update its teaching and practice. In politics, this meant that the church embraced what it had previously rejected—freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state. It also encouraged Roman Catholics to seek what was common with Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, while calling for ecumenical relationships with Protestants, known to the council as "separated brothers." And as mentioned above, Vatican II explained an ecclesiology that sought to recognize greater collegiality among the bishops and also the gifts of the laity, even asserting that the average believer participated in the prophetic office "by means of a life of faith and charity." The Council also reformed the liturgy and disciplines that had defined Roman Catholicism since Trent. It was an epoch-making event, one difficult for laity and clergy to comprehend, as Kenneth Woodward, a longtime reporter for *Newsweek*, explained in an account of Vatican II:

There was a time, not so long ago, when Roman Catholics were very different from other Americans. They belonged not to public school districts, but to parishes named after foreign saints, and each morning parochial-school children would preface their Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag with a prayer for Holy Mother the Church. When they went to Mass—never just a "Sunday service"—they prayed silently with rosaries or read along in Latin as if those ancient syllables were the language Jesus himself spoke. Blood-red vigil candles fluttered under statues and, on special occasions, incense floated heavily about the pews. Kneeling at the altar rail, their mouths pinched dry from fasting, the clean of soul were rewarded with the taste of God on their tongues—mysterious, doughy, and difficult to swallow. "Don't chew the Baby Jesus," they were warned as children, and few—even in old age—ever did.

³⁸ <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-francis-formalizes-cardinal-reform-group-reserves-decision-making>.

The Catholic Church was a family, then, and if there were few brothers in it, there were lots of sisters—women with milk-white faces of ambiguous age, peering out of long veils and stiff wimples that made the feminine contours of their bodies ambiguous too. Alternately sweet and sour, they glided across polished classroom floors as if on silent rubber wheels, virginal “brides of Christ” who often found a schoolroom of thirty students entrusted to their care. At home, “Sister says” was a sure way to win points in any household argument.

Even so, in both church and home, it was the “fathers” who wielded ultimate authority. First, there was the Holy Father in Rome: aloof, infallible, in touch with God. Then there were the bishops, who condemned movies and sometimes communism; once a year, with a rub from a bishop’s anointing thumb, young men blossomed into priests and Catholic children of twelve became “soldiers of Jesus Christ.” But it was in the confessional box on gloomy Saturday nights that the powers of the paternal hierarchy pressed most closely on the soul. “Bless me Father for I have sinned” the penitent would say, and in that somber intimacy, sins would surface and be forgiven.

There were sins that only Catholics could commit, like eating meat on Friday or missing Sunday Mass. But mostly the priests were there to pardon common failings of the flesh, which the timid liked to list under the general heading of “impure” thoughts, desires, and action. Adolescent boys dreamed of marriage when it would be okay by God and the fathers to “go all the way.” But their parents knew full well that birth control was not included in such freedom. Birth control was against God’s law, all the fathers said, and God’s law—like Holy Mother the Church—could never change.³⁹

But everyone could see that Rome had changed. John Paul II and Benedict XVI tried to channel that change back into a coherent order. But for some, the damage had been done. In the light of Francis’s recent off-the-cuff interviews, the less demanding and more tolerant character of Vatican II seems to have returned to the papacy. As one reporter on the Vatican recently put it, “Vatican II offered a new way of thinking about doctrine; it presented doctrine as something that always needed to be interpreted and appropriated in a pastoral key.” He sees this same attitude in Francis who insisted that “the dogmatic and moral teachings of the church are not all equivalent.” Instead, the church’s teaching finds its true pastoral significance within a “missionary style [that] focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things.”⁴⁰ Conservative Presbyterians who know the history of the controversies over modernism in the Presbyterian Church USA may notice an uncanny resemblance between Francis and the signers of the Auburn Affirmation who also distinguished between the essential and non-essential aspects of Christian teaching to avoid being charged with departing from ordination vows. In other words, if Vatican II represented Rome’s backing away from its previous condemnations of liberal theology, and if Francis represents the spirit of Vatican II, he may create a setting where theological innovation (read: liberalism) can blossom.

Questions surrounding the place of modernism in contemporary Roman Catholicism lead naturally to the third consideration relevant to evaluating Francis, namely, the social

³⁹ <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2013/01/reflections-on-the-revolution-in-rome>

⁴⁰ <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-wishes-release-vatican-iis-bold-vision-captivity>

teaching of the church. In the case of Protestant modernism, the decline of fidelity to orthodox teaching was bound up with efforts to apply Christianity to all of life. In the late nineteenth century, this meant trying to give the churches resources to respond to the social crises arising from industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. The Social Gospel—an application of the gospel to social and political “sins”—led churches to downplay the historic gospel which for progressives looked too otherworldly and individualistic to be of much good.

In contrast to Protestant modernists, the post-Vatican I papacy held on to both Roman Catholic teaching about salvation while also beginning to deliver teachings about the social conditions that had provoked the social gospel. Leo XIII, for instance, the same pontiff who condemned Americanism as a heresy, also issued *Rerum Novarum* (1891), an encyclical that addressed the tensions between industrial laborers and capitalism. He advocated conditions and compensation that would allow workers to avoid poverty. He also insisted on the importance of Christian moral norms for a proper understanding of the dignity of the laboring classes. Many historians regard Leo’s writing as the beginning of the so-called social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Benedict XVI, the church’s social teaching aims “to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.” He added that the church “has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice . . . cannot prevail and prosper.”⁴¹ Since Leo XIII, practically all popes have understood their office to have a responsibility to address economic, political, and international well being. Pope Francis has yet to issue any encyclicals that directly fall in the category of social teaching, but many of his off-the-cuff remarks indicate that he is willing to address topics that governments around the world are trying to resolve. In his inaugural homily Francis said, for instance, “I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”⁴²

For Christians who want a church that speaks to all of life, Rome’s tradition of social teaching represents a wholesome effort to extend the blessings of Christianity to the entire world, not just its peoples but its structures. But for conservative Presbyterians who believe that the church can only speak what God’s word reveals, Rome’s extensive comments on society and politics violate the doctrine of the spirituality of the church and show the dangers of churches speaking to matters beyond what Scripture reveals. J. Gresham Machen, in fact, explained this position by saying that the church could not speak to civil or political matters unless God had clearly revealed such laws and policies in the context of Christ’s fulfilling the civil and ceremonial laws of Old Testament Israel. Instead, the church’s mission, as exemplified by Christ and the apostles, was to proclaim the good news of eternal life through faith in Christ. This conviction—the idea that the church cannot let worldly affairs compromise her proclamation of otherworldly realities—means that even if many Protestants and Roman Catholics find Francis’s identification with the poor a refreshing shift, conservative Presbyterians will be much

⁴¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.

⁴² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato_en.html

more critical. For rather than showing the world God's love, Francis may actually be obscuring the real love that God displayed in the sacrifice of his beloved son, if he is not proclaiming that to the spiritually poor and needy no matter what their economic or physical condition.

Conclusion

On the three considerations raised here, Protestant skepticism regarding the magisterium of Pope Francis remains reasonable. These matters will do little to diminish his popularity. His recent papal exhortation, *Evangelii Guardium* (Joy of the Gospel), is being likened to the progressive imagination of Martin Luther King Jr. But saying yes to the gospel is possible only for those who get the gospel right.

The enthusiasm for Francis reveals more about the state of American evangelicalism (not to mention divisions among U.S. Roman Catholics) than the possibilities for his pontificate. His humble lifestyle and preferential option for the poor trump careful considerations of the doctrine that he preaches, because evangelical enthusiasts content themselves with accounts of his orthopraxy (or Roman Catholics on the left and the right can read their own convictions into his teachings). Thus when Timothy George confidently asserts that the first Jesuit Pope embraces Martin Luther's thesis on the importance of life-long repentance, he is simply engaged in wishful thinking.

Finally, to the three considerations raised above, we add one more: who is next? What happens when the seventy-six-year-old Francis passes from the scene? What will be found attractive in that "breath of fresh air?" If the fortunes of Roman Catholicism rest on the Bishop of Rome, the non-Protestant Western church will continue in its "Babylonian captivity."

Recommended Reading

Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us, ed.

John Armstrong (Moody, 1994). Especially helpful is the chapter by Robert B. Strimple, "Roman Catholicism Today" analyzing the post-Vatican II situation

John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (Norton, 2004).

Anne Roche Muggeridge, *The Desolate City: Revolution in the Catholic Church* (Harper & Row, 1986).

John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Belknap Press, 2010).

Russell Shaw, *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America* (Ignatius, 2013).

William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature, ed. John Witte, Jr., and Frank S. Alexander (Columbia University Press, 2007).

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ServantReading

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation

by Riley D. Fraas

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation, by R. A. Sheats. Tallahassee, FL: Zurich Publishing, 2012, xx + 323, \$30.00.

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation by R. A. Sheats is the finest specimen of a spiritual biography that I can recall reading in recent memory. If the reader is looking for a work of academic history that objectively reports all the facts about Viret, this is not the source. Its bias is clearly in favor of the Reformation in general and Viret's ministry in particular. However, if the reader is looking for a source of inspiration, encouragement, and devotion to the Almighty, it is highly recommended. Here are six reasons why I recommend that you read it.

1. It Is an Action-Packed, Page-Turning Thriller

From conflicts with Romanists (55); Bernese Protestant magistrates assuming all ecclesiastical authority in Pays de Vaud and forbidding church discipline (151–202); ignorant parishioners; empoisonment (44–46); illness (206); exile from his home country (167); blessed ministerial fruit; to his surprisingly gentle character in the face of opposition, capture, and imprisonment (251), I just could not put this book down. The action is non-stop. One episode that stands out in my mind is this anecdote of the first impression the reformer Guillaume Farel made in a Catholic village:

Arriving thus in Orbe with the Bernese ambassadors, Farel proceeded immediately to the town church where he mounted the pulpit and attempted to preach. A Catholic eyewitness recounts the event:

. . . after vespers were said, Farel, with presumptuous audacity, without asking leave of anyone, mounted to the pulpit of the church to preach, and as soon as everyone saw him, men, women, and children all cried aloud and boomed with every exclamation, seeking to prevent him, calling him dog, scoundrel, heretic, devil; other abuses they hurled upon him, so much so that one couldn't even hear God thunder.⁴³

Farel, however, was not to be cowed, and patiently awaited the cessation of the noise. At sight of his calm obstinacy, the men of the city rose furiously from their seats and rushed forward with the intention of pulling Farel from the pulpit. The courageous

⁴³ Quoting Pierrefleur, *Memoires de Pierrefleur* (Lausanne, Editions La Concorde, 1933), 16.

preacher would certainly have perished at the hands of the incensed mob had not the bailiff taken him in hand and personally escorted him to his lodging. (11)

2. It Is Well-written

Sheats writes with an effusiveness and expressiveness of style that can only come from being immersed in sixteenth-century French literature for months on end. Her English prose ebbs, flows, and punches. This quality is admittedly easier to recognize than to describe, but I will offer an example, “Again, as in the years of Catholic power, the Scripture had been replaced, though it was now done not by a bishop’s command or papal decree, but by the pen of a Protestant magistrate” (166).

3. It Is Doxological

As a spiritual biography should, it glorifies God in all things. This book will drive you to your knees in thanks to God for his mighty acts in history. Sheats recounts the successful disputation held versus the Catholic clergy at the cathedral of Lausanne in 1536:

Upon this vital battlefield each of these three men contested for the Faith, the mystery hid from ages, but now revealed to the saints (Col. 1:26). And within this combat each among this brilliant array of Reformers was noted in his own way: men shuddered at the thunderings of Farel, they sat amazed at the memory and clear-headedness of young Calvin, and they marveled at the startling wisdom and refreshing gentleness of Viret. (70)

And,

Viret and Calvin. How often the Lord had brought the paths of these two men together! How often the Swiss Reformer had enjoined his French counterpart—in preparing Geneva to receive the man they had banished, in aiding Calvin upon his return to the city . . . ever spurring each other onward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. But now, after a lifetime’s friendship and companionship, it was Calvin who first attained the prize. (246)

4. It Fills in Important Historical Gaps

Pierre Viret (1511–1571) is a name that is largely forgotten, but clearly should not be. Viret, along with the more famous Calvin and Farel, together formed the *Triumvirate* (71–72). These three pastors worked closely together, were dear friends, and were used mightily in French-speaking Switzerland. Viret spent a significant part of his ministry in Geneva, so much that the Genevans thought of him as “our pastor” long after he had departed that city (247). At the founding of the Genevan Academy, the principal and most competent faculty members were those who had been exiled from Pays de Vaud as a result of their dispute with Bernese Protestant Lords over fencing the Lord’s Supper, professors from the Reformed Academy of Lausanne (204). This Academy had been established to train ministers for the newly Reformed city. During its short existence, the Academy of Lausanne of which Viret was a founding faculty member yielded some of history’s most influential Reformers. Sheats writes:

Indeed, in the days prior to the establishment of Calvin's Academy in Geneva in 1559, the preeminent place of study in the pays de Vaud was unquestionably Lausanne. The Academy turned out countless pastors for the Reformed faith, and, aside from the preachers who left the Academy to proceed as missionaries to the surrounding Roman Catholic countries, were many world-renowned men of the Faith who also received their training at Viret's school. These students included Zacharias Ursinus and Casper Olevianus, authors of the Heidelberg Catechism of 1562, and Guido de Brès, author of the Belgic Confession of 1561." (92)

5. Pierre Viret Is an Inspirational Figure

Viret was known for being dauntless, courageous, gentle, pastoral, and a true peacemaker. Here are some notable quotes from the author: "If Farel was the Peter of the French Reformation and Calvin was the Paul, of a certainty Viret was the John" (64). "Only the fear I have of Him holds me to my post"⁴⁴, (175).

Just as Beza, Viret recognized the innumerable difficulties and almost certain defeat that awaited him in Lausanne. But, despite the seeming hopelessness surrounding him, he knew he could not forsake his call. As pastor of Lausanne, he must remain and fight for the Reformation of that city until every means possible had been exhausted. (174–75)

Sheats describes an incident in Lyon, France, where Viret ministered for a time, involving a Jesuit priest who had newly been condemned to death by the Protestant authorities for his false teachings:

Viret requested that clemency be shown the condemned man and that time be granted him to consider the Reformed teaching before he was brought to execution. The baron, however, would hear of no delay, and ordered the execution to continue. Viret, seeing that all entreaties were vain, leapt upon the scaffold and, interposing his very life to save his enemy, declared that if Auger were to die, he also would share his fate. (223)

As a result, the execution was interrupted, and Auger was not long after sprung out of prison by Catholic comrades, and lived on to trouble Viret's ministry (246). Viret was so universally appreciated as a peacemaker that when the French crown issued an edict that only French-born pastors could remain in the country, the Catholic clergy in Lyon, fearing what might happen in their city if his peacemaking influence were absent, lobbied for the Swiss Viret to be given special treatment by allowing him to remain in Lyon (235).

6. The Beautiful Glossy Color Photographs

This book contains copious photographs taken on location in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands of cities, cathedrals, castles, and council buildings relevant to the life and ministry of Pierre Viret. If you have never been to any of the locations pictured, as I have not, you may want to go after seeing these photographs. The high volume of

⁴⁴ Quoting Henri Vuilleumier, *Notre Pierre Viret* (Lausanne: Librairie Payot & C^{ie}, 1911), 228.

photographic pages and the extended bibliography and index reduce the prose sections to considerably less than the official 323 pages.

I won't say that you must read the book. I will only say that if you don't, you're really missing out.

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ServantPoetry

Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

The New-yeeres Gift

Let others look for Pearle and Gold,
Tissues, or Tabbies manifold:
One onely lock of that sweet Hay
Whereon the blessed Babie lay,
Or one poore Swadling-clout, shall be
The richest New-yeeres Gift to me.

ServantHumor

With All My Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind?

by Eutyclus II

Distractions in worship are a problem—the little kid who won't sit still, the little kid who continues to bounce around after the initial fidgeting, the little kid's parents who won't attend to the bouncing toddler fast enough, the teenager two aisles ahead who looks back to see when if the parents are attending to the little kid. Incidents like these are what lead congregations to create nurseries or designate seating for families with young children. Of course, these "solutions" don't remove distractions. Loud children are still a distraction even if they sit at the back of the meeting space or don't wind up in the nursery. And that leads to the post-worship distraction of wondering about whether to talk to the parents and calculating the good that may come for peaceful services over against the antagonism that such an intervention may produce.

And then come the distractions beyond the control of parents or the progress of covenant children's self-control. During a recent service, elders went forward to sit in the front pew nearest the communion table to receive and distribute the elements of the Lord's Supper. One of the elders noticed a bee flying around the front of the room. When it landed on the table, the elder thought the pastor would also notice the insect and take proper action. But the minister did not since he was in the middle of instructions about the sacrament. The elder tried to concentrate on the words of institution but could not because the bee had crawled from the table into the napkins that enfolded the loaf of bread about to be broken by the pastor before being distributed to the congregation. The pastor went ahead, seemingly oblivious to the danger.

The elder did not know what to do. He considered intervening, which would have meant standing up, walking to the table, picking up the tray, and provoking the bee to fly somewhere else. But this would turn the elder's distraction into a complete disruption of the sacrament. On the other hand, the elder also considered what kind of distraction would ensue if the pastor went ahead, opened the napkin, alarmed the bee, which then inflicted its stinger on an exposed part of the pastor's body. And if the pastor were allergic to bee stings and started to swell up, the disruption would have been disproportionately much greater than if the elder had intervened.

As it turned out, the service went ahead, the pastor removed the napkin, the bee flew away, the pastor broke the bread, and the elders took the pieces to the congregation. Whether the elder had actually examined himself properly or heeded the pastor's exhortation is not hard to say since he had not. But he had avoided acting in a way that would have distracted everyone else.

The greatest commandment—to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind—is a challenge any day of the week. But it takes on dimensions not sufficiently appreciated when Christians gather together to embody such love in corporate worship. I may be prepared to give my whole being (as much as possible, anyway) to the worship of God on a given Sunday morning, but the presence of other people can ruin that effort to

give up my entire self. What other people wear, how they smell, what noises they make can throw any worshiper off. If I worshiped God all by myself—in the proverbial prayer closet—I could conceivably approach God without any distraction, though everyone would likely admit to having thoughts during prayer or Bible reading that make us less than single-minded.

The challenge of distractions is arguably greater for pastors. A fairly easy example is the challenge a minister faces when he sees one of his adolescent children—no longer seated with and policed by his mother—whispering and laughing too frequently during the service. Should he call out his child by name—even during a sermon or administration of a sacrament—or should he wait to discipline the child at home? Either way—the child making noise or the pastor calling attention to the child—the pastor distracts the congregation.

But the duty of not diverting attention away from worship falls to ministers and officers in more subtle ways than the obvious ones that come with fractious children. Leading in worship requires a pastor to function as a kind of moderator. Whether he announces every element or calls on the congregation to rise or sit, the pastor has a duty to monitor the time (when to begin, how long the service is going), observe the actions of the people and ensure they occur in good order (such as allowing people taking the offering to complete their rounds before the congregation rises to sing a hymn), and to follow the order of service printed in the bulletin (admittedly some Presbyterian communions frown on bulletins but Orthodox Presbyterians generally do not). If a minister forgets a part of the service that has been listed in the bulletin—and this can happen any time a guest minister leads worship—congregants will likely take notice and wonder, for instance, whether the pastor will simply skip the Lord's Prayer entirely (because he forgot to say it at the designated time) or make up for his mistake and insert it at another point in the service.

A similar calculation extends to how much a minister inserts his own personality into the way he conducts a service. Of course, voice modulation, pronunciation, volume, cadence – in other words, the simple manner in which a pastor speaks is part of his personality and will be part of the way he leads a service, not to mention facial expressions and body language. But pastors can insert more of themselves than they realize in distracting ways. A joke in a sermon, an illustration, even the way he makes announcements can take members of the congregation's thoughts away from the elements of worship to wonder about the propriety of the example or to consider the illustration more than the sermon's biblical text. Some have argued that the minister needs to “get out of the way” when he preaches so that the people will give their due attention to God's word. This is no less true for the rest of the service where the pastor leads in such a way that worshipers do not notice him as they offer up praise and prayer to God.

The danger in our time of a subdued minister who goes out of his way not to draw attention to himself is that he will not be attractive to would-be members who evaluate a pastor by his likeableness. Pastoral restraint, of course, need not govern interactions after a service or other forums. But pastoral moderation for the sake of congregational participation is not a recipe for displaying a minister's charisma. And if people are going to look for a church on the basis of a pastor's personal charms, looks, or demeanor, a “get-out-of-the-way” approach to leading in worship could harm the appeal of a local congregation.

In the end, whether something in a service appeals to people or distracts from worship is impossible to control. God's people come in all shapes, sizes, and personalities, and that means that what some believers find disruptive, others will not even notice, or what some find attractive will put others off. The lesson, then, may have less to do with each Christian's temperamental idiosyncrasies and more with the corporate nature of the Christian life. If Christianity is less about me, my needs, my criteria for a good pastor, my pet peeves with unruly children, and more about what I share in common with all believers—from a common confession to sitting under the oversight of the same elders—then perhaps we as a body will have fewer distractions in worship and in the life of a congregation. If that is so, then maybe the Greatest Commandment needs to be understood not simply as a directive for me to be all consumed, but for Christians corporately to worship with all of their collective heart, soul, strength, and mind. In which case, I end up giving up of myself for the good of the body just as little Johnny does as he tries to sit still and stay quiet for seventy minutes.