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Church of Mercy: Vision of the Church

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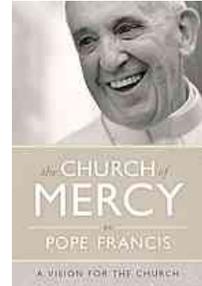
Book Review

Church of Mercy: Vision of the Church

by Pope Francis, edited by Giuliano Vigini

Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014

Pope Francis has surprised and shocked many by his teaching and behaviour. He is Time Magazine's Person of the Year for 2013. Similar to John XXIII, Francis is interested in renewing and revitalizing the Roman Catholic Church and the whole of humanity. He calls the Roman Catholic Church to be more compassionate, a Church of Mercy rather than a church of judgment and doctrine. In his teachings, he takes the emphasis off of the hierarchy and stresses the role of the people of God in building the church and society. Francis is much in line with the spirit and teachings of Vatican II which he cites often. Like his namesake, he follows the maxim of Francis of Assisi: 'preach the gospel always through your actions, and if necessary use words.' He urges pastors and indeed all the faithful to follow that maxim and stresses that we are to be in solidarity with the needy. He does not like the split that he sometimes sees between what pastors say and do. Francis is rumoured to leave the Vatican incognito during the night to visit the homeless on the streets of Rome.



During his time as Bishop of Buenos Aires in Argentina, he rode the bus to work not using a limousine and lived in a simple apartment. He refused to move into the Vatican apartments when made Pope. He allowed Benedict, his retired predecessor, to remain in the papal apartments. Rather, Pope Francis lives in a simple apartment in the Vatican hotel. He is the first pope to select Francis as his name and he desires to follow the way of poverty that Francis exemplified. Similar to John XXIII, he is opening the windows. His comment to the press about the treatment of gays: 'Who am I to judge', has reverberated throughout the world and has shaken the more conservative Roman Catholics. He is concerned that for some the RC Church has become a museum piece. Rather, he wants the church to be living, breathing and infused with God's Spirit. His vision for the church is one of compassion and mercy, faithful to the gospel where the RC Church sheds its legalism and becomes a gathering of the living Spirit, in service to all humanity. With this radical turn in the Papacy, Francis also claims that he is building on the rich tradition of Roman Catholicism. He sees the good in his predecessors Benedict XVI and John Paul II. His admonishes to RC clergy are strong much like Jesus' admonishes to the Scribes and Pharisees. He wants them to let go of any privilege, elitism and careerism and to be with the people of God as one among them. He values humility, service, mercy and openness and mentions these values often in his teaching.

Church of Mercy is divided into ten parts with 39 chapters. Each part contains a variety of chapters and has titles like Good News of Christ (Part 1), Poor Church for the Poor (Part 2), Shepherds with the 'Odor of the Sheep' (Part 6), Demolishing the Idols (Part 8) etc. Most chapters are short (2-3 pages) and these writings come from his sermons and addresses to various groups and within various contexts. All of the book is the writing of Francis I with the exception of a preface and foreword by the editor. There is an appendix which gives a chronology of Pope Francis' life. The shortness of the chapters makes the

book excellent meditation material. I have read the book many times and find it inspiring and food for my spiritual journey.

Church of Mercy is a challenge for Roman Catholics and indeed for all who seek to live and walk the gospel. I strongly recommend it.

Elizabeth Meakes, DMin.