

Re: The Next Pope: the Office of Peter and a Church in Mission. George Weigel

Extract from Letter, Rose Marie Crowe, 9 August 2020

George Weigel, in his new book, *The Next Pope: the Office of Peter and a Church in Mission*, purports to outline the tenor of the next pontificate, effectively dismissing the validity of our present pope, Francis, who, Weigel hints, is hostage to something he labels pejoratively as ‘Catholicism Lite’. Curiously, he proposes as a template the tactics of evangelicals and fundamentalists who maintain “clarity of teaching and strong moral expectations”. In reality, these groups espouse the literal interpretation of the Bible and derive their ethos from the most punitive verses in Scripture, applying them to justify the condemnation of others.

Weigel equates truth with doctrine and mercy with the “purification” of those who “acknowledge that they have squandered their human dignity.” Though he cites the parable of the Prodigal Son to support this theory, he misses the central message of the parable: that the Father runs to meet his son, embraces him and celebrates his return without requiring that he debase himself. It is a story of unconditional love—Justice Lite, surely?

Weigel claims that the Church is “moribund” and in crisis because of lax practices and “anti-Christian propaganda in politics, culture and the media.” He recommends a return to the dogmatic certainties and customs of the past (including full religious habits for nuns). In this context, he denigrates the wisdom of Indigenous peoples, calling it the worship of false gods. He declares that this emergency is due to a “collapse of the deep faith that Jesus is Lord.” Jesus—if we take him at his word—far from wishing himself declared as Lord, wanted only to show everyone, especially the poor and powerless and those called sinners, that they were God’s loved children, as he himself was.

Followers of Christ cannot be called Christian while they ignore the fact that Jesus gave us only one rule: “Love God, self, neighbour, enemy.” Jesus saw this as a sure way to form a lasting community. Weigel overlooks the works of love and compassion of multitudes of people around the world who are committed to the healing of one another and of this holy planet. These are truly the People of God, the Body of Christ, working to bring about God’s reign as a universal community of love, justice and peace. The Church is alive and active.