

## Item #95 (Some Thoughts on a Book by George Weigel)

In 2020 Ignatius Press published a book by George Weigel, the well-known biographer of St. John Paul II. The title of the book is *The Next Pope. The Office of Peter and a Church in Mission*. What follows here is not a review of the book in the conventional sense of the term (though the book is well worth reading in its entirety), but a few comments about what Weigel says about the present age in which the Church finds herself and the resultant emphases that should guide the next pope in his service.

I begin with a lengthy citation from the beginning of the book (pp. 7-8) giving the context for his analysis that follows.

The Catholic Church is the same Church over time, for as Saint Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:5, it serves the same Lord, is formed by the same faith, and is born from the same baptism. The Catholic mode of being-the-Church changes, however, to meet the demands of continuing Christ's saving mission in the world. There have been five such epochal transitions in Christian history. One of them is underway now.

In the first of these great transitions, what we know as the Early Church definitively separated from what became rabbinic Judaism, in a process that accelerated after the First Jewish-Roman War in 70 A.D. That Early Church gave way to, even as it gave birth to, Patristic Christianity, which emerged in the fourth century and was shaped by the Church's encounter with classical culture. Toward the end of the first millennium, Patristic Christianity gave way to, even as it gave birth to, Medieval Christendom, the closest synthesis of Church, culture, and society ever achieved. Medieval Christendom fractured in the several Reformations of the sixteenth century, and from that cataclysm came Counter-Reformation Catholicism: the mode of being the Church in which every Catholic born before the mid-1950s grew up.

And toward the end of the second millennium, the fifth great transition began to gather force throughout the world Church: from Counter-Reformation Catholicism to the New Evangelization. Catholics live within the turbulence of this transitional moment.

**What** this amounts to is the need for Catholics, and especially the pope, to grasp the implications of the Gospel as preached by Jesus Christ and believe--and act accordingly. Weigel devotes a number of pages to various aspects of all that this belief implies for the pope and the Church that he serves. He closes his presentation with two citations from the Gospels:

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*  
--Matthew 28:19

*"And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that*

*attended it. Amen.*

--Mark 16:20

**There** is no doubt that these two quotations, in their context of Weigel's crystal clear writing, carry a persuasive message. But I would like to add another quotation from a Gospel that, it seems to me, speaks explicitly of the Eucharist, and adds to Weigel's persuasive argumentation. It is John 1:14:

*“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory such as belongs to the Father's only begotten Son, full of grace and truth.”*

I make the argument for this Eucharistic interpretation above in Item #1, Chapter 2. The rejection mentioned in John 1:11, when viewed in the light of John 6:60:66, strengthens the argument I make, though I did not see this at the the time.

**(James Swetnam, S.J. May 9, 2022)**