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[Review]: Russell Shaw, *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2020). Pp. 150. ISBN: 978-1-62164-340-1 (PB), ISBN: 978-1-64229-112-4 (eBook)

The papacy in the twentieth century had faced turmoil, chaos, and bloodshed on the account of a modern era that had begun devoid of faith, an implication of such meant that people could take charge of their destiny using the availability of freedom and liberty, as much as the tools of science and technology. Hence, evangelizing in a secularized world became challenging, a case of the Church and the world that was not only on the course to separate faith from modernity but also establish its various philosophies.

The above topic was extensively developed by Russell Shaw. He was born on May 19, 1935 in Washington. He holds a B.A., *summa cum laude* and an M.A. in English Literature from Georgetown University. He has directed several Catholic organizations over the years, a Fellow of Catholic Scholars, a Knight of Columbus and more groups. He received the Frederic Ozanam Award of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists and the Pro Vita Award of the Diocese of Brooklyn. He is widely published, an author and a journalist who has written more than twenty books.

The book is divided into nine chapters, discussing about mixed elements of history, biography, and theology of eight popes. The editor's note is an excerpt from the book *From the Depths of Our Hearts* by Pope Benedict XVI and Robert Cardinal Sarah. Cover photographs by Wikimedia Commons Images; cover design by Carl E. Olson. Papal documents were taken from the Vatican website and translated documents gotten from Vatican Council II.

The first outbreak of the modern mind considered as emergent heresy and deadly enemy of the church was firmly fought against by Saint Pius X which he was most remembered for. Modernity in the twentieth century was one devoid of faith, and Saint Pius X was not going to let such philosophy reign as long as

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he remained the Holy Father. Although a pope but more of an evangelist with an iron fist; Shaw recalled that Pope Benedict XVI criticized Pius X's fight against modernity as overzealous, and at same time admitting that Pius X's approach was a matter of historic necessity given the nature of threat it posed to the church.

Not only was Pius X dealing to eradicate the issue of modernity devoid of faith, he was also greatly faced with the anticlerical government of France which stood for hostile secularism, one he was firm in defiance to. This led to campaigns against both sides and eventually separation; the French Government withdrew recognition of Catholic Universities, evacuated Jesuits from the country, redirected seminarians to serve in the military, stopped chaplaincies in hospitals and in the armed forces, broke off diplomatic relations with the Holy See, brought a new law that separated the church and the state which led to the state paying stipends to priests in compensation for income lost during the French revolution, hence properties of the church became that of the state, and Bishops and Priests were forced out of their homes and seminaries. Pius X reacted by forbidding lay Catholics to work in such places. The situation even got worse when Emile Combes rose to prime minister, although Shaw revealed he was a bitter ex-seminarian and prominent Freemason. Critics often said that Pope Pius and his secretary of state fueled the tension between the Holy See and the French government by their action and comments; Shaw agrees to the possible correctness of the criticism, but then he also recalled that John Pollard, a historian, had analyzed that it would have still been almost impossible for the Vatican to avoid the clash with France given the anti-clerical mood in the country should Pius X had went on with the accommodationist policy by Leo XIII

Pius X instituted an oath against Modernism that required to be taken by priests. He also set up a network of informers who were to report anyone to Rome suspected of Modernism. Although the pope's intentions were good, but as Shaw spelled it, the value of such an exercise is questionable on the grounds that loyal priests did not need an oath to keep them in line with the faith, and those whose loyalty were not so loyal may just be tempted to say the words and act as they will. Adding to that, Shaw testified to the fact that this approach to eradicating Modernism failed, given that it only drove Modernity underground just for it to surface a half century later.

Considering the somewhat hostile behavior of President Woodrow Wilson during his visit to Pope Benedict XV for the post-World War I peace conference, 1919, one could only imagine, as Shaw pointed out, what Woodrow Wilson and Benedict XV could discuss about when they went into the pope's study for private conversation, alone together. Given their dissimilar personalities and faith, Shaw could only narrow it down to talks about peace. Each had written proposal for peace, although Benedict XV had his already published before the war ended. But both proposals were declined by leaders of the victorious nations for harsh reparations intended to cripple Germany for years to come.

Shaw highlighted that the anticlerical French and Italian governments were responsible for the exclusion of the Holy See in the peace conference in Versailles. They refused to let the Holy See be one of the principals at Versailles despite

Benedict's desire to be a participant, thus his exclusion must have been disheartening for him. But as Shaw analyzed, it was a favor in disguise for the church, considering that a second world war broke again from the so called peace talks in Versailles. The implication is that the pope is spared from any blame for what Shaw termed disastrous peace that was no peace.

Concerned Benedict XV is rather said to be an unknown pope, Shaw readdressed the notion citing the pope had led the Church at a critical moment in the world history, through the first world war which preoccupied his pontificate as he made intelligent and compassionate effort to relief human suffering caused by the war, and also to put an end to all wars. Shaw reiterated that the pope's diplomacy, although failed to achieve the three main aims in war time, eventually brought back the Holy See into serious world affairs after a century of being ignored. Although Benedict XV continued with the anti-Modernist policies of his predecessor, he also did things differently, taking steps to ease the tensions with France and Italy. Benedict XV also had to deal with the devastating influenza epidemic that broke out after the war. The epidemic killed more people than the war itself, one which the pope contracted and died.

Pope Pius XI also faced grave crisis ranging from the Great Depression, an economic collapse that affected the world; to the rise of a new generation of ruthless, arrogant rulers and dictators who were readily out to cause and go into war; to bloody persecutions of the Church by Fascist anticlerical in Italy, Nazi Germany, and communist regime of the Soviet Union; to his uncompromising response to issues on marriage, sexuality, rights of parents and the Church in education that was growing in the Western liberal democracies.

Today, the feast of Christ the king is an annual tradition in the Catholic Church, when Christ is shown to the world as king of all. This tradition was established by Pope Pius XI to show the significance of the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.

At the wake of the Second World War, in 1939, Pope Pius XII was chosen as 259th successor of Saint Peter to head the Church Militant. Shaw described him to be superbly prepared for the task in many ways given his experience in diplomacy for years having served in the diplomatic service of the Holy See, and as secretary of state to the Vatican. The skills he possessed were such the Church need in a world of armed crisis; but in contrast, there is the doubt that Pope Pius XII or any other person could have been adequately prepared for the challenges and burdens as leader of the Catholic Church in a world at war.

Pope Pius kept to the Vatican's traditional policy of official neutrality in war time. Just like the First World War, the Vatican engaged on a large scale humanitarian relief program in the Second World War, and granting asylum to refugees who many were Jews. Shaw revealed that although Pope Pius XII hated Nazism and labeled Adolf Hitler an evil man, he even more considered Soviet Communism to be a bigger threat to the Church and Western civilization, fearing the spread of Communism in Eastern Europe and its expansion to the west. He made effort to stop Communists from winning in the Italian elections, seeking that Catholics come out to vote against the Communists and threatening supporters with ex-

communication. Although the election went to the pope's favor, one which Shaw regarded would have been a huge setback for both the Church and democracy should reverse had been the outcome. Recording that the Church suffered grievously at Communist hands, Shaw opined that writers who now shrug off the persecution during those years and downplay Pope Pius' resolute anti-communism clearly have short memories. Shaw also noted that for some years now Pope Pius has been criticized for not sufficiently denouncing the Nazi persecution of Jews: he reminded the critics about the tension that kept worsening between Hitler and the pope that made Hitler threaten to deal with the pope; and the incomplete account of Pius XII without talking about the pope and the Jews, Jewish leaders praised him after the war and thanked him for saving many Jews, and years after the war he was regarded as a "moral icon" in Europe. Still, Shaw admitted there are legitimate questions although: did Pius XII say enough about the killing of Jews? If enough, how much 'enough' given the circumstances of those times?

Seeking for a change from the patrician style of Pius XII, the cardinals entrusted the See of Saint Peter to Pope John XXIII. Shaw complimented that the cardinals got their change in indeed, such that launched a new era in the Church, with the implications still unfolding. Ranging from his deliberate breach of papal protocols by receiving Anglican archbishop of Canterbury and Soviet Premier Atheist son-in-law; to establishing a Vatican secretariat for Christian Unity, also reaching out in friendship to Jews. Although he started something truly significant: The Code of Canon Law, an achievement of The Roman Synod, which was completed in 1983 and promulgated by Pope Saint John Paul II, and an ecumenical council which spanned for four sessions. Shaw opined the Vatican II is regarded as the most important Catholic event and perhaps the most important religious event during the twentieth century.

Shaw reaffirmed the disagreement of Catholics as to whether Vatican II was necessary, given the Church was health and growing. There was the question as to what problem(s) was the Vatican II council supposed to solve; considering other councils were held to deal with particular problem(s), but the ecumenical council was unclear to many as Pope John is sometimes said to have failed to give the answer of the question. The issue as Shaw pointed may not have been that he didn't provide an answer but that the answer he gave was rather too common, one that was to review the basic mission of the Church. Shaw interpreted Pope John XXIII's address as a challenge to the ecumenical council: how well Vatican II could upgrade and expand its efforts in evangelizing Christ to the modern world.

John XXIII is credited with playing a crucial role in mediating the confrontation that could have ensued when the Cuban Missile Crisis propelled the USA and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war. He is considered one of the most popular popes ever, Shaw wrote, in fact he was intellectually and politically sophisticated.

Pope Saint Paul VI was known to be hesitant in being decisive. Shaw assessed his hard decision-making perhaps to be: because his high level intelligence made him reason more possible consequences that may arise from any course of action than most people would ordinarily do; or because of the progressive and conserva-

tive learning that conflicted his mind. His greatest trial, as Shaw puts it, concerned the issue of contraception. After studying the arguments and expectations that came with it, and praying, the stand of the Church remained in condemnation of all forms of contraception. Paul VI pointed to marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards as possible consequences if artificial contraception is approved. Hence, the Church defends the dignity of husband and wife.

After the sudden death of Pope John Paul I, who only was pope for thirty-three days, Pope John Paul II became the first non-Italian pope since 1522, youngest pope since Pius IX, and first Pole ever to hold the office, historic indeed. Shaw considered him as someone who could do anything well if he simply put his mind to it, and justifying James Hitchcock's assessment that he was probably the most intellectually formidable pope ever. As much as he had admirers he also had critics who complained about his teaching on sexual morality, his insistence that women can't be ordained, his emphasis on celibacy for priests of the Western Church, his system of leadership, his much interference in local matters, and his minimal intervention in the sex abuse scandal.

Conclusively, the book gives account of the eight men who occupied the throne of Saint Peter, the crisis and problems they faced in a century that is the bloodiest and most critical yet. The pontiffs have had issues ranging from the first outbreak of modernity which was considered grave heresy to faith; to the roots of war that led to World War I; to the rise of violent rulers who would readily go to war, and the assault on marriage and moral values; to the outbreak of World War II; to expanding and upgrading a sacred heritage; to implementing and continuing the Vatican council II amidst controversy; to the fall of the Soviet empire and challenge of post-modernity.

The book is recommended to historians and students in the field, theologians, and Catholic faithful to understand the relationship of the Church and the world before now. It is also recommended to non-Catholics, given it contains record of the establishment of Vatican office for Christian Unity by Pope Saint John XXIII; as well recommended to non-Christian Religious, an example being the new treatment of the Catholic Church's relationship with Judaism.