

Analysis: A New Pope
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The world has been made aware that a new Bishop of Rome was elected yesterday by the College of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church. And it appears that many Catholics are elated. Of primary importance is the question of his agenda.

The *New York Times* reported that the new pope would be dealing with four primary issues:

“The new pope inherits a church wrestling with an array of challenges that intensified during his predecessor, Benedict XVI, including a shortage of priests, growing competition from evangelical churches in the Southern Hemisphere, a sexual abuse crisis that has undermined the church’s moral authority in the West and difficulties governing the Vatican itself.”¹

Of the four issues listed in this piece, three of them appear reformatory (shortage of priests, sexual abuse crisis, and difficulties in the Vatican) and one appears competitive in nature (growth of Evangelical churches in the Southern Hemisphere).

A *Wall Street Journal* article addressed this same competitive issue with which the new pope will be dealing:

“But overall, the story of the Latin American church has been one of decline. Whereas the region was more than 90% Catholic some 50 years ago, today there are countries in Central America where fewer than half the population is Catholic. One-room evangelical churches now dot the Latin American landscape, from remote Amazon villages to the labyrinthine slums that surround the region's major cities.”²

Therefore, the Cardinals’ choice of Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, begs the question: how will he (or did he) address the growth of Evangelical churches in Argentina? It appears that the answer to this question is embedded in the term: “New Evangelization.”

Firstly, “New Evangelization” appears to be the theme picked up in his name, Francis:

“Francis fills the bill in many regards. Latin American with Italian background, archbishop of one of [the] world’s largest diocese, rector of a seminary,’ said Kupke. ‘His name choice says a lot. St. Francis spearheaded a new evangelicalism and was a man of simplicity and humility’”³

Likewise, it appears that the New Evangelization was at the forefront of his being chosen by the Cardinals. For example, Cardinal Sean O’Malley of the Archdiocese in Boston, Massachusetts, wrote just minutes after the vote:

¹From: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/14/world/europe/cardinals-elect-new-pope.html> (online); accessed: 14 Mar 2013.

²From: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324077704578357872695335776.html> (online); accessed: 14 Mar 2013.

³From: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/13/pope-francisco-cardinal-jorge-mario-bergoglio-n_2855101.html#10_statement-from-cardinal-sean-omalley-ofm-cap (online); accessed 14 Mar 2013.

“We pledge our faithful support for the Holy Father as he leads the Church in proclaiming the New Evangelization, inviting all people to develop a closer relationship with Christ and to share that gift with others.”⁴

The term “New Evangelization” harkens back to the encyclical of Paul VI titled, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, or “On Evangelization in the Modern World” (8 Dec 1975). It also follows one of the major themes in the papacy of John Paul II, which resulted in:

- “Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible” (Worldwide, 16 Nov 1987)
- “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” (North American, 1994).

Also of interest was Lewis Drummond’s equating Billy Graham’s ministry with that of St. Francis in his *Canvas Cathedral: Billy Graham’s Ministry Seen through the History of Evangelism*:

“As we looked into the life and service of St. Francis of Assisi, we learned that the man of God was a fervent evangelist. Like Graham, he too longed to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ. But history also attests to the fact that Francis felt a deep burden for the physical and social needs of his fellowman.”⁵

So, from a Southern Baptist point of view, therefore, we will need to be very clear on our theology of evangelism:

- What does the Great Commission emphasize, proclamation, demonstration, or both, and if so in what way and to what result?
- How does the Roman Catholic Church view infant baptism in light of conversion and being “born again”?
- Is personal repentance really that important to the Great Commission?

Luke’s Great Commission provides some important insights in answer to these questions:

“He also said to them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’ (Luke 24:46-48 HCSB).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Lewis A. Drummond, *The Canvas Cathedral: Billy Graham’s Ministry Seen through the History of Evangelism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 223.