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Is Francis becoming one more idol?

by Thomas C. Fox

The Francis Chronicles

With all the growing focus of attention on Pope Francis ? including these very Francis Chronicles -- Elizabeth Scalia, managing editor of the Catholic Channel at Patheos.com and author of "Strange Gods: Unmasking the Idols in Everyday Life," asks a compelling question: ?Are we making an idol of the man??"

She writes: The creation of an idol, Gregory of Nyssa tells us, originates with the inception of an idea ? one that we nurture and polish and rationalize until it takes possession of our judgment and guides our actions. ? We think of pop stars as ?idols? but an idol, more correctly, is the thing or person best capable of delivering an affirmation of ourselves to ourselves.?"

She then examines Francis and his core message: ?[He] repeatedly returns to themes of compassion, mercy, tenderness and his words drop like healing dew upon people feeling increasingly isolated from each other, and distanced from God. Whether from a Jeep trundling around Saint Peter?s Square or from an open-sided vehicle on the Argentine streets, Francis reaches out to the people in complete freedom and fearlessness, and the crowd reaches back. The crowd wants to be like him ?able to love and trust God, and the world, and finally themselves.?"

She goes on: ?What saves this from becoming simple idolatry is Francis?s continual exhortation that we fix our attention, and our intentions, upon having an authentic and lifelong encounter with Jesus. He says, in essence, you want to be like me? I want to be like Jesus; look at him! ?"

If culling Francis?s words gets our immediate attention by seeming to affirm the idols we?ve made of our own ideas, then perhaps ? we will dare to wonder again about sin and redemption, sacrifice and suffering and the wideness of God?s mercy. And then, our attempts to mold Francis in our own image will have finally led us to a place of truth.?"

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