

A GUIDE TO THE NEXT PAPAL ELECTION

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Pope Francis in a typical situation: at the Synod for Amazonia (November 2019) surrounded by people.

THE GUIDE INCLUDES...

What happens when the pope dies?

How papal elections work

Profile of the person most likely to be elected

Biographical details of possible papal candidates

Analysis of composition of the College of Cardinals

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AFTER POPE FRANCIS

Morto un papa, se ne fa un altro. ‘When a pope dies, they make another one’
(Roman proverb)

You can’t blame the Romans for their unsentimental bluntness about the papacy. They’ve had to live with this institution, economically, politically and culturally for 1,700 years. Despite this, the death or resignation of a pope and the election of a new one is always a big story in the world media. But getting factual and reliable information is not easy when dealing with the arcane politics of the papacy. The aim of this *Guide* is to assist Catholics and interested others in understanding how the process works and who might be elected next pope. If your main interest is in the actual politics of the coming election and who might be next pope, go straight to **PART TWO**.

PART ONE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE POPE DIES OR RESIGNS?

The pope remains pope until he dies or resigns. Despite the fact that diocesan bishops and officials of the Roman Curia (the papal government/bureaucracy) have to submit their resignation at age 75, popes stay in office until death or resignation. It was, in fact, quite revolutionary when Benedict XVI [2005-2013] resigned the papacy on the morning of 28 February 2013 because he felt he was no longer able to exercise the papal ministry adequately. The last indisputable papal resignation was that of the saintly Celestine V in 1294 who was ‘persuaded’ to retire by Benedetto Caetani, Boniface VIII [1294-1303] who replaced him.

Largely because pre-modern medicine was primitive and dangerous for the patient, sick popes died quickly and regularly. A number of popes (and anti-popes) were murdered. Historically, the average length of a papacy is just over seven years. But there is a danger that with modern medicine keeping people alive much longer, it is possible that a pope could become totally incapacitated by dementia, Alzheimer’s, or some other progressive form of mental or physical deterioration. That is why Benedict’s resignation is so important; he broke the precedent that popes remain in office until death. This solves the problem that the church was approaching in the last years of John Paul II [1978-2005] who lingered on, increasingly incapacitated.

SEDE VACANTE

If the pope dies in office, his death is confirmed by the Cardinal Camerlengo, in English the Chamberlain of the Roman Church, currently Irish-American Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who is accompanied to the death bed by the Pontifical Master of Ceremonies, who supervises papal religious services. The Camerlengo then seals the papal apartment and informs the Papal Vicar for Rome, the cardinal who administers the Rome diocese, who informs the people of the city. Meanwhile the Dean of the College of Cardinals, currently the 91 year-old Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, informs Heads of State, the diplomatic corps, and the other cardinals. Nine days of official mourning are declared and the funeral Mass and burial normally occurs on about the fifth day after the pope's death.

In the case of a papal resignation, none of the above applies. The pope simply announces the date and time of his resignation. With no funeral to organize, this makes it easier for the cardinals who have more time to get to Rome and a longer period to work to discuss the issues facing the church and to assess each other as possible papal candidates.

Generally speaking, the church is run by the College of Cardinals during the two to three-week interregnum between the death or resignation of the previous pope and the beginning of the conclave to elect his successor. The word 'conclave' refers to a locked, enclosed meeting (from the Latin *cum clave*, meaning 'with a key') and is the technical term for the election process. The interregnum period is called *sede vacante*, which loosely means 'empty (papal) chair.' During *sede vacante* the cardinals operate according to strict rules which cannot be changed by anyone during the interregnum.

The Cardinal Camerlengo has an important role in the interregnum. He is supported by the Apostolic Camera, a small office originating in the eleventh century, that assists him in the administration of the Holy See, supervising the budget and dealing with any extraordinary business that may need to be dealt with during *sede vacante*. A rotating committee of three cardinals is chosen by the cardinal electors to assist the Camerlengo in preparing for the conclave and making the day-to-day decisions that cannot be deferred. However, the cardinals are strictly bound not to make any important decisions, above all any that would be binding on the next pope. Daily meetings of cardinals are held which are presided over by the Dean of the College of Cardinals.

When the pope dies or resigns all cardinal-heads of Vatican dicasteries (departments) cease to hold office, except the Camerlengo and the Major Penitentiary, usually a cardinal. Since the Penitentiary deals with confessional matters, the idea is that forgiveness should always be available, pope or no pope. The Papal Vicar for the Diocese of Rome also remains in office, so that the government of the local church can continue.

During the *sede vacante* the cardinals will spend a lot of time meeting and getting to know each other and discussing the profile of the kind of man that they think that the church needs as next pope. They do this through the daily general congregations, which are formal meetings for speeches and discussions about the future of the church and papacy, and more informally through social contact as they talk about the sort of pope they feel they should elect. Some of these off-the-record conversations occur in language groups, or at cocktail parties in embassies, or discussions in religious houses, or national seminaries and colleges. In these interactions they size each other up and sort through priorities for the next papacy.

The simple fact is that nowadays many of them will not know each other particularly well, or at all, because Pope Francis has appointed many from remote places that traditionally don't have cardinals. Those from far-flung dioceses and the developing world can feel quite isolated and common language groups will be important because many cardinals don't speak Italian with any fluency, so they will gather in groups speaking Spanish, English and French. Here the Australian Embassy to the Holy See has become an important centre for cardinals and bishops from the Pacific.

Of course, several loose constellations of cardinals will have already formed around common theological, ecclesiastical, or regional interests. These groups will have been discreetly discussing possible candidates, but will always deny that this is happening, especially if asked by media. Usually those working in the Vatican will be the most active in these discussions because of their common interests and proximity to each other.

One argument put forward is that it is disrespectful to be discussing the next pope while the present one is still alive. Another is that the aim of the secrecy is to avoid party politics and vote gathering by ambitious individuals, but the real reason is because the church is still influenced by the secretive, Mediterranean-Italianate mentality and the fact that the hierarchy still operates like an absolute monarchy, so politics are usually played out obliquely, behind closed doors. This is a system that simply doesn't comprehend modern democratic notions of accountability and transparency.

HOW THE PAPAL ELECTION PROCESS WORKS

The pope is elected freely and democratically, but on the basis of an extremely narrow franchise: those members of the College of Cardinals who are under the age of eighty the day the conclave begins. Since the reforms of Paul VI [1963-78] in November 1970, cardinals over the age of eighty are excluded from participating and voting in the conclave, but they can take part in the discussions before the conclave begins.

Conclaves nowadays are held in the Sistine Chapel. This is situated in a complex of buildings on the right side of Saint Peter's Basilica. Since the middle of the twelfth century popes have almost always been elected by the College of Cardinals. The only exception to this was during the early-fifteenth century Great Western Schism when there were three pretenders to the papacy. All were dismissed by the Council of Constance [1414-1418] and Martin V [1417-31] was elected by a mixed group of cardinals, bishops, priests and lay people, representing the Council. (For details see my book *Upon This Rock. The popes and their changing role* (2000), pp 172-177).

Nowadays it is often forgotten that the traditional role of the pope is to be bishop of the diocese of Rome. In fact, during the first seven hundred years of church history it was usually the clergy and laypeople of the city, as well as the bishops from the towns immediately surrounding Rome, who played the major role in the election of the pope. For most of the first millennium of church history the election of bishops—including the bishop of Rome—followed the Latin dictum *Qui praesidet super omnes, ab omnibus eligatur* ('He who presides over all, should be elected by all'). This applied not only to the pope, but to all bishops. In other words, the various local churches of the first seven or eight centuries got their bishops through a process that was somewhat 'democratic', or at least gave a say to all baptised church members.

Given that there was a genuine communal and representative sense operative in the early church, Catholics then would have considered the present method of electing the pope by limiting the franchise to a tiny group of elderly males highly irregular, even heretical. Over the last couple of centuries many of the cardinals occupied bureaucratic positions in the

Roman Curia with little or no pastoral experience. Many also came from big metropolitan dioceses where their primary task was to administer large corporate entities that divorced them from ordinary life. Pope Francis has tried to break this down by appointing cardinals from the far-flung, developing world church and ignoring dioceses in the West which have traditionally had cardinal bishops.

Despite this geographical broadening-out, many Catholics think that it would be better if the College of Cardinals were joined in the election process by senior bishops or representatives of national conferences of bishops and by representative of priests and laity. While the College of Cardinals is now very internationalised, some of the narrow Italianate and clerical-elitist attitudes still persist, even among non-European cardinals, especially those trained in Rome. They are anxious to conform to *Romanità*, the Roman style and way of acting. With the participation of a broader cross-section of church leadership in the election process, the church could become more open and accountable and abandon its tendency to secrecy and non-transparently.

HISTORY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS

In the early church the whole community, priests and people, participated in the election of bishops, including the bishop of Rome. However, lay participation sometimes led to riots and factional in-fighting, resulting in churchmen increasingly trying to exclude the laity. Slowly the right to elect became confined to the senior clergy of Rome, with the elected candidate being ‘approved’ by the Roman people. The senior clergy involved were the priests who ministered at the ‘titular churches’, that is the oldest churches in the city. The title ‘cardinal’ (from the Latin *cardo* meaning ‘hinge’, or ‘door’) was first applied to these parish priests from as early as the seventh century. They came to be known as cardinal priests.

The title ‘cardinal’ was slowly extended to the senior deacons of Rome. These were ordained men who were not priests, but who were in charge of church administration and the distribution of social welfare to the poor. They became cardinal deacons. By the eighth century the title ‘cardinal’ was further extended to the bishops of the dioceses neighbouring Rome, the ‘suburbicarian’ sees as they’re now called. Together with the local clergy, these neighbouring bishops formed the Roman Synod, often advising the pope on doctrinal issues and assisting him in the administration of the Roman Church. They eventually evolved into a group of cardinal bishops.

As senior pastors and administrators, cardinal priests, deacons and bishops gradually assumed control of the Roman Church during a papal vacancy. They also came to have an increasing say in the election of the new pope. In order to break the interference and influence of secular rulers in papal elections, Stephen III [768-72] decreed in 769 that only cardinal deacons and priests of the Roman Church could be eligible for election as pope, and that the laity were excluded from voting. So much for ‘He who presides over all should be elected by all’!

Despite Stephen’s limiting of the franchise, in the ninth and tenth centuries the papacy increasingly became dominated by lay forces, especially the Mafia-like clans who controlled

the *rioni* or districts of Rome from their fortified mansions. Many of the popes of this period were often thuggish members of these families, utterly unworthy of any ecclesiastical office, let alone the papacy. The interests of these popes were largely confined to the unstable politics of central Italy. (See my *Upon This Rock*, pp 95-117 and *The Birth of the West* (2013) pp 3393, especially pp 69-93).

But from about 1030 onwards a reform movement permeated Rome which gradually gathered strength. The most important pope in the campaign to break lay control of election to ecclesiastical office was Gregory VII [1073-1085]. The reformers realised that the papal election process was the key to making sure that a worthy person was elected and they eventually broke the control of the Roman clans over papal elections. The papacy then turned outward from the narrow preoccupations of the political and ecclesiastical government of Rome and central Italy and began to re-assert its claims to universal jurisdiction over the whole church. Simultaneously, in the decades between 1050 and 1100, the College of Cardinals increasingly became an institution of the broader church. There were more and more cardinals appointed of non-Roman and even non-Italian origin.

Eventually the right of the cardinals to elect the pope was enshrined in the election decree *Licet de evitanda* of the Third Lateran Council of March 1179. However, the notion was maintained for quite a long time that the lesser clergy and the laity of Rome still played a part in the process by their public acquiescence after the election. Even this minimal lay participation subsequently disappeared, especially from the sixteenth century onwards under the influence of an ecclesiology of a divine right papacy.

Beginning in the twelfth century, the cardinals elected the pope in an enclosed conclave. Essentially, they were locked-up and isolated from outsiders in uncomfortable circumstances and sometimes with graduated fasting until the new pope was elected. The reason for this was that in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries there were long breaks between popes because of sharp divisions among the small number of cardinals who could not agree on who should be pope. Locking them away was also supposed to prevent outside influence. Almost all medieval conclaves were held in the Lateran palace next to the cathedral church of Rome, Saint John Lateran.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Most modern conclaves have been held in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The Sistine was built between 1475 and 1481 for Sixtus IV [1471-1484]. The cardinals are now surrounded by Michelangelo's amazing and gloriously restored paintings of the creation painted between 1508 and 1512 and last judgement, painted between 1534 and 1541. In twentieth century conclaves the cardinals and their assistants didn't always have separate rooms. They resided in the cramped and very inconvenient makeshift area surrounding the Sistine chapel.

Since the conclave that elected Benedict XVI in 2005 cardinal electors and their assistants reside in the purpose-built and comfortable Domus Sanctae Marthae (house of Saint Martha), a motel-style building of 130 suites and single rooms with communal dining facilities, erected in 1996 within the Vatican on the left side of Saint Peter's Basilica. The

present rule is that a conclave must begin no sooner than fifteen days, and no later than twenty days after the death or resignation of the previous pope.

To circumvent disputed elections, the Third Lateran Council [1179] decreed that a candidate must gain a majority of two-thirds of the votes of the cardinals to be elected pope. The purpose of requiring the two-thirds majority was to force the cardinals to compromise and reach an agreed consensus about who should be pope. The two thirds rule also avoided the problem of an elected pope's authority being weakened by having to deal with a large minority of disgruntled cardinals who had opposed his election. It prevents damaging splits between a small majority and a large minority.

On 2 February 1996 John Paul II issued the Apostolic Constitution, *Universi Dominici Gregis*. This document tightened the rules governing conclaves. It only permitted an election by scrutiny, that is by a secret, written ballot, thus excluding the previous possibility of election by acclamation, that is when a person was spontaneously proclaimed pope by all the cardinals present in the conclave, or by compromise which involved entrusting the election process to a small group of cardinals representing various parties, a process previously used in a deadlocked conclave. These were useful precisions.

PART TWO THE CONTEXT OF THE COMING CONCLAVE

THE POPE FRANCIS PAPACY

The sudden resignation of Benedict XVI on 28 February 2013 sent shock waves through the church hierarchy. It was so unexpected that, in a way, it created space for a rethink about the direction of the papacy under Benedict and his predecessor, John Paul II. With no papal funeral to distract them, it gave the cardinals more time to reflect on the type of person Catholicism needed as next pope.

It was within this context the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was elected pope, taking the style Francis. (The term 'style' is the correct way to refer to the name a pope chooses when elected). Francis has become a somewhat 'revolutionary' pope and the major issues of his papacy will constitute the specific context of the coming conclave.

Pope Francis has lived up to the expectations placed in him. Immediately after election he set-up an international council of nine cardinals to advise him and assist him in restructuring the Roman Curia. After some seven years of regular meetings, the pope issued the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* ('Preach the Gospel') in December 2019. The document reconceives the work of the Curia as serving the pope and the universal church, rather than lording it over and micromanaging local churches. It also shifts the emphasis away from the role of the Curia as the enforcement arm of the papacy, to seeing it as existing, not only to assist the pope, but also to *serve* the world's bishops.

Francis has certainly achieved several significant shifts of emphasis within the church. He has re-emphasized the importance of a more representative, consultative, synodal form of

church governance. That is, rather than handing down all decisions hierarchically from above, he has drawn bishops and people together in Rome from particular regions, such as South America's Amazonia, or people interested in particular issues, like young Catholics, in broad based synods or meetings, drawing on their expertise and experience to discern and reach decisions about church life and teaching.

The key process here is the synod on synodality held in Rome in October 2023 and October 2024. This synod was unique in that it has brought together bishops, priests, religious and lay people, including women, all with equal voting rights; the vote was previously confined to bishops. Synodal discussions are based on worldwide church consultation. Francis has also tried to devolve authority downward to national bishops' conferences. This reflects a much earlier form of church government from Catholicism's first millennium.

The constant obstacle that Francis has met is the failure of bishops to take-up the initiative he has offered them. As appointees of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, many of them are fearful, lacking the emotional intelligence and leadership ability to adopt the freedom to make their own decisions. Their constant claim is that hard issues are beyond their competence or authority.

Francis has also tried to move the church away from an ideology of doctrinal rigidity and a morality focused almost exclusively on issues of gender, reproduction and sexuality, to a focus on pastoral care for people. He's also emphasized social justice, global equity and care for the environment. While previous popes also highlighted social justice, they were preoccupied with culture wars focusing on relativism, reproduction and gender. Francis, in contrast, has shifted the image of the church from being a bastion of traditional orthodoxy to being a 'field hospital', a place where sinners and the wounded can come for help.

Specifically, on gay issues, Francis has taken an altogether more pastoral attitude: 'If a person is gay and is searching for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge?' He has also been highly critical of exploitative, neo-rationalist capitalism, emphasizing social justice, equity for the poor, support for refugees and care for the environment. No previous pope has been so strong on issues like global warming, biodiversity loss and destruction of the natural world. In addition, his personal simplicity of life and friendliness have made him very popular.

His major failure has been his lack of appreciation of the role of women in the church, as well as connected issues like reproductive health and over-population in the developing world. For the first five years of his papacy Francis was also slow and evasive in his response to sexual abuse, but after his disastrous misreading of the situation in Chile in 2018, he came to realize the extent and impact of this crisis on the universal church. His four-day summit on the protection of minors in the church, held in the Vatican in February 2019, has led to mixed results, but it did place the issue on the papal agenda. His July 2022 visit to Canada also highlighted an apology delivered personally to indigenous people for the church's role in the destruction of culture and for sexual and physical abuse in residential schools. Nevertheless, there is still widespread criticism, especially in the English-speaking world, that the church has still not adequately confronted this issue.

OPPOSITION TO FRANCIS

However, Francis' emphases have not gone unchallenged. In some quarters this has led to an open and, at times, a quite vicious rejection of his papacy. Three notorious opposition cardinals have emerged: Raymond Burke (an American who was formerly head of the Apostolic Signatura, the Vatican's supreme court), Robert Sarah (born in Guinea and former prefect of the Vatican's office for worship) and German-born Gerhard Müller (former prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith). Burke and Müller are also concerned about Muslim immigration to Europe and the danger of de-Christianisation.

There's also been passive but stubborn resistance to Francis from die-hards in the Roman Curia, although with the gradual appointment of people sympathetic to his vision things are improving. A stand-out example of this is his choice of Argentinian Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on July 1, 2023.

Another notorious critic of Francis is the former papal nuncio to the US, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. Viganò first came to prominence in the Vatileaks affair in which he cast himself as a whistle-blower and martyr alleging financial corruption in the governance of the Vatican City State. Instead of making him Governor of the Vatican City State and a cardinal, Benedict XVI appointed him nuncio to the US, where Viganò made sure 'culture warriors' were appointed to major dioceses. Recalled to Rome, he turned on Pope Francis accusing him of not acting on sexual abuse allegations against the former archbishop of Washington, DC, Theodore McCarrick, and calling for the pope's resignation. Nowadays Viganò is largely discredited.

There has also been openly hostility to Francis by bishops, especially in the United States where presently a majority of the bishops are anti-Francis and where the Bishops Conference operates almost like a branch of the Republican Party and many openly support Trump largely over the issues focusing on gender and abortion. Added to this is a vociferous minority of very well-funded, reactionary lay Catholic organizations and individuals, centred mainly in Italy, France and the US, whose disapproval of Francis is visceral.

These people are not conservatives; they represent an extreme position that I have tagged 'neo-traditionalist'. They should not be under-estimated and are already preparing actively for the forthcoming conclave. Their aim is to stir-up a kind of culture war with two lines of attack on Francis: the first is loosely theological and the other socio-political. Often the two lines converge. It is important to understand this opposition, because these people will strenuously attempt to influence the coming conclave.

Among the neo-traditionalist opposition is the American layman, Stephen K. Bannon, former chairman of the far-right Breitbart News and a former close Trump advisor. Bannon, like some other Francis opponents, has been influenced by Traditionalism, a bizarre, syncretistic pseudo-philosophical ideology that rejects the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and secular modernity. For a number of years Bannon was in league with Cardinal Burke, but they broke-up in mid-2019 over Bannon's support for Frédéric Martel's book *In the Closet of the Vatican* (2019), which claims to reveal a widespread gay sub-culture among priests in the Roman Curia and episcopate. Martel argues that these men are at war against Francis 'precisely because of his supposed liberalism on questions of sexual morality.' Most

are ‘are [both] very homophobic and... secretly homosexual.’ In English they are what we colloquially call ‘closet queens.’ However, Bannon’s influence in the church has declined lately.

On the socio-political front the opposition to Francis centres around his support for social justice and equity for the poor, refugees and the developing world, as well as his opposition to neo-rationalist capitalism, anthropocentric individualism, environmental destruction in the name of ‘development’ and the kind of economy that marginalizes the dispossessed and ruthlessly uses and destroys the natural world. In the US many ultra-wealthy Catholic donors have stopped supporting the Holy See financially because they are angry with Francis’ pronouncements on capitalism and the environment and their loss of influence. However, they still have sway with some American bishops and, through the targeted use of their wealth, they still influence the church. A significant proportion of Catholics (58%) voted for Trump in the 2024 election.

PART THREE

THE ELECTORS

GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF CARDINAL ELECTORS

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the composition of the College of Cardinals has become increasingly internationalised and Italian dominance has declined. In the first conclave of the twentieth century in 1903, which elected Pius X [1903-1914], more than half of the cardinals (38 of 62) were Italian. A century later in the conclave that elected Benedict XVI in April 2005, there were 115 cardinals from 50 countries, with only 20 from Italy. As of February 20, 2025, out of 138 electors (from March 1, 2025 there will be 137), there are 19 Italians eligible to vote. Since the pope’s primary task is to be bishop of Rome, it could be argued that it is appropriate that he be an Italian. From the death of the devout Dutchman, Hadrian VI [1521-1523], until the election of John Paul II in 1978, only Italians were elected as pope.

Francis has continued the process of internationalizing the composition of the College. He has now appointed the large majority of voting cardinals with 73 countries now represented, in contrast to 48 when he was elected in 2013. He has appointed cardinals from dioceses as far afield as Tonga, Haiti, Mongolia, Papua-new Guinea, Myanmar, Ivory Coast, Cuba, Timor-Leste and the Cape Verde Islands. In the process, he has partially broken the European and Western hold on the College making it easier for someone from the non-European world to be elected as pope.

The real shift that has occurred in the Francis papacy is the increase in the number of cardinals from the ‘periphery’, the developing world where the majority of Catholics now live. However, some countries are over-represented in the College in comparison to their actual Catholic population. Examples are Italy, Spain, France, Poland, the US, Canada and India. It is also significant that Francis has ignored several ancient and prominent dioceses that have a long tradition of cardinal-archbishops. Two stand-out examples are Milan and

Venice. Large archdioceses like Los Angeles and Sydney, which usually have cardinals have also been ignored. In total 110 voting cardinals are diocesan bishops, or have special ministries, and 26 serve in the Roman Curia.

There are four cardinals from our region. They are Cardinals Wilfred Dew (retired archbishop of Wellington, New Zealand), John Ribat, MSC (archbishop of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea), Soane Patita Paini Mafi the Bishop of Tonga, and at 45 the youngest member of the College of Cardinals, Mykola Bychok, CSsR, Bishop of Saints Peter and Paul of Melbourne for Ukrainian Catholics.

Embracing the peripheries, however, brings problems. Many of the new cardinals won't know each other when they get to Rome, will be somewhat divorced from Vatican politics and have limited or no spoken Italian. But they will have far more hands-on pastoral experience, often in situations of poverty and deprivation, than cardinals from large metropolitan dioceses in the developed world like New York or Munich, that tend to operate like large corporations with big staffs and high financial turn-overs. The peripheral cardinals will also have a very different take on things to Italianate bureaucrats from the Curia.

THE REALPOLITIK OF THE NEXT CONCLAVE

The electors' diversity of background and experience will make this conclave harder to predict, although most conclaves are unpredictable. It will also mean that the pre-conclave discussions, both the formal (general congregations) and informal discussions and person-to-person interactions will be much more important as cardinals get to know each other and assess opinions, strengths and weaknesses. Many of the peripheral cardinals are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and many will have been deeply involved in their own local issues, often dealing with poverty, starvation, environmental devastation, disease, social issues, or dictatorial, military, unstable, or corrupt governments. As a result, they won't have had much time to think about the problems facing the papacy and may enter the conclave without strong views and follow 'grand electors,' the influential cardinals leading the various constellations touting various *papabili*, Italian slang for possible or likely candidates for pope.

Church historians Alberto Melloni and Massimo Faggioli have warned that there is a serious danger of interference in the coming conclave by influential people with axes to grind and adept at using social media (*La Croix*, 20 July 2021). Melloni warns that Pope Francis' new special norms to deal with clergy sexual abuse have made cardinals vulnerable to accusations via social media, whether true or false, or made them open to implications regarding their sexuality, which could lead to their exclusion from the conclave, 'or at least [from] the list of *papabili*.' Faggioli argues that an 'anti-institutional, nihilistic' form of neo-traditionalism will do everything it can 'to shape the outcome of the next conclave' to ensure that another Francis-type pope is *not* elected. He adds that, 'the power of Catholic influencers in mainstream media, digital media and social media... [who] cannot resist the temptation to create a media storm when they don't get their way,' cannot be under-estimated.

A number of ultra-traditionalist groups, particularly in the US, exemplify Faggioli's warnings, and canon lawyers have suggested that some of their activities may constitute direct interference in the election of the pope, which is contrary to article 80 of the 1996 Apostolic

Constitution on papal elections and may create grounds for excommunication. Needless to say, those cardinals who are supportive of the present pope will be most criticised by the reactionaries, while conservative cardinals will emerge relatively unscathed. However, interference in conclaves or publicity campaigns for particular candidates don't go down well with most cardinals and usually prove counter-productive. It remains to be seen what influence these kinds of campaigns have, but certainly they should not be ignored and could undermine the freedom of the conclave.

A more subtle approach has been taken by some of the cardinals themselves. Certainly, before his death in early-2023 Cardinal George Pell was active in building an anti-Francis coalition of cardinals who would vote for a candidate who would reverse the present pope's policies in the next papacy. He worked with the Hungarian Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Peter Erdö, to organize opposition to the election of a Francis clone.

Church politics aside, we can be certain that to be electable, a cardinal will need to be in reasonably good health, aged somewhere between sixty-two and seventy-six, with an emphasis probably on the middle of that age-range. However, the age theory doesn't always hold-up: John XXIII [1958-1963] was 77 when elected, Benedict XVI was 78 and Francis 76. Essentially, the cardinals are looking for an age-range that gives reasonable expectation of a pontificate long enough to provide stability, but not too long like the 26 years of John Paul II. Ideally, they will look for someone who speaks near-perfect Italian, because the pope is the bishop of Rome. Certainly, speaking Spanish and English are very helpful, but not essential.

Also, a candidate will need to be cautious on theological issues and committed to defending the core beliefs of Catholicism, while remaining open to the other churches and religions. Dialogue and negotiation with Islam will be particularly important. However, he will need to be ready to defend Catholics and Christians who live in predominantly Muslim countries.

Spirituality is essential and serious candidates would need to be genuinely committed to the inner life of prayer and schooled, like Pope Francis, in a long-established spiritual tradition like that of the Jesuits, or one of the other mainstream Catholic spiritualities. As pope, the candidate would also need to be able to interpret Catholic belief and practice in terms that make sense to contemporary life and to ordinary people. Candidates with extreme opinions, either progressive or reactionary, are unlikely to be elected. The cardinals will be looking for a person who can reconcile and bring people together.

Here something needs to be said about the role of the Holy Spirit in these proceedings. While cardinals and Catholics generally believe that papal elections are somehow guided by God's Spirit, the actual election process will be played out through political negotiation, pressure politics and horse-trading, all determined by the various theological, ecclesiastical and geo-political priorities and prejudices of particular cardinals. Catholics hold that grace builds on nature and that the subtle activity of the Spirit works through the complexity of human affairs. Benedict XVI once told Bavarian TV that the Holy Spirit leaves room for the exercise of human judgement, only guaranteeing that in the end the church will not be ruined by making the wrong choice of pope. 'It would be a mistake,' Benedict said, 'to believe that the Holy Spirit picks the pope, because there are too many examples of popes that the Holy

Spirit would obviously not have chosen.’ Exactly right! The book and film *Conclave* gets it right. God works though the machinations of humankind.

Perhaps the best explanation lies in the oath that each cardinal takes at the beginning of the conclave when he swears ‘I call as my witness Christ the Lord, who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected.’ Essentially, Catholics believe that the Holy Spirit makes sure that the man chosen doesn’t lead the church completely astray.

PART FOUR

CONSTELLATIONS IN THE CONCLAVE

To some extent, the cardinals can be configured into a couple of general constellations. I use the word ‘constellation’ rather than ‘group’ because most of cardinals tend to come together loosely, rather than act as an organized group with very specific points of view with which all agree. They are not factions in the political sense.

THE ‘PERIPHERALS’

Given that Francis has appointed (as of February 2025) 106 cardinals out of 138 electors from countries in the global South where Catholics are facing poverty, political conflict, underdevelopment and malnutrition, Western preoccupations like gender issues, culture wars, relativism, post-modernism, or the details of ecclesial governance have little traction with them. Cardinals like John Ribart from Papua New-Guinea, Chibly Langlois, from Haiti, or Louis-Marie Ling Mangkhanekhoun from Laos, face an entirely different set of issues to Cardinals Blaise Cupich in Chicago, or Reinhold Marx in Munich.

The peripheral cardinals will certainly constitute one constellation and they are a sizeable group: if we count those from Asia, Africa and Oceania, there are 48 with votes in the next conclave; add to that 20 from Latin America. Most of them will be looking for a pope with pastoral experience, for someone who has worked in parishes, missions, or some form of hands-on ministry, as well as showing skill in administering a diverse diocese. Most of them are younger, with an average age in the mid-sixties. The majority also come from dioceses that have never had a cardinal bishop before, and several belong to the religious orders of priests that were the primary missionaries in their region. Being part of an international religious order means that, while they come from the periphery, they will have travelled, have a reasonably broad international outlook and be more aware of the challenges facing the universal church than those with more limited Western experience.

Also, their developing world background and the general distaste among all cardinals for external pressure will probably marginalize the attempts of so-called ‘staunch Catholic ultra-traditionalists,’ who often display a superficial understanding of church history and Tradition, to influence the outcome of the conclave.

Certainly, most of Francis’ appointments are likely to have broad sympathy with his priorities and this would be generally true of cardinals from the periphery. A new pope might shift some of his predecessor’s emphases, but it’s unlikely that someone who completely

repudiates Francis' policies entirely will be elected. The peripherals will certainly be influential in the conclave.

THE 'TRADITIONALISTS'

Nevertheless, the cardinal allies of the ultra-traditionalists will form a constellation that will work hard to elect someone who will reverse Francis' direction and priorities and return Catholicism to a more 'orthodox' position. This was clearly the aim of the Pell-Erdö group. They are opposed to Francis' openness to divorced, remarried Catholics receiving Communion, his strong support for environmental issues, his more accepting attitude to LGBTIQ+ people, his unequivocal attacks on entrenched clericalism among priests and bishops who, to use his words, lack 'the smell of the sheep.' They also reject his emphasis on pastoral care rather than moral or doctrinal rigidity and his synodal approach embracing a much broader cross-section of women and men in church governance.

Catholics wedded to culture wars against secularism find Francis' more accepting attitude toward the world intolerable. Because of their entrenched determination, the anti-Francis constellation should not be under-estimated because they are working very hard for the election of a cardinal sympathetic to their worldview. While those attacking him represent a small minority of Catholics, they are well organized, backed by serious money, and have a strong social media presence. Vatican expert, Marco Politi, estimates that 'about thirty per cent of the clergy, the committed laity and the world's bishops take the same line.' I think Politi's numbers are a bit exaggerated and that world-wide, the group is numerically quite small.

Reversing the emphases of Francis' papacy will be a fault line in the next conclave. Culture warriors never surrender and their ultimate aim is to take the church back to the days before the 'chaos' of the Second Vatican Council, although they will never admit this publicly.

An important part of their agenda is the restoration of the Mass and worship-style established after the sixteenth century Council of Trent. Pope Francis offended them mightily when he rescinded the broad permission Benedict XVI had given them to celebrate the so-called 'Tridentine Mass.' Essentially, the rejection of Vatican II's liturgical reforms was symbolic of the wholesale rejection of the Council itself. These issues will certainly surface in the conclave as the reactionary constellation tries to seize back the initiative. It is unlikely that they will succeed entirely, because their culture war preoccupations are very Western. But they should not be discounted because they might well be able to convert some African cardinals to their side, especially since the February 2024 granting of blessings to gay people. African clerics seem obsessed with homosexuality, probably because of the proximity of Islam and its strong anti-gay stance; they don't want to be seen as weak on the issue.

There are others who have made it clear that they disagree with the emphases of the Francis papacy and will be looking for a very different type of pope in the coming conclave. We have already met some members of this constellation: Burke, Müller and more discreetly, Sarah and Erdö. Another is the Dutchman, Willem Eijk, Archbishop of Utrecht. He talks about 'apostasy' in the church and publicly opposes Pope Francis' whole approach on marriage and communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, gay relationships and intercommunion with

Protestants. He casts all these issues as signs of the apocalyptic ‘great betrayal’ predicted in the Book of Revelation.

Another cardinal attached to this constellation is Albert Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka. His focus is worship; he supports the old-style Mass, is opposed to so-called ‘secularizing tendencies’ in Catholic liturgy and condemns Communion in the hand. It was actually Ranjith who invented the now widely used phrase ‘reform of the reform’, essentially meaning the rolling back of Vatican II.

THE ‘CONSERVATIVES’

There is another constellation of cardinals who range across the mainstream conservative spectrum. They don’t repudiate Vatican II, but claim to have the ‘authentic interpretation’ of the Council. They claim that Vatican II has been misinterpreted by most Catholics, claiming that this arises from what Benedict XVI called a ‘hermeneutic of rupture.’ He claimed that many misunderstood Vatican II as a complete disruption of the tradition and the creation of an entirely new church, rather than as an event gently developing the past, what he called the ‘hermeneutic of continuity’.

Benedict’s either/or dichotomy is entirely artificial. The vast majority of thoughtful Catholics believe that the Council both maintained continuity with the Catholic past, as well as shifting the position of the church on important issues like liturgy, ecumenism, attitudes to the Jewish faith and religious freedom.

Other cardinals sympathetic to the ‘hermeneutic of continuity’ are sceptical of what they see as the tendency of many modern Catholics to ‘baptize’ and idealize secular and religious movements outside the church, such as the environmentalism, or the push for gay rights. They feel this leads to the loss of a specifically Christian and Catholic identity that dilutes the evangelizing drive to convert others to the church. They are strong on the necessity to reassert what is specifically ‘Catholic’ and they tend to take a more sceptical attitude toward the modern world.

An example of a cardinal who fits into this ‘hermeneutic of rupture’ constellation is the already-mentioned Esztergom-Budapest cardinal, Peter Erdö. He is a conservative European intellectual, very much in the Benedict XVI mould and some see him as a possible *papable*. He will certainly have influence in the conclave, but I think a return to this papal euro-centric style is unlikely. Another who fits into the rupture hermeneutic is Rainer Maria Woelki, Archbishop of Cologne. Woelki is interesting in that he has moved from being an unreconstructed traditionalist to a more moderate position. However, lately he has become the leader of the opposition in the German church’s synodal process and has dealt badly with sexual abuse cases in Cologne. There would also be a small number of Latin American and African cardinals sympathetic with this view.

Several US cardinals are somewhat at home in this constellation: Daniel Di Nardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston, New York Archbishop, Timothy Dolan, and James Michael Harvey, former head of the papal household and now archpriest of the basilica of Saint-Paul-Outside-the-Walls. Putting them altogether at most there would probably be about

twenty-five to possibly thirty cardinals who would want at least some major modifications of Francis' papal priorities.

SO – WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

Having identified the main constellations, it needs to be emphasized that the real division is no longer between progressive and traditionalist/conservative, but much more between the secularised North and the global South, the developed and the developing worlds. While the culture warriors of the North are focused on arguments about traditional sexual morality, abortion, gender issues and church governance, the fact is 'if you are a cardinal from Indonesia or Guatemala or Congo, restricting or enlarging LGBTIQ+ rights is not at the top of your agenda. Making sure your flock does not go hungry matters more than whom they go to bed with' (Sean Michael Winters, *National Catholic Reporter*, 4/9/2019).

This also makes the conclave difficult to predict; it is hard to determine which way cardinals from the global South will go. Many of the Latin American and Asian cardinals will remain faithful to Francis' vision, most probably led by Luis Tagle, former archbishop of Manila, Philippines and now at the Dicastery for Evangelization in the Curia.

The African cardinals are harder to predict. They can be very clerical and rigid on sexual issues like homosexuality, contraception and reproductive health, but very open on social justice with a willingness to confront political corruption head-on in their own countries. Asian Catholics often happily embrace interreligious dialogue with Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, but are more pious and devotional in their religious practices.

There is a sense in which the next pope could be from anywhere. Most cardinals will come to the conclave with reasonably open minds, wanting to get to know each other and to be informed. They are going to form opinions and make up their minds in official discussions, and even more importantly in the informal *tête-à-têtes* which occur at the margins all over Rome immediately before the conclave. This is what happened in 2013 when cardinals got to know Jorge Bergoglio and heard him speak about inbred clericalism, while encouraging the cardinals to take the gospel to the geographical as well as the existential peripheries of pain, sin and ignorance. In contrast, Angelo Scola, Archbishop of Milan, the main candidate representing continuity with the Benedict papacy, shot himself in the foot with an arcane theological lecture that left his colleagues cold.

Something similar is likely to happen at next conclave. Cardinals, most but not all from developing countries, who believe that the real questions facing the church are poverty, injustice, environmental degradation, rather than abstract theological or ecclesiastical struggles about internal church matters, will look for a candidate who reflects those priorities. Synodality will also be an important issue, especially for those from peripheries because they are more used to a consultative, co-operative forms of governance than cardinals from big metropolitan, hierarchically, business-like structured dioceses, isolated from the give-and-take of ordinary existence.

Now that Benedict XVI has set the precedent that a pope can resign, the election of an older man becomes possible, because he can resign if the papacy becomes too much for him, or if he is sick. It won't matter either where the candidate comes from as long as they have a

breadth of vision, an openness to cultures other than their own, and a realization that the Eurocentric, North American preoccupations of Western Catholicism are no longer normative.

As a result, predicting this conclave is difficult. Also, cardinals also deeply dislike their more ambitious colleagues touting their candidacy, however subtly; overt self-aggrandisement achieves nothing. They also tend to resist outside pressure group tactics, especially when they use the media or the internet.

TWO FINAL THOUGHTS

Before looking at possible candidates, I want to mention the issue of extending the papal election franchise beyond the College of Cardinals to include representatives of national conferences of bishops and even representative priests and laity. In other words, the pope would be elected by a representative world synod rather than by a tiny group of clerical males who, while they may be from an international cross-section of the world, are scarcely representative of world Catholicism. They are simply those who, by a process of attrition, accident, patronage, or ambition, have made it to the top.

One other thing: there is no reason why someone from outside the College of Cardinals could be elected, although the last time this happened, it was disastrous. In 1378, just after the popes returned to Rome from Avignon, the non-cardinal Archbishop of Bari, Bartolomeo Prignano, was elected as Urban VI. The trouble was he turned out to be barking mad!

While no non-cardinal has been elected since Urban VI, that doesn't mean it can't be done. A person who comes to mind who is not presently a cardinal is Archbishop Bruno Forte of Chieti-Vasto, a regional archdiocese on the Adriatic coast, west of Rome. He is personally close to Pope Francis and has a lot going for him. He is a first-rate theologian with much pastoral experience who is moderately progressive.

Of course, any baptized Catholic male can be elected pope; he doesn't have to be a cardinal, a bishop, or even a priest. The only prerequisites are that the pope be a male and be a Catholic.

The reality is that the patriarchy is still entrenched and women need not apply, even though there's no reason why a woman couldn't be a cardinal. Rheims Archbishop Éric de Moulins-Beaufort, President of the French Bishops Conference, recently said that he envisioned that 'the Holy See will one day be led by the Pope surrounded by a college of cardinals in which there would be women' (*National Catholic Reporter*, 28/7/2020) and former Holy See Press Office Director, Father Frederico Lombardi, SJ, commented in 2013 that women cardinals were 'theologically and theoretically ... possible' because it's an office for which you don't have to be ordained. The fact that there are no women cardinals just illustrates that the Catholic church still has a long way to integrate the ministry of women into governance structure, although one of Pope Francis most recent appointment is to make Sister Raffaella Petrini the Governor of the Vatican City State.

PART FIVE

SO...WHO WILL BE THE NEXT POPE?

The Roman adage ‘He who enters the conclave as pope comes out as a cardinal’ is usually accurate; media-highlighted front-runners and particularly self-promoters usually don’t win. Yes, there have been exceptions where the front-runner was elected, like Eugenio Pacelli as Pius XII in 1939, but nowadays the best we can do is to nominate and assess the *papabili* who have already emerged, as well as others who might be considered. Once inside the conclave cardinals are their own men who will make their own decisions according to their conscientiously held views.

Certainly, the role of the ‘grand electors’ will probably be important. The term ‘grand elector’ refers to influential cardinals who get together a coalition to support a particular candidate. They are the ones who will work out a compromise between the groups if lead candidates cancel each other out, or can’t get a two thirds majority, or no clear candidate emerges after multiple votes. The cardinals will then look for compromise candidates. If the conclave were to reach a deadlock, they would then start to look for a compromise candidate. This is where some of my two-stars might be elected.

Also, there’s a feeling abroad that the cardinals, particularly those from the developing world, might favour an Italian this time and my first two picks are Italians.

MY LIST OF POSSIBLE CANDIDATES WITH RATINGS FROM 5 STARS = REAL INSIDE CHANCE TO 1 STAR = OUTSIDE CHANCE

Matteo Zuppi, Archbishop of Bologna, Italy



Born on 11 October 1955 in Rome, Zuppi studied for the priesthood at the Pontifical Lateran University. He also gained a doctorate of letters and philosophy from Rome’s La Sapienza University in church history. There he met Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Sant’Egidio Community, which he joined. A lay group located in Rome’s Trastevere district, the Sant’Egidio Community was established in 1968 and has 30,000 members in more than 20 countries in Europe, Central America, Africa and Asia. They are engaged in inter-religious dialogue, peace activities and supporting the marginalized and poor.

Zuppi was ordained in May 1981 for the Diocese of Palestrina, just west of Rome, formally transferring back to Rome diocese in 1988. Between 1981 and 2012 he had wide ministerial experience in Roman parishes and played a key role in Sant’Egidio Community’s work in helping to end the civil war in Mozambique in 1992. Last year he went on a peace mission to Ukraine representing Pope Francis. He met president Volodymyr Zelensky, but not

Russia's Vladimir Putin. He then went to the United States to meet then-President Biden. He remains closely connected with Sant'Egidio.

In January 2012 he was ordained an auxiliary bishop of Rome and in December 2015 he was appointed Archbishop of Bologna. He was created cardinal in October 2019.

He is very much a Francis bishop. He has enormous ministerial experience in the diocese of Rome, of which the pope is bishop. Through the Sant'Egidio community he has experience of the wider developing world; he is an honorary citizen of Mozambique for his work in reconciliation there and he is deeply committed to maintaining 'humanitarian corridors' for immigrants from Africa and Asia into Europe. Sympathetic to LGBTIQ+ issues, he is very much in the 'who am I to judge' tradition.

He also comes with a broad historical perspective, telling a Madrid conference on urban evangelization in early-2020 that 'the end of Christendom, which is clear...doesn't mean the end of the Gospel or of Christianity.' He is also concerned that the church seizes the opportunity that post-modernity offers. Answering the criticism that Catholicism is no longer attractive to secularised Westerners, he says that the church has to get closer to people 'to talk to everyone and start again. Listen and talk, listen to wounds and talk with friendliness, with real concern for people.' The Gospel, he says, 'should not be reduced to morals. It should be an encounter; it should be life ... that speaks to the heart.' He has little sympathy with 'the prophets of doom.' 'Some people,' Zuppi says, 'first of all want to make everything clear. Mercy is the opposite' because it breaks down all barriers and overcomes all limits. Zuppi is a man who looks outward.

While the views he has expressed and his membership of Sant'Egidio will make him unattractive to conservatives and reactionaries, it will make him very appealing to cardinals from the periphery, especially if the conclave felt that the time had come again for an Italian to be elected. Zuppi is my *numero uno* front-runner. **Zuppi: STAR RATING: **** (4)**

Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Holy See



From Schiavon near Vicenza in northeastern Italy, he was born on 17 January 1955, studied in the local seminary and was ordained for Vicenza diocese in 1980. He has a doctorate in canon law from Rome's Gregorian University and since 1985 he has served in the Holy See's diplomatic service.

After stints in nunciatures in Nigeria and Mexico, in 2009 he was appointed Nuncio to Venezuela and ordained archbishop. This was a difficult post because this was the year President Hugo Chávez died and his successor, Nicholas Maduro was appointed. The country

was governed by a socialist regime that was moving the country away from US dominance. The Venezuelan bishops had aligned themselves against the Chávez government and supported an unsuccessful coup against him in 2002.

It was while he was in Venezuela that Parolin got to know the then-Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Bergoglio who, when he was elected as Pope Francis in March 2013, appointed Parolin as his Secretary of State. This is the most important and powerful position in the Holy See, with the incumbent essentially acting as the pope's second-in-charge. In our terms, he is both prime minister and foreign minister. Parolin is strongly identified with the Francis' programme, although he takes a much more diplomatic approach than the pope. Besides Italian, he speaks French, English and Spanish.

However, there are some negatives to his election. He has hardly any pastoral experience and has never run a diocese. Also, during his tenure the Secretariat of State has been involved in two complex financial scandals, one of which involved the purchase and then sale of an expensive London property in South Kensington with the Vatican losing some €200 million.

The newly-established Secretariat for the Economy under Cardinal George Pell tried to reign-in Parolin's deputy, the *Sostituto*, Angelo Becciu over financial skulduggery, but Pell was unsuccessful when Francis sided with the Secretariat of State. However, after further evidence of mismanagement emerged, Francis stripped Becciu of his rights as a cardinal, including his right to vote in a future conclave. As Secretary of State, Parolin has had to take responsibility for this major failure.

Also, there's been criticism of Parolin's judgment over his negotiations with the People's Republic of China. Criticism has come not only from Cardinal Joseph Zen, former Bishop of Hong Kong and a long-term opponent of negotiating with the Communist government and who was arrested in May 2022, but also from former Hong Kong British Governor, Chris Patten, a Catholic, who is critical of negotiating with Chinese president Xi Jinping because of his human rights record. In an effort to regularize appointments of bishops, Parolin's diplomacy is accused of abandoning the underground church that has always been loyal to Rome.

Parolin has been completely loyal to the Francis agenda but he is, at heart, a diplomat who has spent most of his ministry among the powerful of the world. Many cardinals would be concerned that this would not be a good preparation for a papacy focused on pastoral care and concern for the poor. While early on in the Francis papacy he was seen as a 'hot tip' to succeed, his star has now faded considerably. **Parolin: STAR RATING: ** (2)**

Luis Antonio Gokim Tagle, Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization



A Filipino, born in Manila on 21 June 1957, his maternal grandfather was Chinese and his nickname is ‘Chito’. He studied for the priesthood for the Imus diocese, just south of Manila, and after ordination in 1982, he did further theological studies at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC., obtaining a doctorate in historical theology in 1991. His topic was episcopal collegiality at Vatican II.

For fifteen years he served on the editorial board of the Bologna-based History of Vatican II Project, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (English editor) which produced the five-volume *History of Vatican II* (1995-2006). Tagle wrote the chapter on ‘The “Black Week” of Vatican II’ (Vol IV, pp 388-452), referring to the week in November 1964 when the majority of bishops felt that the texts of the Council were being compromised and stymied by a recalcitrant, reactionary minority. Besides English, Tagle speaks Tagalog and Italian.

After returning to the Philippines in 1992, he worked in parishes and taught in local seminaries. He was ordained Bishop of Imus in December 2001. In October 2011 he was appointed Archbishop of Manila and was created cardinal in November 2012, aged 55.

He acted as president of the Synod on the Family (2014-2015) and in December 2019 Francis brought him to Rome and appointed him Prefect of the important Dicastery for Evangelization. He was also made president of Caritas Internationalis, the worldwide Catholic charity.

Often referred to as ‘the Asian Francis,’ Tagle is humble, deeply spiritual, charismatic, with an excellent sense of humour. He has considerable pastoral experience in the Metro Manila region, is a good speaker and is excellent in the media; for several years he had his own weekly hour-long TV programme. He is committed to social justice, equity and the poor. Like Francis, when dealing with issues like respect for the LGBTIQ+ community and access to communion for the divorced remarried, his bias is in strongly favour of genuinely pastoral solutions. His experience at Evangelization will also stand him in good stead.

But he sometimes confuses Western progressives when he reverts to being a typical Filipino bishop who tend to be fairly conservative on issues like abortion, contraception and reproductive health, despite the Philippines’ massive population problems. Successive governments have always had to struggle with the church hierarchy to introduce contraception, reproductive health programmes and population limitation.

His reputation suffered a set-back when in the 2022 reform of the curia, the pope was appointed prefect of the Evangelization Dicastery and Tagle was reduced to one of two pro-prefects. He also lost the leadership of Caritas Internationalis when, due to serious management problems, the entire leadership was removed. This doesn't mean he's out of favour with Francis. As pro-prefect at Evangelization, he controls the purse strings of a very large budget, and appoints bishops in almost all of Africa, Asia and Oceania, except Australia and New Zealand. As a result, Tagle has enormous influence on the periphery and remains a serious candidate.

His drawback is that he is already seen by many in the media as a likely candidate and that's not always a recommendation to his cardinal colleagues. His closeness to Pope Francis will also make him unattractive to some. **Tagle: STAR RATING: *** (3)**

Robert Sarah, Prefect Emeritus of the Dicastery for Divine Worship



Born on 16 June 1945 in the then-French controlled Guinea, near the border with Senegal, Sarah's parents were first generation Christians. At the age of eleven he left home to study at a junior seminary run by the Holy Spirit Fathers, who have deeply influenced him. He later studied in major seminaries in Ivory Coast, Guinea and the Grand Seminary in Nancy, France.

Ordained in July 1969 for the Archdiocese of Conakry, he studied at the Gregorian University and spent a year studying Scripture in Jerusalem. He returned to Guinea to work in parishes and teach in the seminary.

At age 34 he was appointed Archbishop of Conakry in August 1979. He courageously opposed the Marxist dictatorship of Ahmed Sékou Touré, first president of an independent Guinea. A Muslim and leader of opposition to the French, after independence Touré instituted one party rule and persecuted and killed his opponents. The church, led by Sarah, was one of the few institutions to oppose Touré, who died in 1984. Sarah's opposition continued against Touré's military successor; he showed both courage and national leadership.

In 2001 he was called by John Paul II to work in the Roman Curia. In November 2014 Pope Francis, in a surprize move, appointed him Prefect of the Dicastery for Worship and the Sacraments. The reason: because Sarah is a 'neo-traditionalist' in terms of worship, that is he wants to hark back to the pre-Vatican II liturgy. He has also mounted quite effective opposition to the Francis agenda, although not openly. He is strongly supported by wealthy US conservatives, including the Knights of Columbus, as well as groups of French-speaking reactionaries; the title of his book *God or Nothing* indicates something of his extremist stance.

Although deeply spiritual, he is a somewhat humourless ascetic, who is uncomfortable with women, especially women in authority. He is extremely conservative theologically and, perhaps understandably given his experience with Touré in Guinea, has little sympathy with Islam. He says that ‘Western homosexual and abortion ideologies and Islamic fundamentalism [are] ... almost like two apocalyptic beasts,’ similar to Nazism and Communism. If elected he would certainly repudiate the priorities of the Francis papacy.

Sarah will be the favoured candidate of some conservative cardinals. He would also have some traction among African cardinals who would see the election of a black pope as a coming of age for the African church. But his age is most certainly against him; he will turn 80 in mid-June 2025. From a pastoral perspective his election as pope would be a disaster.

Sarah: STAR RATING: * (1)

Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson: Chancellor of the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences



Another African *papabile* is Peter Turkson, born on 11 October 1948 in the town of Nsuta, Ghana. He studied for the priesthood at the Regional Seminary in Ghana, and at St. Anthony-on-Hudson seminary, Rensselaer, New York. Ordained priest in 1975, he's had several stints in Rome and has a doctorate in scripture from the Gregorian University.

He was in Rome when he was unexpectedly appointed archbishop of Cape Coast in 1992 and was created cardinal in 2003. In 2009 Benedict XVI called him to the Vatican curia and appointed him to the-now Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. He resigned in late-2021 and in April 2022, Francis named him Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Turkson is in tune with Francis' agenda, is a good communicator, and is fluent in English, French, Italian, German and Hebrew.

If the cardinals were looking for someone from Africa, he has had all the right experiences: a solid intellectual training, together with parish, diocesan and curial experience. Because of his fluency in English and understanding of the Anglo-American world, he has well publicized views on topics of interest to people from the West; on contentious issues he takes a moderate stance.

For instance, on women's ordination, he says: ‘Apart from the question of ordination, I don't see why we should exclude women from positions of responsibility in the church ...

In the church in Ghana, we now have many women catechists, which is a very important position. Many communities do not have a priest ... so it is women catechists who leads the worship. We also have a number of women in significant government positions in Ghana.' On HIV/AIDS he says condoms are not the solution, but takes a moderate stance on this issue.

On the question of Western values (especially LGBTIQ+ values) influencing Africa, he says 'we need to be careful about generalizing about Western values,' because while culture is changing in Africa, in traditional Africa 'any lifestyle that does not lead to the growth of the community is seen as dysfunctional...In a traditional African society, people wouldn't even tolerate ... talk about homosexuality.'

He says that Africans tend to be enthusiastic about both worship and faith. 'Christianity has become too notional, too much in our heads ... when you become a Christian, you come to meet a person, not a set of ideas.' He points out that the more developing world environments are destroyed, the more pressure there will be for immigration to developed countries.

There are some black marks against him. At the time of the 2013 conclave, he appeared ambitious and talked-up his chances of election as pope in the media, which immediately led other cardinals to exclude him. More recently he infuriated sexual abuse victims when he said that Catholicism needs to 'exit' the abuse scandal and 'lift the cloud over the church.'

However, theologically he would be moderately progressive and he may appeal to electors looking for an African pope. He's cosmopolitan and seems to be able to bridge cultural differences and the high level of his biblical studies and the Anglo-American elements in his background might recommend him to some electors.

Turkson: STAR RATING: ** (2)

Michael Czerny, Prefect for the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development



Born in Brno in the former Czechoslovakia on July 18 1946, his family emigrated to Montreal, Canada in 1948. Educated there by the Jesuits, he joined the Society of Jesus in 1963 and was ordained priest in June 1973. He studied at the University of Chicago and obtained a doctorate in interdisciplinary studies (human sciences, social thought and theology) in 1978. In 1979 he founded the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Social Justice in Toronto.

During a stint at the Central American University of San Salvador (1990-2002), he also worked with the UN as negotiator in resolving the El Salvador civil war. In 2002 he moved to Africa where he founded and directed the African Jesuit Aids Network offering ministry and support to HIV/AIDS sufferers and trying to find solutions to the pandemic. Czerny argued that condoms were ineffective in preventing the spread of HIV in the general African general population, despite their success outside Africa. He also taught in the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya.

Recalled to Rome in 2010 he was appointed a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace presided over by Cardinal Peter Turkson. In 2016 he became undersecretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development where he focused on refugees and migrants, a cause close to Pope Francis' heart. He also participated in the synodal assembly for Amazonia in 2019. He was created a cardinal in October 2019 and in December 2021 Francis appointed him Prefect for the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. He speaks English, French, Czech, Spanish and Italian.

He is a man with vast international experience across a whole range of social issues in both North and Central America, Africa and Europe with a world-wide vision derived from his work in the Jesuit Generalate in Rome. No other cardinal has comparable breadth.

Given this experience he would certainly appeal to many cardinals from the periphery and to electors with a vision of the worldwide church. However, the church may not be ready for two Jesuit popes in a row and he will certainly be opposed by Euro-centrists and those who oppose Francis' outreach to the church in the developing world. He is a serious candidate.

Czerny: STAR RATING: *(3)**

Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and Primate of Hungary



Born on June 25 1952 in Budapest, his father was a medical doctor. His whole education and early ministry occurred under the Communist regime of János Kádár who came to power after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Erdő was educated in a Catholic lyceum in Budapest and began his studies for the priesthood in the Theological College of Esztergom and later in the Central Seminary of Budapest. He gained doctorates in theology in 1976 and canon law in 1980 from Rome's Lateran University. He was ordained priest on June 18 1975 in Budapest cathedral. He speaks Hungarian, Italian and French.

After a brief stint in parishes, he has had a long academic career in Hungary teaching canon law in the Esztergom seminary (1980-1988) and in the theology faculty of the prestigious Pázmány Péter Catholic University (1988-1998). He was also visiting lecturer in canon law at the Gregorian University in Rome (1986-2002).

For three years he was Auxiliary Bishop of Székesfehérvár in central Hungary. He was then appointed Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and Primate of Hungary on 7 December 2002 and made a cardinal 21 October 2003. Despite living under an oppressive Communist regime for 30 years, his ecclesiastical career has been very successful.

He was president of the Hungarian Episcopal Conference from 2005 to 2010, but he was not re-elected; he was apparently not popular with the majority of Hungarian bishops. In contrast, he served two terms between 2006 and 2016 as President of the Council of the Bishops Conferences of Europe.

In March 2005 he participated in the conclave that elected Benedict XVI and was certainly seen as *papable* in the 2013 conclave that elected Pope Francis, although his relative youth (61) probably told against him. Pope Francis appointed him Relator General of the 2014 Synod of Bishops on Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization.

Erdö's relationship with the authoritarian, right-wing Fidesz Party government led by the Protestant (Calvinist) Viktor Orbán is close; it's been in office since 2010 is close to both Catholics and Protestants with the churches generously subsidised. In response the bishops don't embarrass Orban or the government by supporting refugees and migrants and LGBT+ people, groups targeted by Fidesz.

While he is clearly highly intelligent, he is very Euro-centric and there is something of the old Austro-Hungarian imperial paternalism about him. He is theologically neo-traditionalist and sympathetic to those dedicated to the promotion of the Post-Tridentine Latin Mass. For me the fundamental question is: does the church need another canon lawyer as pope?

Described in London-based *Catholic Herald* (5/8/22) as 'a conservative canon law expert coming from the frontline of the European culture war' and as 'an emerging front runner' to follow Francis, Erdö will certainly appeal to those opposing the election of a Francis clone. Recently evidence has emerged that he was discreetly strategizing with the late-George Pell in preparation for the coming conclave and that he continues to work to make sure that another Francis-style cardinal is *not* elected. He will be a major candidate for the traditionalist camp.

Erdö: STAR RATING: *(3)**

OTHER POSSIBILITIES

Besides the more likely *papabili* listed above, there are some other cardinals who just might be considered by their colleagues. Two I'd mention are: Reinhold Marx (69), archbishop of Munich and Freising, and Marcello Semeraro (74), prefect of the Congregation for Causes of

Saints. Because of his stance on synodality and leadership of the German synod, Marx will be unpopular with many cardinals, but he'll be a grand elector for a more progressive candidate. Semeraro has been close to Francis for two decades and until late-2020 was secretary of the pope's Council of Cardinals; he's now prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. He is very pastoral and may appeal as a compromise Italian.

Back in 2020 two books were published discussing the post-Francis conclave. The first is by Englishman Edward Pentin, Rome correspondent for the *National Catholic Register*, a neo-traditionalist US-based weekly. His book *The Next Pope: The Leading Cardinal Candidates* (Sophia Institute Press, 2020) lists nineteen cardinals he considers *papabili*; his list includes those I've already listed, plus another eleven, several of whom have already turned eighty. Among those still within the electable age range are Raymond Burke (75), former head of the Signatura (Vatican high court), Willem Eijk (70), Archbishop of Utrecht, Netherlands, Gerhard Ludwig Müller (76), Prefect Emeritus of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Malcolm Ranjith (76), Archbishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka. I don't think any of these cardinals have any chance of being elected.

The other book is by American George Weigel, also entitled *The Next Pope*, but with a different subtitle, *The Office of Peter and a Church in Mission* (Ignatius Press, 2020). Weigel outlines a profile for the next pope rather than naming specific *papabili*, but typically the profile reflects his own strongly-held opinions on almost every aspect of contemporary Catholicism.

For Weigel the key issues are 'theological' by which he really means gender and sexuality-related morality which, he argues, has been watered-down to fit in with modern culture. 'The Church is living, vibrant, and effective,' he says, 'in societies where Catholics have embraced Catholicism in full and are joyfully living missionary discipleships.' In contrast, in places like the US, Canada, Australia and the UK where what he calls 'Catholic lite' predominates with Catholics abandoning aspects of the Church's moral teaching, then, he argues, the faith has no influence on culture. This is an oft repeated Weigel trope. His book is really an anti-Pope Francis critique, endlessly repeating many of his oft-repeated themes.

Conclusion

In the end, this is going to be a difficult conclave to predict. Zuppi, Tagle and Czerny stand out as candidates for continuing the Francis line, and they remain the most attractive candidates from a mainstream Western Catholic perspective, but their close link with the Francis agenda might stymie them. Erdö is the obvious candidate for the traditionalists. For those favouring an African, Turkson is a possibility. Personally, I favour one of the Zuppi, Tagle, Czerny trio, but then I have a poor record on predicting popes; I missed backing both Benedict and Francis as winners, so nowadays I'm just as likely to be completely wrong again; after all I'm not infallible!

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