

Pope Francis Promises New Look for Catholic Church

Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio's election as pope has broken Europe's centuries-old grip on the papacy, opening the doors on a new age of simplicity and humility for the Roman Catholic Church, mired in intrigue and scandal.

He is the first South American pontiff, the first non-European pope in 1,300 years and the first to take the name Pope Francis, in honour of St. Francis of Assisi, the 12th century saint who spurned wealth to pursue a life of poverty.

His elevation on the second day of a closed-door conclave of cardinals came as a surprise, with many Vatican watchers expecting a longer deliberation, and none predicting the conservative 76-year-old Bergoglio would get the nod.

He looked as startled as everyone, hesitating a moment on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica before stepping out to greet the huge crowds gathered in the square below to catch a glimpse of the new pontiff.

"I ask a favour of you ... pray for me," he urged the cheering crowds, telling them the 114 other cardinal-electors "went almost to the end of the world" to find a new leader.

He also offered a **prayer** to his predecessor, **Pope Benedict**, who resigned unexpectedly last month, after saying he was too frail to tackle the many problems assailing the world's largest organization, which has an estimated 1.2 billion members.

"Good night and have a good rest," Bergoglio said before disappearing back into the opulent surroundings of the Vatican City—a far cry from his simple apartment in Buenos Aires.

Delighted priests, nuns and pilgrims danced around the obelisk in the middle of St. Peter's Square, chanting: "Long Live the Pope" and "Argentina, Argentina."

In his native Argentina, jubilant Catholics poured into their local churches to celebrate.

"I hope he changes all the luxury that exists in the Vatican, that he steers the Church in a more humble direction, something closer to the gospel," said Jorge Andres Lobato, a 73-year-old retired state prosecutor.

Change of Direction

The 266th pontiff in the Church's 2,000-year history, Francis is taking the helm at a time of great crisis, with morale among the faithful hit by a widespread **child sex abuse scandal** and infighting in the Vatican bureaucracy.

His unexpected election answered some fundamental questions about the direction of the Church in the coming years.

After more than a millennium of European leadership, the cardinal-electors looked to Latin America, where 42 percent of the world's Catholics live. The continent is more focused on poverty and the rise of evangelical churches than questions of materialism and sexual abuse, which dominate in the West.

They also chose a man with long pastoral experience, rather than an academic and Vatican insider like Benedict.

"It seems that this pope will be more aware of what life is all about," Italian theologian Massimo Faggioli told Reuters.

Bergoglio was born into a family of seven, his father an Italian immigrant railway worker and his mother a housewife. He became a priest at 32, nearly a decade after losing a lung due to respiratory illness and quitting his chemistry studies.

Despite his late start, he was leading the local Jesuit

community within four years. □Bergoglio has a reputation as someone willing to challenge powerful interests and has had a sometimes difficult relationship with Argentine President Cristina Fernandez and her late husband and predecessor, Nestor Kirchner.

Displaying his conservative orthodoxy, he has spoken out strongly against gay marriage, denouncing it in 2010 as “an attempt to destroy God’s plan,” and is expected to pursue the uncompromising moral teachings of Benedict and John Paul II.

Not everyone liked the look of his profile.

“I think they missed an opportunity to renew themselves. They’ve picked another old guy,” said Daniel Villalpando, a 32-year-old web designer in Mexico City. “Sure, he’s a Latino, but they got the most European of the Latinos.”

Bergoglio is the first Jesuit to become pope. The order was founded in the 16th century to serve the papacy and is best known for its work in education and for the intellectual prowess of its members.

“I did not expect to see him in white tonight. I think it was a surprise, but it shows the courage of the cardinals to decide to cross the ocean and therefore to broaden perspectives,” said Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi.

The Vatican said his inaugural Mass would be held on Tuesday. U.S. President Barack Obama said the election of Francis “speaks to the strength and vitality of a region that is increasingly shaping our world.”

Age Concerns

In preparatory meetings before the conclave, the cardinals seemed divided between those who believed the new pontiff must be a strong manager to get the dysfunctional bureaucracy under control and others who were looking more for a proven pastoral

figure to revitalize their faith across the globe.

Bergoglio was a rival candidate at the 2005 conclave to Benedict, but his name had not appeared on lists of possible contenders this time around, with many discounting him because of his age, thinking prelates wanted a younger leader.

The secret conclave began on Tuesday night with a first inconclusive ballot. Three more inconclusive ballots were held on Wednesday before Francis obtained the required two-thirds majority of 77 votes in the fifth and final vote.

Billowing white smoke poured from the Sistine Chapel and the bells of St. Peter's Basilica rang out to announce the news, drawing Romans and tourists to the Vatican.

"May God forgive you," Bergoglio said to the cardinals at a subsequent dinner, raising loud laughter, according to New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan.

He is due to make a private visit to a Rome basilica on Thursday and then meet Benedict, who is secluded in the papal summer residence outside Rome. Francis will celebrate a Mass with cardinals in the late afternoon.

Additional reporting by Catherine Hornby, Naomi O'Leary, Tom Heneghan, Barry Moody and Keith Weir; Editing by Peter Cooney

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