

The Last Pope? Why Speculation Is Exploding After Francis' Death

The death of Pope Francis has created a firestorm of speculation about the next pope. There is no clear frontrunner, and all sorts of names are being thrown around.

Many liberal Catholics are hoping for another liberal pope that will be able to continue the legacy of Francis, while many conservative Catholics are desperate for a conservative pope that will move the Vatican in a very different direction.

Meanwhile, a controversial document that was discovered in the Vatican archives in the 16th century known as "the Prophecy of the Popes" is getting a ton of attention on social media. Many are suggesting that the pope that will soon be elected will actually be the last pope before the return of Christ.

I will try to take this one step at a time.

On Monday, it was being reported that Pope Francis died "of a cerebral stroke and irreversible heart failure."

Pope Francis died of a cerebral stroke and irreversible heart failure, the Vatican's top doctor said Monday. Francis was 88.

The stroke led to a coma and "irreversible cardiocirculatory collapse," Dr. Andrea Arcangeli, the head of the Vatican's health department, said in a statement reported by multiple news outlets.

Francis died Monday at 7:35 a.m. at the Casa Santa Marta guesthouse at the Vatican where he lived.

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Francis is being remembered as a “reformer” that often said very controversial things.

For example, just a few months ago Francis publicly declared that all religions “are paths to God” during a visit to Singapore.

“All religions are paths to God. I will use an analogy, they are like different languages that express the divine,” Francis said during a September trip to Singapore. “But God is for everyone, and therefore, we are all God’s children.”

Francis broke with traditional Catholic teaching in many other areas as well.

Now a new pope will be elected, and according to ABC News that process usually begins “between 15 to 20 days after the pope’s death.”

It’s also during the interregnum that all cardinals under the age of 80 who are eligible to participate are summoned to Rome to prepare for the secret conclave inside the Sistine Chapel to choose the next pontiff, a gathering that typically commences between 15 to 20 days after the pope’s death. The cardinals spend the interregnum housed in private rooms in the Domus Marthae Sanctae – essentially a residence hotel in the Vatican with dining facilities that usually houses visiting clergy and laity. Per tradition, the cardinals are cut off from the outside world, including televisions, phones, computers and newspapers.

The College of Cardinals will cast as many as four ballots in a single day for the next pope, with a two-thirds majority required to elect a pontiff. After each vote, the ballots are burned and smoke is released from the Sistine Chapel’s

chimney as a signal to the throngs holding vigil in St. Peter's Square. Black smoke – fumata nera in Italian – indicates an inconclusive vote, while white smoke – fumata bianca – will signify that a new pope has been elected. If three days pass with no pope elected, voting can be suspended for a day to allow the cardinals time for reflection before the next round of ballots are cast.



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This upcoming conclave is going to be fascinating to watch, because at this stage nobody knows who is going to win.

Right now, more money is being bet on Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin than anyone else. He is currently the Vatican's Secretary of State, and he is considered to be very "influential."

The Vatican's influential top diplomat and a popular moderate, he has recently been installed as the bookmakers favorite. Like his boss, the 70-year-old has espoused a liberal worldview and recently said he was hoping for "an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people," and also urged Europe to "rediscover itself" in order to be able to face the "major challenges" of the era, in a recent interview.

Parolin is one of three leading contenders named "Peter," and he would be the first Italian pope since 1978.

The other leading contender is Cardinal Luis Tagle.

Tagle, 67, has been dubbed the "Asian Pope Francis," because his views largely align with the late Pontiff.

He has criticized the church's "severe" stance on gay people, divorcees and single mothers.

Tagle is the seventh cardinal ever from the Philippines and, if picked, would become the first Asian Pope.

One expert claims that Tagle was once “Pope Francis’s favorite to succeed him,” but it appears that his age may work against him.

Edward Pentin, a Vatican expert and the author of The Next Pope: The Leading Cardinal Candidates, said: “Five or six years ago, he was Pope Francis’s favorite to succeed him. He’s head of the important new super-dicastery for evangelization. He’s quite a strong contender. And he’s still relatively young,”

His age may count against him, however – cardinals are wary of appointing a relatively young man because his papacy could last decades, thwarting their own ambitions and squeezing their chances of one day being elected.

Another candidate to watch closely is Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu.

He is considered to be very conservative, and he would be the very first black pope.

Besungu, 65, is a Congolese cardinal who has publicly clashed with Francis in the past.

He rejected a decree from Francis that the church should give its blessing to homosexual couples, arguing it “cannot be carried out in Africa without [Christians] exposing themselves to scandals.”

*He effectively declared the doctrine, called *Fiducia supplicans*, null and void on the African continent.*

There are many that are speculating that one of the three candidates named “Peter” will win because that would fit “the

Prophecy of the Popes.”

“The Prophecy of the Popes” was supposedly written by St. Malachy in the 12th century, and it was supposedly “discovered” in the Vatican archives in the 16th century by a Benedictine monk named Arnold Wion.

The “Prophecy of the Popes” (Latin: Prophetia Sancti Malachiae Archiepiscopi, de Summis Pontificibus) was discovered in 1590 by Benedictine monk Arnold Wion and is kept in the Vatican Secret Archives. This work describes 112 cryptic mottos in Latin, each relating to succeeding popes, starting with Celestine II.

This list supposedly describes all of the popes that will reign until the return of Christ.

The final pope in the list is given the title “Peter the Roman,” and The Prophecy of the Popes says some very alarming things about the time when he will lead the Vatican.

“In the final persecution of the Holy Roman Church there will reign Peter the Roman, who will feed his flock amid many tribulations, after which the seven-hilled city will be destroyed and the dreadful Judge will judge the people. The End.”

A number of scholars were completely convinced that Pope Francis was “Peter the Roman.”

But Francis was not named Peter, and he was not Italian.

However, Cardinal Pietro Parolin fits both of those criteria.

“Pietro” is the Italian version of the name “Peter,” and he would be the first Italian pope since 1978.

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Of course all of the speculation that we are witnessing about this on social media may be for nothing, because as Ricky Scaparo has pointed out, the authenticity of “the Prophecy of the Popes” is “highly questionable.”

The authenticity of the prophecy is highly questionable. The document first appeared in 1595, over 400 years after Malachy's death, in a text by Benedictine monk Arnold Wion.

Scholars widely regard it as a forgery, possibly created to influence papal elections during the late 16th century. The mottos are vague and open to interpretation, making them easy to retrofit to various popes after the fact.

There is no way that we can prove that this document was originally authored by St. Malachy.

So ultimately we don't have any way of proving if it is authentic or not.

But if a candidate named “Peter” is eventually elected, a lot of people out there are going to go nuts over this.

Personally, I will be very interested to see how all of this plays out.

What we do know is that we really are living in the end times, and so it is entirely possible that the next pope could be the last pope.

No matter how much time we have left, all of us should be living with a sense of urgency, and all of us should be trying to make an impact on this world while we still can.

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