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Feature Article

Conclave contenders

Potential papabili

Robert Mickens - 31 December 2011

One of the talking points in Rome in recent months has been the growing frailty of Pope Benedict. Inevitably, speculation has turned to his likely successor. Our Rome correspondent offers an insider's guide to those considered papabile

In just a few months from now, Pope Benedict XVI will officially surpass Blessed John Paul II and become the oldest man in more than 100 years to serve as Bishop of Rome. The Polish Pope died just 16 days shy of his eighty-fifth birthday, a milestone Pope Benedict is set to reach on 16 April. Only four other popes since the end of the thirteenth century have made it to 86 years of age, of which the most recent was Pope Leo XIII, who died aged 93 in 1903.

Although Pope Benedict's general health appears to be good, he has begun to show signs of fatigue and increasing frailty. History and prudence would suggest that the cardinals of the Church should seriously start thinking about suitable candidates to succeed him. Casting a vote for the Successor of Peter is the main and gravest purpose for which they are given a red hat. They must avoid being caught unprepared, as apparently they were at the last conclave, when a number of cardinals publicly confessed that they did not know their confrères very well.

The next Pope is likely to be the product of a compromise among the electors, evidently not the case at the last conclave. The voting rules had been significantly revised in 1996 by Pope John Paul II, allowing for a simple majority vote after a couple of weeks of stalemate. Previously, voting would continue until a candidate received two-thirds-plus-one votes. Apparently, Joseph Ratzinger had reached a simple majority early in the balloting and, according to one theory, a number of other cardinals agreed to add their support to his candidacy rather than risk a protracted conclave and highlighting the divisiveness that that would have signalled.

This is not likely to happen at the next conclave. Shortly after his election, Pope Benedict wisely changed the rules back to the traditional system. So his successor is most likely to have been someone with broad support rather than one coming mainly from a particular faction. According to number 1024 in the Code of Canon Law, any baptised male is eligible. But since 1378, the Pope has always been elected from within the College of Cardinals.

Even if Pope Benedict creates any number of new members before the next conclave, the college is likely to maintain certain characteristics. First, there will be a significant group of men with experience of working in the Roman Curia, meaning the man who is eventually elected Pope will have to have the backing of this bloc. Secondly, approximately half or more of the members will be Europeans and an even larger percentage will have studied in Rome or somewhere else on the Old Continent. Thus, the successful candidate, even if not European, is likely to have undergone a degree of European cross-pollination. And since this is an election for Bishop of Rome, any serious papabile must have a decent command of the Italian language.

The likely candidates



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Faith and charity - a vital partnership

Pope's Lent message focuses on keys to healthy spiritual life

Cardinal Angelo Scola (born 7 November 1941), Archbishop of Milan, is the current front-runner according to many Italians. He is close to Pope Benedict and has an impressive curriculum vitae that includes serving as rector of the Lateran University and bishop in two previous dioceses, including as Patriarch of Venice. He is also one of the first priests to be ordained, in 1970, exclusively for service in *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL), although his supporters have tried to argue that his membership in the movement ceased once he became a bishop. With access to CL funding, he has been a creator of ambitious university and cultural programmes, and a restorer of church buildings. One of his major accomplishments has been to establish the Oasis Foundation, which brings Muslim and Christian scholars together to brainstorm on the future of the Mediterranean world. But he is said to have opponents in the Roman Curia. And at age 70, the clock is ticking.

Cardinal Odilo Pedro Scherer (born 21 September 1949), Archbishop of São Paulo, is the strongest Latin American candidate but has appeal that stretches beyond geographical considerations. Not only has he headed the largest diocese in the world's largest Catholic country since 2007, he also has sterling Roman credentials. German-Brazilian, he obtained a licentiate and doctorate in theology at the Gregorian University and later spent several years working at the Congregation for Bishops (1994-2001). In between, he worked in the Diocese of Toledo (Brazil) as a seminary rector and parish priest. Auxiliary bishop since 2001 and cardinal since 2007, the Roman Curia, Europeans and Latinos could find him a compromise candidate.

Cardinal Peter Turkson (born 11 October 1948), president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, is the front-runner among the Africans. Born in Ghana of a Catholic father and a mother who converted from Methodism, he is one of the few Africans to have undertaken doctoral studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He completed his basic theology at a seminary run by the Conventual Franciscans in upstate New York and then taught in a seminary in his native Ghana. He was named Archbishop of Cape Coast in 1992 and cardinal in 2003. Since taking up his Vatican post in October 2009, he has impressed people by his clear pastoral sense, a down-to-earth manner and his gentle sense of humour.

Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga SDB (born 29 December 1942), Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, has been described as a Latin American John Paul II because of his charismatic personality, linguistic abilities and his work in promoting the Church's social teaching. The native Honduran, who is currently president of Caritas Internationalis, was "Italianised" early on by his Salesian formation in Rome and Turin. A conservatoire-trained musician, he spent his initial brief years of priesthood in the classroom before becoming a bishop at the young age of 35. He was created cardinal in 2001. He tarnished his reputation by initially backing the 2009 military coup in Honduras.

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn OP (born 22 January 1945), Archbishop of Vienna, is probably the strongest European candidate from outside Italy. A theologian of the Dominican tradition who studied in Paris and Germany, he is urbane, polyglot and of noble lineage. When he became a young cardinal in 1998, he was considered one of the brightest among the conservatives in the college, but that was when there existed some notable moderate-to-progressives who were still of voting age. Protests from reform-minded Catholics in Austria are now testing the veteran's metal and the jury is still out on his performance. Some believe he would break new ground if he were allowed. But his closeness to Pope Benedict and the improbability that the cardinals would elect two German-speaking popes in a row go against him.

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri (born 18 November 1943) has been described as an ideal Italian-Argentine candidate who would restore the order that has all but crumbled in the Roman Curia during the current pontificate. Currently prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, he is a lifelong papal diplomat with a pedigree from the *Accademia Ecclesiastica*. As *sostituto* (deputy Secretary of State) from 2000 to 2007, he was one of the most powerful men in the pontificate of John Paul II. However, he lacks pastoral experience and has never been a diocesan bishop.

Cardinal Marc Ouellet SSP (born 8 June 1944) has headed the Congregation for Bishops since June 2010. A French-Canadian, he joined the prestigious Sulpician

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teaching society shortly after priestly ordination and has spent most of his life as a seminary professor and rector. He spent 10 years in Colombia and then nine back in Canada before going to Rome in 1997 to teach at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family. He is a former editor of *Communio*, the international journal founded by Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, both of whose theology he espouses. After serving briefly as vice-president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, he was named Archbishop of Quebec in 2002 and received his red hat three years later. During his eight years as spiritual leader in one the world's most secularised societies, Cardinal Ouellet often caused controversy by speaking out on moral issues. His affability and sincerity helped him smooth out the rifts, but it is not clear that he was able to accomplish much in his brief time there.

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi (born 18 October 1942) became an instant hit when Pope Benedict named him president of the Pontifical Council for Culture in 2007. A first-rate biblical scholar who has popularised Scripture studies through Italian television, radio and popular periodicals, he has ambitiously spearheaded efforts to re-establish the prominent place that the Catholic Church and the Vatican used to occupy in the world of high culture. Before taking up his post in Rome, he spent most of his time as a professor and director of the highly-regard Ambrosian Library in his native Milan. A kind and affable man and someone who is "moderate" ecclesologically, he unfortunately lacks global and multi-cultural experience. He is a classic European intellectual.

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