



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 14, 2013

## Argentine Cardinal Becomes Pope Francis

The 115 cardinal-electors of the 1.2 billion-member Roman Catholic Church, meeting in conclave for the second day on March 13, [elected Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio](#), archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to become the church's 266th pope.



When the traditional puff of white smoke — signaling that a pope had been elected — rose from the Sistine Chapel chimney at 7:06 p.m. on Wednesday, Rome time, a wave of excitement stirred through the crowd of tens of thousands gathered in the rain in St. Peter's Square to await the announcement and first appearance by the new pontiff.

Flags of many nations waved amidst the crowd, along with homemade signs reading “Habemus papam!” (“We have a Pope” in Latin) and “Viva il Papa!” (“Long Live the Pope,” in Italian).

Following the announcement by the Cardinal Protodeacon Jean-Louis Tauran, in Latin, that Cardinal Bergoglio had been chosen, and that the new pope had chosen the name Francis, a chant of “Francesco!” resounded across the piazza.

“I would like to thank you for your embrace,” said the new pope from the balcony on St. Peter's Basilica overlooking the Piazza. “My brother cardinals have chosen one who is from far away, but here I am.”

The [New York Times](#) reported that as he blessed the faithful, Francis asked the audience in Italian to “pray for me, and we'll see each other soon.”

The world's news media and Vatican observers immediately commented on several firsts signified by this selection: Bergoglio was the first pope to take on the name Francis, the first from the New World, the first Jesuit, and the first non-European pope since the Syrian-born Pope Gregory III, who served from 731-741.

Though Cardinal Bergoglio was reportedly the runner-up in votes to then-Cardinal Ratzinger during the conclave of 2005, he was not among the likely candidates named by most Vatican watchers to succeed Pope Benedict XVI. After having largely ignored the cardinal from Buenos Aires, the world scrambled to learn more about the man who had just become pope.

As his name indicates, Bergoglio is of Italian ancestry — the son of immigrants — a characteristic likely to help him gain acceptance among members of the Roman Curia, the administrative apparatus of the Catholic Church in the Vatican. He entered the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1958, was ordained to the priesthood in 1969, and served as the Jesuit provincial for Argentina from 1973 to 1979. Bergoglio became Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998 and was named a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 2001.

A brief profile of the new pope in the [National Catholic Register](#) notes:

Cardinal Bergoglio was known to be vibrantly pro-life, describing the pro-abortion movement as a “culture of death,” using the term coined by the man who made him a cardinal in 2001, Pope John



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Paul II. He opposed the free distribution of contraceptives in Argentina, staunchly defended the rights of the poor and chastised material inequality — he would frequently visit the slums in Buenos Aires — and spoke out strongly against same-sex “marriage.”

The *Register* article also quoted Cardinal Bergoglio’s statement written in 2010 denouncing Argentina’s legislation to permit not only same-sex marriage, but also the adoption of children by same-sex couples:

“At stake is the identity and survival of the family: father, mother and children,” he wrote. “At stake are the lives of many children who will be discriminated against in advance and deprived of their human development given by a father and a mother and willed by God. At stake is the total rejection of God’s law engraved in our hearts.”

In response to Bergoglio’s statements, Argentina’s president, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (wife of the previous President Néstor Kirchner) said the church’s tone was reminiscent of “medieval times and the Inquisition.” A March 13 article in the [Huffington Post](#) reported that President Kirchner had apparently mellowed (or took the wiser political path) and sent the new pope a congratulatory message that read, in part: “I want to greet you and express my congratulations on your election as the new Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church. It is our desire that you have, as you assume the leadership and guidance of the church, a fruitful pastoral career, playing such great responsibility toward advancing justice, equality, fraternity and peace of mankind.”

The *Post* also noted: “Argentine media have confirmed in the past that between 2003 and 2007, President Néstor Kirchner had several clashes with the new Pope over the issue of gay marriage, even labeling them as having an ‘adversarial relationship.’ ”

One question often asked about any Catholic cleric from Latin America is the individual’s position on “liberation theology,” a so-called social justice movement that has been condemned by faithful Catholics as being Marxist in nature. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, when he was Cardinal Ratzinger, condemned liberation theology on the grounds that under it the spiritual concept of the church as “People of God” is transformed into a “Marxist myth.”

The writer of an article in the [Washington Times](#) on March 13 cited Sergio Rubin, author of an authorized biography of Cardinal Bergoglio, *The Jesuit*. In his work, Rubin asks, and answers: “Is Bergoglio a progressive — a liberation theologian even? No. He’s no third-world priest. Does he criticize the International Monetary Fund, and neoliberalism? Yes. Does he spend a great deal of time in the slums? Yes.”

Rubin has also been quoted in the media in defense of charges that Bergoglio failed to stand up to the 1976-1983 military junta that has been charged with kidnapping and killing thousands of people in a “dirty war” to eliminate leftist opponents. An AP article on the subject noted:

“In some way many of us Argentines ended up being accomplices,” at a time when anyone who spoke out could be targeted, Rubin recalled in an interview with The Associated Press just before the papal conclave.”

The report also quoted Adolfo Perez Esquivel, who won the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize for documenting the junta’s atrocities. Said Perez Esquivel in an interview with Radio de la Red in Buenos Aires: “Perhaps he didn’t have the courage of other priests, but he never collaborated with the dictatorship. Bergoglio was no accomplice of the dictatorship. He can’t be accused of that.”

Pope Francis inherits leadership of a church that has been beset by many crises, many external, some



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internal. His challenges will be formidable. Perhaps mindful of this, the new pope asked for the faithful to pray for him in his first public address:

And now I would like to give you my blessing. But before I do, I would like to ask you a favor: before the bishop blesses the people, I ask you to pray to the Lord that He bless me ... the prayer of the people for a blessing upon their bishop. Let us take a moment of silence for you to offer your prayer for me.

*Photo of Pope Francis: AP Images*



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