



## “Quo Vadis, Leo?”: “Whither Goest Thou?”

Since his election on May 8, Pope Leo XIV (Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost) has been the subject of endless and contentious speculation by Catholics, non-Catholics, and anti-Catholics alike. Is he progressive, liberal, moderate, conservative, or traditionalist? Where will he stand on moral issues (LGBTQ matters, divorce, marriage, abortion, euthanasia)? Where will he come down on political-social issues (immigration, borders, socialism, capitalism, liberation theology, communism, China)? What about ecclesiastical governance issues (“[Bergoglian synodalism](#),” women deacons, “collegiality,” clerical sex scandals)? Environmental issues (climate change, *Laudato Si’*)? Doctrinal issues (salvation, ecumenism)? Liturgical issues (Traditional Latin Mass, liturgical craziness, pagan adaptations)? And much more.



AP Images  
Pope Leo XIV

The speculation and fierce debate began almost as soon as the new pope stepped onto St. Peter’s central *loggia*, following the announcement, “*Habemus papam.*” Analysts on both the Right and the Left did quick dives into the background and social-media posts of the little-known Robert Prevost, surveying his career as priest, bishop, and cardinal to divine where he might lead the Catholic Church. As it turns out, there is something for everyone, and the spin doctors of the Right, Left, and center have had a field day predicting that Pope Leo will go this way or that.

### Francis’ Legacy

The fact that these fundamental matters are being so closely followed and intensely debated is grim testimony to the wrenching revolution wrought in the Church during the 12-year pontificate of Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis). The Argentine Jesuit was the darling of the media and the political classes that hate Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular. Why? Well, because he was a never-ending font of useful ambiguity. He provided a papal *imprimatur* for their godless, secularist immorality, their diversity/inclusivity obsession (which harshly and hypocritically excludes all those who disagree with them), their identity politics, and their globalist-communist vision for a New World Order.

Nancy Pelosi, Joe Biden, Whoopi Goldberg, Sunny Hostin, Father Jimmy Martin, Hillary Clinton, Rachel Maddow, Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Cornel West, Klaus Schwab, Bill Gates, Fidel Castro, the Communist Party USA, the Chinese Communist Party, the militant LGBTQ lobby, *The New York Times*, PBS, CNN — virtually the entire leftist universe — could barely contain their glee over Francis’ daily doses of doctrinal chaos and confusion. They were delighted by his auto-demolition of the Catholic Church’s perennial “stodgy,” “bigoted” moral and spiritual teachings that had stood for the past two millennia. Conversely, for conservatives and traditionalists (both inside and outside the



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Church) the Bergoglian papacy was a horror show, an unmitigated disaster. Hence, the great angst on all sides, going into the papal conclave, concerning Pope Francis' successor.

## The Contenders

The top contender among the *papabile*, according to the commonly quoted Vatican handicappers, was Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Francis' Secretary of State and top advisor. Although typically described as a "moderate" by the media, Parolin was viewed by most knowledgeable observers as an uber-liberal in the mold of Francis. He is responsible for the secret 2018 Vatican-Beijing agreement that has betrayed the persecuted Catholic Church in Communist China into the hands of the CCP. He covered up, according to Archbishop Viganò, the Vatican Bank scandal and the clerical sex-abuse scandals. Parolin also played a major role in helping Francis purge conservative prelates and stack the College of Cardinals with Bergoglians. He is an enthusiastic advocate for Francis' radical vision for a "[synodal church](#)," and was generally expected by all sides, once elected pope, to initiate "Francis 2.0."

Parolin's failure to accede to the papal throne was cause for great relief to many Catholics, this writer included. However, Parolin was not the only Bergoglian in the running for the petrine office. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of the Philippines, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Italy, Cardinal Mario Grech of Malta, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, and any of a number of additional "progressive" candidates might have proven even worse choices than Parolin.

Catholic conservatives and traditionalists hoped and prayed for a miraculous conclave outcome in which Cardinal Robert Sarah of Guinea, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa of Jerusalem, or Cardinal Péter Erdő of Hungary might emerge as the surprise pope. But, considering the makeup of the College of Cardinals, that would have been truly a miracle.

Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost of Chicago (by way of a long missionary stint in Peru) was a dark horse who didn't rank high, or at all, on many *papabile* lists. Consequently, there was much less publicly available information on him than on the higher-profile candidates mentioned above.

## Reaction From Left and Right

There was initial cheering on the Left when his past tweets and retweets that were critical of President Trump's policies surfaced. Prevost's support of migration especially endeared him to the migrant lobby. But, then some of his past statements opposing same-sex blessings, transgender indoctrination, and ordination of women threw a cold blanket on the party. Ardor for Leo on the Left started to decline.

On the Right, opinion on Pope Leo has been divided from the get-go. Right out of the starting gate, some Catholic (and non-Catholic) conservatives/traditionalists blasted him, while others praised him, or offered guarded optimism.

MAGA influencer and internet firebrand Laura Loomer was quick to make this [announcement](#) on her X account on May 8: "Meet the new American Pope. Of course he's anti-MAGA and WOKE. Another Open Borders Pope. Gross."

In another X post she [denounced](#) him as a "MARXIST POPE!"

Likewise, commentator Mike Cernovich saw another dark shadow descending on the Vatican. "Sorry, Catholics," he [said](#). "This new Pope is an open borders globalist. He will be pushing for abortion soon. This isn't a guess. You can scroll his X account and see what he's been up to."

Former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, host of the huge *War Room* podcast, has been one of the Catholic



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influencers most critical of Pope Leo. And his lineup of guests and co-hosts seem to share his anti-Leo perspective. “I mean it’s kind of jaw-dropping,” Bannon [told the BBC](#) one day after Leo’s election. “It is shocking to me that a guy could be selected to be the Pope that had had the Twitter feed and the statements he’s had against American senior politicians,” he continued, predicting that there’s “definitely going to be friction” between Leo and Trump. In subsequent shows he referred to the papal conclave vote as more “rigged” than the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Cardinal Prevost, he claimed, is the “worst pick for MAGA Catholics.” “This is an anti-Trump vote by the globalists that run the Curia — this is the pope Bergoglio and his clique wanted,” [said](#) Bannon.

One of Bannon’s frequent commentators and his primary Vatican correspondent for the *War Room* is the Rome-based Ben Harnwell, who is an unrelenting critic of Pope Leo. “This guy has been massively embraced by the liberals and the progressives,” [says](#) Harnwell. “He is one of their own.... He has [Pope] Francis’s DNA in him.” Harnwell [warns](#) that “Leo may be even more dangerous than Bergoglio” because “he has every indication to be just like Francis on the agenda but is far more subtle.”

## Not So Fast: Wait and See

Not all traditionalists in the Catholic “tradosphere” are so quick to write Pope Leo off to perdition. In fact, prominent traditional Catholics have vigorously rebuked their fellow trads for jumping the gun on condemnation. Perhaps foremost among these “Patience, please!” trads is Catholic journalist Michael Matt, editor of [The Remnant](#) newspaper, host of the [Underground](#) podcast, and host of the annual [Catholic Identity Conference](#). If asked to name anyone who might fitly be called the “dean” of American Catholic traditionalists, the first name to come this writer’s mind would be Michael Matt. Carrying on the Catholic journalist tradition of his father and grandfather (dating back over a century, to 1897), Matt has been fighting the good fight against the forces of destruction within the Catholic Church his entire life. That includes every pontificate since the Second Vatican Council, which concluded in 1965. Naturally, that has meant expending rivers of ink and oodles of podcast time exposing and opposing the subversive agendas of Pope Francis over the past dozen years. Resolutely but respectfully, of course. The point is he is the last person in the world to “squish out” or be snookered by Vatican II modernism camouflaged in traditionalist garb.

In one podcast after another since the conclave, Michael Matt has called on fellow conservatives and traditionalists to “cool it” regarding the attacks on Pope Leo — at least until he clearly embarks on a Bergoglian path. (See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).) He acknowledges that some of the new pope’s post-conclave remarks — on Pope Francis, migration and synodality, for instance — are troubling, but shouldn’t be the signal to freak out. Because Pope Leo is also sending signals that he may be striking a different path from that of Francis, even while using much of his predecessor’s rhetoric.

Matt [reminds viewers](#) that when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) was elected as successor to Pope John Paul II, there were traditional Catholics who warned that Ratzinger had been “the worst of the worst” of the Vatican II brigade of saboteurs. And yet, after he became pope, Ratzinger brought back the Latin Mass and made significant steps to restoring Catholic orthodoxy. No one saw that coming, Matt notes. So, before rushing to censure Pope Leo, he asks, why not give him a reasonable period to show where he stands? And why not, while continuing in prayer for him, also respectfully petition the Holy Father on matters of concern, to show him that traditional Catholics are not the cranky, belligerent, hateful miscreants that Francis and his media allies have caricatured us as?



## Cause for Hope

About those positive signals Pope Leo has sent; there are many, the significance of which may not be recognized by non-Catholics. Such as his eschewing of Pope Francis' false humility in his papal attire and papal domicile. Returning to papal tradition, Pope Leo wore the [red mozzetta](#) (elbow-length cape) when appearing on the *loggia* following his election and announced that he will be moving back into the traditional [papal apartment abandoned by Francis](#). And, among other welcome signs to traditionalists, he [sang the Regina Coeli prayer](#) in Latin during his first Sunday address to pilgrims in St. Peter's Square, [reintroduced Latin in his first Mass](#) as pope, blessed the journalists at [his first press conference](#) with a Latin benediction, [praised the Catholic Eastern rites](#) for preserving their beautiful liturgical traditions, [prayed for the persecuted Church in China](#), replaced the [scandal-ridden Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia](#) as president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, and, in his [first meeting](#) with the Vatican diplomatic corps, reaffirmed the traditional Catholic teaching on marriage, abortion, and euthanasia.

These and other positive signals are cause for hope, without naively believing that Pope Leo is about to initiate a counter revolution that will overturn the 60-year devastation of Vatican II. As Matt says, these positive signs indicate that we may have rare opportunities for snatching back some of our plundered Catholic patrimony — if traditionalists react intelligently and strategically to these openings. The evils and absurdities unleashed by Pope Francis shocked and awakened many people and, ironically, in many ways grew and strengthened the traditionalist movement within the Church. There are now Latin Mass religious orders, sympathetic bishops, and flourishing traditional parishes that didn't exist during the devastating aftermath of Vatican II in the 1970s and 1980s. Why not exercise the virtues of patience and prudence, and give the new Holy Father a wait-and-see honeymoon period before passing a verdict? If the Leonine pontificate turns out to be a remake of the Bergoglian one, as the pessimists predict, then Catholic traditionalists can return to the catacombs and holy resistance.

Michael Matt is far from alone. Among the conservative and traditional Catholic intellectuals, influencers, publications, and websites who are noting Pope Leo's overtures to Catholic tradition and taking a cautious (and charitable) optimism toward his young papacy are [Dr. Peter Kwasniewski](#), [Dr. Taylor Marshall](#), Raymond Arroyo, Dr. Anthony Stine, Robert Royal, *Catholic Family News*, Matt Walsh, *U.S. Grace Force* podcast, [Patrick Coffin](#), Professor Roberto de Mattei, Edward Pentin, Philip Lawler, Robert Royal, Dr. Robert Moynihan, Joe McClane, [John-Henry Westen](#), Jesse Romero, John Yep, Terry Barber, and Doug Barry. In addition to these lay Catholics, respected clerics such as Bishop Joseph Strickland, Cardinal Raymond Burke, Cardinal Gerhard Muller, Cardinal William Goh Seng Chye, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, Bishop Athanasius Schneider, Fr. Gerald Murray, Fr. Charles Murr, Fr. Chris Alar, and many others have expressed the opinion that Pope Leo is more likely to be a unifier and a "bridge builder," as opposed to "Francis the Merciful," who talked a good game about "listening," "accompaniment," and "inclusivity" while acting like a spiteful autocrat toward those who did not share his leftist ideology.

With Pope Leo XIV, who is an [Augustinian bishop](#) now occupying the Chair of Peter, faithful Catholics are being encouraged to harken to that famous maxim of St. Augustine: "Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you."



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