



"A compromise is often a deal in which two people get what neither of them wanted."

—James Russell Lowell

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John Paul II's Successor

Last week's leading news story dealt with Pope John Paul II's illness, described as a relapse of a viral infection that was making it difficult for him to breathe. He reentered the hospital where he is routinely treated, but his symptoms persisted. Ultimately, doctors performed a tracheotomy on the ailing pontiff, and this seemed to do the trick, as he was soon resting comfortably and eating heartily. He is expected to recover from this bout of illness by [Easter](#).

Nevertheless, his recent ill health—on top of his Parkinson's disease and his 84 years of age—has started observers' tongues wagging (again) about his successor. It is unlikely that any of his closest aides and advisors will become the next Pope, as various factors (for instance, their age) render them improbable candidates. The pope's most important aide is his longtime private secretary, recently elevated Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, 65, but he also closely relies on Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 77, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the [Faith](#); Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, 71, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops; and Cardinal Angelo Sodano, 77, the Vatican secretary of state. However, these men will have great influence on the College of Cardinals when they meet in conclave within

twenty days of the pope's death to elect the next pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church.

The conventional [wisdom](#) runs along the lines of this sentence from a February 24, 2005, Reuters article by Phillip Pullella, "Pope's illness prompts questions about succession": "The Pope has appointed all but three of some 120 cardinals who can enter the conclave, stacking the odds that the new leader will think like him and not tamper with his rulings like bans on contraception and women priests." Those who favor this line of thought consider Ratzinger to be the likely candidate, despite his age, as a kind of transitional figure, allowing some of the younger, conservative cardinals time to age (as many cardinals feel that a 60-year-old papal candidate is too young).

Because 65% of Catholics live in Africa, Asia, and South America, many believe it is time for a non-European Pope. The cardinals could choose an African, Nigeria's Cardinal Francis Arinze, 72, who is known for his expertise on Islam and interreligious affairs. Latin America, which has never produced a pope, could entice electors with "Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez Maradiaga, 62, a telegenic Honduran; Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, 68, of Argentina, who is known for his expertise on social issues; or Cardinal Claudio Hummes, 70, of Sao Paulo, Brazil, the largest diocese in the world's largest Catholic country," opines Julia Duin of the *Washington Times* in her February 3, 2005 article "Pope's illness stirs talk of succession."

Despite this common prognostication, longtime *National Catholic Reporter* Vatican correspondent John Allen, Jr., warns that we will be surprised by whom the College of Cardinals picks (Paula Doyle, "Next pope: 'We are going to be surprised,' says Allen," Tidings Online, March 4, 2005). Historically, he says, Popes who "stack" the College with their own appointees fail in getting a successor in their image: "[For instance,] Pope Pius XII appointed all but two of the 51 cardinals who elected his successor, [yet] the next pope elected was the 'strikingly' different Pope John XXIII." He believes that the cardinals will size up John Paul II's strengths and weaknesses and choose someone who will shore up areas that the present pope neglected. Writes Doyle: "Allen said a majority of cardinals that he has

interviewed identify the top three challenges facing the church as: internal church governance, growing secularization and the relationship between Christianity and Islam."

Allen sees the College splitting into four voting blocs:

1. "Border Patrol"—Cardinals who favor strong boundaries between the secular and religious;
2. "Reform Party"—Cardinals who desire "moving forward with the reforms of Vatican II";
3. "Social Justice"—Cardinals who "seek to promote understanding across cultural and ethnic divisions"; and
4. "Integralists"—Cultural warrior Cardinals who "want to see the church's teaching on such issues as abortion, gay marriage and stem cell research incorporated into civil law."

As each of these blocs consists of about a quarter of the eligible College members, alliances will have to be made, likely between the first and last groups and between the second and third groups. From that point, they will have to compromise to find a candidate that will "satisfy" the necessary two-thirds majority.

There is no telling when the enduring John Paul II will die, as he has already survived an assassination attempt, Parkinson's, and numerous illnesses. However, we could be in for an interesting papal election within the next year or so. We can be thankful that [God](#) is in charge, and the selection will move events forward toward the [return of Jesus Christ](#): "For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" ([Romans 13:1](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Conscience \(Part 2\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The standards one lives by are not installed at birth, but absorbed through culture and education. Conscience, defined as "man's moral intuition which passes judgment on his own moral state," when applied to the Bible becomes "the response of man's moral awareness to divine revelation concerning himself." A conscience can only function according to what it knows, and will automatically adjust in the direction in which it is exercised (conscience follows conduct). It can even become inured to what it once abhorred (Ephesians 4:19). The primary feature of the New Covenant involves a change in heart from stony to pliable (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16), reeducating the conscience to be sensitive and submissive to God and His standards (Isaiah 55:8-9; Ephesians 4:23).

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Sovereignty of God: Part Two](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

That God is sovereign means that He IS God, the absolute governor of all things. This has profound implications for us—it means He chooses goodness or severity, according to His will and purpose.

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