

VATICAN

New cardinals: Africa punished, Fiducia supplicans' takes revenge

ECCLESIA

07_10_2024



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Only a few weeks ago, the Pope had written to the members of the Sacred College asking them to reduce costs and avoid superfluous spending. Yesterday, however, he [announced 21 new cardinals will be created](#) on 8 December, bringing the number of

electors to 141, 21 more than the limit of 120 set by Paul VI in the [Romano Pontifici Eligendo](#).

Scrolling through the list read out yesterday in St. Peter's Square at the end of the Angelus, what stands out, perhaps more than all the other nine consistories, is the purely personal criterion for the choices. This is no other way to explain the cardinalate to an official of the Secretariat of State, the Indian Monsignor George Jacob Koovakad, who for three years has been responsible for papal travel. On the Pope's first flight with him to Budapest in 2021, Francis had praised his habit of always laughing, while a year ago he had complimented his grandmother in a video call for the education she had given her grandson. The papal trip was [probably also the](#) 'occasion' for another cardinal-elect, the Bishop of Bogor Paskalis Bruno Syukur, who in Indonesia had the opportunity to let the Pope know of his enormous enthusiasm for the message of 'human brotherhood' at the heart of the Abu Dhabi Declaration.

The least surprising name on the list is that of Monsignor Rolandas Makrickas, and not because he leads a prestigious archdiocese or for particular pastoral or theological merits: simply, everyone in the Vatican has known for some time that the 52-year-old Lithuanian has been in the good graces of the Pontiff from whom he received in less than three years the post of extraordinary commissioner for Santa Maria Maggiore, then the archiepiscopal title, the role of coadjutor archpriest of the Roman basilica and now also the cardinalate. Similar fate for Father Fabio Baggio, who before becoming a bishop is cardinal-elect despite being 'only' undersecretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Baggio's warhorse is the issue of migrants and he can boast of his trust with the Pope, who entrusted him with the direction of the Laudato si Centre for Higher Education, with which he trains refugees to work in the gardens of the Pontifical Villas of Castel Gandolfo.

Despite the focus on the peripheries, all these appointments are concentrated between Rome and the Vatican: this is also the case of the only non-electoral cardinal, the almost centenarian Monsignor Angelo Acerbi, who served in the diplomatic service of the Holy See as the Apostolic Nuncio to New Zealand, the Netherlands, Colombia, Hungary, and Moldova, but for more than twenty years the Pope's head of office in Santa Marta. This choice could be a tribute to Paul VI because Acerbi is one of the last to have been ordained bishop by Montini.

Another very predictable name is that of Baldassare Reina, who in little more than two years, from rector of the seminary in Agrigento, has climbed the entire *cursus honorum* becoming bishop, auxiliary of Rome, then Vicegerent and now also

cardinal vicar, putting an end to the confusion that had been created after the transfer of Angelo De Donatis, who had fallen out of favour at Santa Marta, to the Apostolic Penitentiary. That by now all the parameters previously applied for consistories have been broken is also made clear by the decision to create Archbishop Roberto Repole of Turin a cardinal, even though his predecessor Cesare Nosiglia was left without a galero for nine years and even though the same treatment was not reserved for the holders of archdioceses such as Milan, Venice, Naples and Genoa.

That the choices are entirely personal, is also evident by the cardinalate of Monsignor Mykola Bychok, Redemptorist bishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics in Melbourne. It is difficult not to interpret this decision, regardless of the value of the 44-year-old prelate, as a slap in the face for Monsignor Svjatoslav Ševčuk, Archbishop of Kiev and head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, who boasts a long-standing relationship with the Pope but who has not been spared reproaches in these years of war for the more ardent papal pronouncements, as well as more conservative positions on doctrine.

Just as evident is the 'punishment' inflicted on the liveliest and most flourishing Church, the African Church, which will have only one cardinal nominated in the consistory in December: Monsignor Ignace Bessi Dogbo, archbishop of Abidjan and the fourth Ivorian in history to enter the Sacred College. A further 'slap in the face' to the African episcopate that has rebelled against rainbow blessings is the choice to award a French bishop in Algeria, Monsignor Jean-Paul Vesco, an expression of the very **small minority of North African (but not African) bishops** who have 'endorsed' Fiducia Supplicans and who in recent days, through the former Cardinal Cristóbal López Romero have also complained about their brethren led by Fridolin Ambongo.

In Europe Pope Francis only makes the archbishop of Belgrade a cardinal, while the US episcopate is once again ignored. In North America, however, the archdiocese of Toronto will again boast a cardinal archbishop, Francis Leo. For the Sacred College that will have to elect his successor, Bergoglio is, however, betting above all on 'his' Latin America, by giving the cardinalate to the progressive bishops of Lima (Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio attended the parish of Caprona with Fr Severino Dianich), Porto Alegre, Guayaquil. While the Archbishop of Santiago de Chile Fernando Chomalí has a less sided orientation and has shown strong resistance against the laws on abortion and euthanasia. The creation of Monsignor Vicente Bokalic Iglic as a cardinal was also in the air after Francis elevated Santiago del Estero to the rank of archdiocese last July and even made him, its titular, primate of Argentina.

Other names are those of Monsignor Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, Archbishop of Tokyo, Monsignor Pablo Virgilio Siongco David, Bishop of Kalookan in the Philippines and Dominique Joseph Mathieu, Conventual Franciscan Archbishop of Tehran Ispahan in Iran.

But the name that is provoking the most discussion is undoubtedly that of the British Dominican Father Timothy Peter Joseph Radcliffe, one of the best known pro-LGBT theologians in the Church and whom the [Daily Compass](#) has already dealt with on the occasion of the Synod opening. His entry into the Sacred College at the age of 79 is an unequivocal message and extinguishes the hope that at the end of this pontificate there might be a turnaround. A 'career' recognition that the Pope instead denies, once again, to his peer Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia who had recently ventured into giving interviews answering questions about his hypothetical cardinalate.

The words of caution for the inauguration of the Synod and the indisputable proof offered during the trip to Belgium (which may have cost the archbishop of Malines-Brussels Luc Terlinden the red beret) had given the illusion of a Pope tired of being instrumentalised by the most extremist wing of Catholic progressivism. Unfortunately, however, the announcement of the new consistory has definitively disproved this scenario. Moreover, a significant datum of the list announced yesterday is that of age: many of the new cardinals are very young. This is not a random characteristic, but one that indicates Francis' desire to give a precise imprint to the Church in the coming generations and not only, as is often written, at the next conclave. Which in any case, it must be said, is not close because the Pontiff at almost 88 years of age enjoys excellent health and has no intention of stepping down.

The following December's consistory will probably be the worst of the ten under Bergoglio, which paradoxically comes at one of the best moments of the pontificate, after the outcome of the Pope's trip to Belgium, with a firm stand against the anti-clerical polemics of politicians and journalists, had once again compacted an increasingly divided Church.