

NOT ONLY TUCHO

Who will be the rainbow cardinals at next papal conclave

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Not only Tucho Fernandez. In the sacred college, shaped by Francis to the tune of nine consistories in eleven years, the current prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith is by no means the only cardinal to have demonstrated a certain sensitivity to

LGBT issues in the Church. The positions on the subject of cardinals considered ultra-progressives such as the Americans Blaise Cupich and Robert McElroy, the German Reinhard Marx, the Luxembourger Jean-Claude Hollerich, and the Austrian Christoph Schönborn are already well known. The lack of knowledge among/of the members of the college, however, leads to an underestimation of the extent of support for the LGBT communities committed to demanding further openings within the Church.

This is especially true among the less prominent names of the future electors of Francis' successor. The countercultural choices made in the consistories by the Argentine pope have mistakenly led one to believe that it was precisely from those privileged peripheries during the current pontificate that a surprise in the name of discontinuity from the open line of the last decade could have come. The publication of 'Fiducia supplicans' and the resistance of the African episcopate and several bishops around the world have given the illusion of confirming this vulgate. More than a few thought that the bungling of the green light to pastoral blessings for same-sex unions could overturn the outcome considered a foregone conclusion of the next conclave, isolating those who wanted to go too far. But among the electors of the sacred college, an expression of the suburbs, not everyone thinks like Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, the man who symbolises the African rebellion against the Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Outside Africa, in fact, a number of 'peripheral' cardinals are sensitive to the rainbow cause.

One of the most active is the Indian Anthony Poola, head of the HASSS (Hyderabad Archdiocese Social Services Society) in his diocese, which boasts **an ad hoc programme for transgender empowerment**. The archdiocese's initiatives in this field are supported by Misereor, the international cooperation organisation of the German Bishops' Conference. In addition to commendable actions such as medical assistance and vocational training for the production of jute sacks, the HASSS also organised inclusive Christmas celebrations and a Women's Day dedicated to the transgender community. Cardinal Poola participated in these events and on these occasions, he vindicated the recent indications of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has opened up to participation in the sacraments of baptism and marriage by transgender and homosexual persons.

On the same continent, but in the Philippines, the current Metropolitan Archbishop of Manila is Cardinal Jose Fuerte Advincula, who on Holy Thursday 2023, in order to heed the Pope's call to "become a more listening and compassionate Church", decided to wash the feet of Ryan Borja Capitulo, chosen precisely as a

representative of the LGBT community. It should be noted, however, that Capitulo explained that he accepted by pledging to share his 'ongoing struggle (...) to live in chastity and sexual purity, living Catholic teaching on homosexuality and accompanying my fellow LGBT people on our faith journey'.

From Asia to the Pacific: Tonga Bishop Soane Patita Paini Mafi is a friend of the Tonga Leitis' Association, the only existing pro-LGBT rights association in the Polynesian kingdom. On 6 December 2016, Mafi was a speaker at the association's national congress and congratulated rainbow activists on their open discussion with religious leaders. On that occasion, speaking about LGBT rights in the Church, the cardinal said: 'We hope to talk about these things more and more in encouraging words with each other. But the fundamental thing is to make them feel accepted. They are appreciated in their dignity. They are people created by God.' In recent years Mafi has continued to attend the association's conferences and in December 2020 he celebrated a Mass in the Basilica of St Anthony of Padua for the local trans community known as 'Leitis', allowing himself to be portrayed alongside activists displaying rainbow symbols. The Bishop of Tonga even participated in a documentary dedicated to their struggles released in 2018 under the title *Leitis in Waiting*.

The familiarity with pro-LGBT groups also characterises some of Brazil's future voters. This is the case of Cardinal Sérgio da Rocha, Metropolitan Archbishop of São Salvador da Bahia, who, in celebrating an ad hoc Mass for victims of transphobia on 21 May 2021, accepted a request from the Center for Advocacy and Defense of the LGBT Rights of the State of Bahia and consented to the singing of the Ave Maria by a drag queen in a performance at the end of the liturgy. Still in Brazil, Cardinal Leonardo Ulrich Steiner, who has already declared himself in favour of the legalisation of homosexual unions, is bishop of Manaus where the church of São Sebastião, which three years ago was the site of a recording of a music video made by a LGBT group, is located.

Far or near, not excluding a possible new consistory before the start of the new session of the Synod in October, the next conclave will have to reckon with this widespread sensitivity on rainbow issues. It is not definite that bringing to the table of the general congregations (if there will be any) *Fiducia supplicans* or in any case an overly heavy handed approach will guarantee consensus in the peripheries for those who would like an agenda in discontinuity with the current pontificate (African bloc aside, within which, however, there is the exception of the South African Stephen Brislin). The two-thirds majority quorum, reinstated by Benedict XVI, will require those cardinals who want to have a bearing to follow the evangelical invitation to be 'prudent

as serpents, and simple as doves' trusting in the fact that, as Ratzinger recalled in his last general audience, 'the boat of the Church is not mine, it is not ours, but it is his, and the Lord does not let it sink'.