

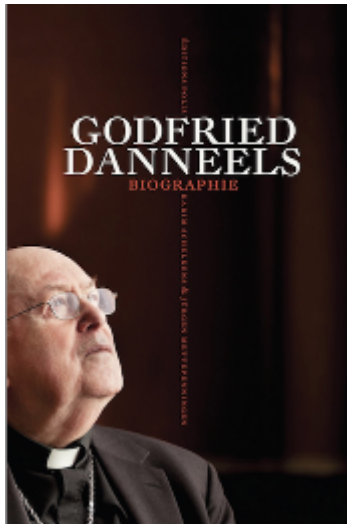


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## The Real Francis Revolution Marches to the Beat of Appointments

In the United States and in Italy the changes are most spectacular. With new "Bergoglio-style" bishops and cardinals. In Belgium, Danneels's revenge against Ratzinger. The triumph of the St. Gallen club

by Sandro Magister



ROME, November 14, 2015 – Much more than reforming the Vatican curia and finances (to which he is applying himself more out of obligation than out of passion, with no comprehensive plan and too often relying on the wrong men and women), it is clear by now that Pope Francis wants to revolutionize the college of bishops. And he is doing so in a systematic way.

The two talks that he gave this autumn to the bishops of the United States and of Italy will certainly be numbered among those that most distinguish his pontificate from those of his predecessors.

If there were in fact two national episcopates, each more than two hundred men strong, that were putting the guidelines of Karol Wojtyła and Joseph Ratzinger into practice, these were precisely the American and the Italian.

Both have had noteworthy leaders: Cardinal Francis George in the United States and Cardinal Camillo Ruini in Italy. But while in the first case a tough team of cardinals and bishops united in vision and action had formed around George, in the second case none did.

And in fact, with Ruini already gone from the stage, it has taken very little for Francis to annihilate the Italian episcopal conference, in order to begin to remake it "ex novo." While the same thing has not happened in the United States, as was seen in the synod last October, where none other than the American delegates were the backbone of the resistance against the innovators, together with the Africans and East Europeans.

### THE TWO TALKS IN WASHINGTON AND FLORENCE

"It is not my intention to offer a plan or to devise a strategy," Pope Jorge Mario Bergoglio told the bishops of the United States gathered in the cathedral of Washington last September 23:

> **"Dear Brother Bishops..."**

Nor did he want to dictate a precise agenda for the Italian bishops listening to him in Florence, where the leadership of the Italian Church had gathered last November 10:

## > Il nuovo umanesimo in Cristo Gesù

But there is no doubt that in both cases Pope Francis has ordered the episcopates to make an about-face.

The address in Washington is in a more elaborate literary style. The one in Florence is more conversational. But both are unequivocal in demanding from the bishops a transformation in language, style, and pastoral action.

Francis said to the bishops of the United States:

"Woe to us, however, if we make of the cross a banner of worldly struggles and fail to realize that the price of lasting victory is allowing ourselves to be wounded and consumed."

"We cannot let ourselves be paralyzed by fear., thinking back on bygone times and devising harsh responses to fierce opposition."

"Harsh and divisive language does not befit the tongue of a pastor, it has no place in his heart; although it may momentarily seem to win the day, only the enduring allure of goodness and love remains truly convincing."

And to the Italian bishops:

"We must not be obsessed with power, even when this takes the shape of a power useful and helpful to the Church's social image."

"May God protect the Italian Church from every expression of power, image, money. Evangelical poverty is creative, welcoming, supportive, and full of hope."

"I like a restless Italian Church, ever closer to the abandoned, the forgotten, the imperfect."

"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures."

These last words are taken directly from "Evangelii Gaudium," the document that Francis himself has called "programmatic" for his pontificate and that he has enjoined the Italian Church to "explore in a synodal manner" over the next few years and at every level: "in every community, in every parish and institution, in every diocese and district, in every region."

Plus a warning to resist the ancient and never extinct heresy of Pelagianism:

"Pelagianism leads us to trust in structures, in organizations, in plans that are perfect because they are abstract. Often it also leads us to assume a style of control, of toughness, of formalism. Form gives the Pelagian the security of feeling superior, of having a precise orientation. It is in this that he finds his strength, not in the lightness of the breath of the Spirit. In the face of the evils or problems of the Church it is useless to seek solutions in conservatism and fundamentalism, in the restoration of outdated conduct and forms that even culturally have no capacity of being significant. Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, inquiries, but is living, able to stir up and animate things. Its face is not rigid, its body can move and develop, its flesh is tender. Christian doctrine is called Jesus Christ."

It goes without saying that, in listening to this reprimand, the thought of the bishops present went not only to the hard-fought synod of last October and to the pontifical document that will sum it all up, but also - in a negative sense - to the Ruini era and what was his "cultural project."

While in Washington, however, the pope did not fail to recall - in a positive sense - the era of progressive leadership exercised among the American bishops during the 1970's and '80's by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin with his famous watchword, repeated by Francis, of the "seamless garment," meaning the commitment without distinction - here too with the words of Francis - to "the innocent victims of abortion, children dying of hunger or under the bombs, immigrants drowning in the search

for a future, the elderly or sick who are neglected, the victims of terrorism, of wars, of violence and drug trafficking, the environment devastated by a predatory relationship of man with nature.”

## THE APPOINTMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Cardinal Bernardin was archbishop of Chicago. As was Cardinal George after him. And now for a year it has been Blase Cupich, the man whom Francis in a surprise move promoted to this crucial see as future leader of an American episcopate aligned with the new course:

### > **Vatican Diary / Behind the scenes of the Chicago appointment** (30.9.2014)

Cupich, in the judgment of many, did not have the stature of his predecessors. Nor was he popular among the other bishops, to judge by the few votes he received in the 2014 elections for the presidency and vice-presidency of the episcopal conference. But his promotion to Chicago was warmly recommended to Francis by two American cardinals of the “liberal” and “moderate” minority, Theodore McCarrick and Donald Wuerl, the former and current archbishop of Washington.

McCarrick is remembered for his efforts in 2004 to bury the letter written by then-cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the American bishops, warning them not to give communion to pro-abortion Catholic politicians, a letter that was then made public by [www.chiesa](http://www.chiesa):

### > **The Kerry Affair: What Ratzinger Wanted from the American Bishops** (3.7.2004)

While memories are still fresh of Wuerl’s pugnacious presence at last October’s synod, called there not because he was elected by his fellow bishops but - like Cupich - through direct appointment by Francis, who also included him on the commission charged with writing the final document. In the strength of this position, Wuerl publicly attacked the thirteen cardinals who signed the letter delivered to the pope at the beginning of the synod, including New York archbishop Timothy Dolan.

### > **Cardinal Wuerl Calls Out Pope’s Opponents**

The four delegates elected for the synod by the bishops of the United States were all from the majority wing, influenced by Wojtyla and Ratzinger. While the first two runners-up were San Francisco archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, also of that wing, and Cupich. But Francis, in selecting the 45 synod fathers of his appointment, discarded the former and fished out the latter. And he added another of the same cloth as Cupich, little-known Youngstown bishop George V. Murry, a Jesuit.

Two other appointments warmly greeted by “liberal” American Catholics as being in keeping with the “style of Francis” have been that of the new archbishop of Santa Fe, John Charles Wester, and even more so that of the new bishop of San Diego, Robert W. McElroy.

And it is likely, after the address in Washington on September 23, that this overhaul of the United States episcopate that Francis has begun will continue with accelerated velocity.

It is curious, however, that when it comes to appointing the heads of dioceses with serious administrative or judiciary problems, the pope’s selection should be more pragmatic. In Kansas City, after the resignation of Bishop Robert Finn over accusations of inaction concerning a case of sexual abuse, the appointment fell to James Johnston, a staunch Wojtylian but with a proven capacity for management. And something similar seems to be in the works for the appointment in Saint Paul and Minneapolis of the successor to Archbishop John Nienstedt, forced to resign amid even weightier accusations.

One important indication of the current state of equilibrium among the bishops of the United States will come over the next few days with the voting for the heads of the commissions of the episcopal conference, in which the newly promoted Wester and McElroy will enter the fray, both challenged by bishops of opposing perspectives:

### > **USCCB elections present clear choices**

## IN ITALY

The first decisive blow that Francis struck against the Ruini-molded Italian episcopal conference was, at the end of 2013, the removal of then-secretary general Mariano Crociata, exiled to the marginal diocese of Latin, and the appointment as new secretary of Nunzio Galantino, the last place finisher on the long list of candidates suggested to the pope by the permanent council of the CEI.

But “the last shall be first.” And in fact, from then on Galantino has moved with absolute and unopposed powers, confident in his proximity to Pope Francis, entirely eclipsing the CEI president still in office, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco.

There has followed a sequence of appointments made or missed that is fleshing out the transformation. Among the recent ones that have concerned dioceses of primary importance must be pointed out the appointment of the parish priest Claudio Cipolla in Padua, that of another parish priest, Corrado Lorefice, in Palermo, and in Bologna that of Matteo Zuppi, former auxiliary bishop of Rome.

On Lorefice and Zuppi and on their real or presumed affiliation with the “school of Bologna,” the historiographical movement that imposed throughout the world an interpretation of Vatican Council II in terms of “rupture” and new beginning” in the history of the Church, see this post on Settimo Cielo:

### **> A Bologna e Palermo due nuovi arcivescovi. Della stessa "scuola"?**

But it can be added that Bergoglio has known Zuppi personally for years. As a prominent member of the Community of Sant'Egidio, Zuppi had gone to Buenos Aires a number of times to bring aid. And he never missed a visit to the then-archbishop of the Argentine capital.

As for the appointments omitted, these concern the college of cardinals above all, where the pope has rewarded, instead of the traditional sees of Turin or Venice, the less prestigious ones of Perugia, Agrigento, and Ancona.

In Ancona, the newly promoted Edoardo Menichelli is very close to Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, having been his personal secretary. And Silvestrini was part of the club of progressive cardinals that met periodically in St. Gallen, Switzerland to discuss the future of the Church, and that in the two conclaves of this century first opposed the election of Ratzinger and then supported the election of Bergoglio. A club that has featured the cardinals Walter Kasper, Karl Lehmann, Carlo Maria Martini, Basil Hume, Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, and Godfried Danneels.

### **AND IN THE REST OF THE WORLD**

The ultra-progressive Danneels, 82, archbishop emeritus of Mechelen-Brussels, is among the favorites of Pope Francis, who in both 2014 and 2015 put him at the top of the list of the synod fathers personally appointed by him, while leaving at home the current archbishop of the Belgian capital, the conservative André Léonard.

Bergoglio was not even bothered by the discredit that has fallen upon Danneels for how he tried in 2010 to cover up the sexual abuse committed by former Bruges bishop Roger Vangheluwe against his young nephew:

### **> Belgium cardinal tried to keep abuse victim quiet**

But there's more. Last November 6, Pope Francis appointed as new archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels Jozef De Kesel, a former auxiliary of Danneels and his protégé.

Danneels wanted De Kesel as his successor back in 2010. But Benedict XVI blocked him and appointed Léonard, whom he had chosen personally. With the result that the nuncio in Belgium at the time, the German Karl-Joseph Rauber, left his post and denounced the failure to promote his and Danneels's candidate in an interview with “Il Regno” that was a frontal attack on Ratzinger:

### **> "De bello germanico". Ex nunzio tedesco vuota il sacco contro Benedetto XVI**

But not even this behavior so little in keeping with the role of a nuncio bothered Bergoglio, who not only has not made Léonard a cardinal but last February rewarded with the scarlet none other than

Rauber, for “distinguishing himself in the service of the Holy See and the Church.”

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Other details on Danneels and the anti-Ratzinger and pro-Bergoglio club of St. Gallen, which he himself has called “a mafia”:

### **> Cardinal Danneels Admits to Being Part of 'Mafia' Club Opposed to Benedict XVI**

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English translation by **Matthew Sherry**, Ballwin, Missouri, U.S.A.

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For more news and commentary, see the blog that Sandro Magister maintains, available only in Italian:

### **> SETTIMO CIELO**

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