

As an American, Pope Leo's Election Augurs Well for the World

By Conrad Black

There is some significance in the fact that the new leader of one of the world's largest religious denominations, and the head of the state and government of the world's most powerful and influential country, are both Americans. This certainly does not mean the impending Americanization of the Roman Catholic Church, any more than it implies the Catholicization of America. But it does demonstrate that so intelligent and international an electorate as the [133 voting members](#) of the College of Cardinals is not intimidated by the controversy surrounding America, or the antagonism to the United States of the international left, including significant elements of the Catholic Church easily recognizable in contemporary American society.

It should also be taken as significant, and in fact, symmetrical, that both one of the world's [largest religious denominations](#) and the world's most important country are led by Americans. This is widely interpreted by qualified observers of the Holy See as indicative of a need for better administrative efficiency to manage the Roman Catholic Church's finances and eliminate its central deficit. But it can also be read as a decision by the church's ruling body to move away from the left—a stance that has affronted the traditionalist majority of Roman Catholics—and signify this with the elevation of the first English-speaking pope [in 866 years](#) (since Adrian IV) and show greater solidarity with a resurgent United States under a president focused on traditionalist goals.

This is a subtle change, as Robert Francis Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV, spent much of his clerical career combating leftist influences in pastoral work in [South America](#), especially Peru. It has been widely assumed that he emphasized his own international orientation and the universal mission of the

church by giving his inaugural remarks to the immense crowd in Saint Peter's Square in Latin, Italian, and Spanish, [without a word of English](#). Pope Leo also speaks French fluently and his surname, Prevost, implies a partially French background.



Pope Leo XIV appears at the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to give his first Sunday blessing after his election, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on May 11, 2025. AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the impressions generated by the successful end of a papal conclave, but the immediate filling up of Saint Peter's Square and the approaching boulevard with very enthusiastic crowds—conspicuously including large numbers of young people—and the waving of many flags of the prominent nationalities of the world, confirms the widely recognized recent development of increased religious practice amongst Roman Catholics in the United States and a number of other disparate countries, including Spain and South Korea.

This is not a surprising fact in itself, but a confirmation of widespread disillusionment with the egregious failure of secular government in most of the world's important countries, and the great majority of its less important ones. The initial

victory of Donald Trump in 2016 against all odds, and his astonishing comeback last year against a solid wall of media and financial opposition—as well as a desperate, unprecedented, and dangerously unconstitutional assault from a politicized perversion of the prosecution system—indicate that the world's most important country has opted for a reversion to the traditional goals and values that made it the greatest nation in history, and is already reinforcing its status in that regard.

It would be presumptuous and premature to identify particular characteristics to the nationality of the new pope too precisely, but it is the first time since the era of the Christian Roman emperor, [Constantine \(306–337\)](#), that the same nationality (or an ancient equivalent thereof) was shared by the pope and the leading secular office-holder in the world of the time. It may be possible that a shared trend is to be found in the world's most powerful nation—the principal bulwark of democratic government and Judeo-Christian civilization—peacefully rejecting its own elites, in part because of these elites' perceived appeasement of the enemies of traditional American values, given that one of the largest of all religious denominations seems to have executed a partial course correction in a parallel direction. The Catholic Church may be moving away from what many of its adherents regarded as an [unseemly dalliance](#) with the traditional secular and even ecclesiastical enemies of Christianity, as both a philosophy and a historical phenomenon.

Whatever its practical implications, and however it may be obscured or diluted by the ever-flowing deluge of haughty disdain and snide envy constantly directed against the United States—including that vocal minority of Americans who believe their country deserves a good thrashing and humiliation for its multi-sided moral turpitude—the election of an American pope nearly 2,000 years after the [initiation](#) of that office, and exactly 250 years after the initial stirrings of the United States, is a great honor to America. President Trump immediately [recognized this](#), and in some respects, it is a legitimization of Americanism and an undoubted fillip to the prestige of that country.

Taking a wider perspective—and assuming that the views of the new pope are not radically different from what is generally believed by those who know him and have commented on him, including members of his own family—the Roman Catholic Church, with 1.4 billion ostensible members and approximately a billion of more or less practicing coreligionists, may be taking some distance from the previous pope's dalliance with the secular left at the same time that the United States re-elected a president who is applying unconventional means to the pursuit of traditional patriotic American goals. If this is what is happening, it may indicate an epochal sea change in the correlation of political and ideological forces in the world. The left, and particularly the atheistic and extreme left, has failed everywhere and is rejected almost everywhere.

Pope John Paul II and President Reagan, though they scarcely knew each other, collaborated usefully against international communism, especially in Poland and Nicaragua. Nothing should be assumed, but it is conceivable that President Trump and Pope Leo XIV, sharing the same national upbringing, could also find a good deal of common ground. I am probably the only commentator in the world who thinks that we might have seen a harbinger of this change in the absurd and snide criticism directed against Melania Trump when she accompanied her husband to the late pope's funeral [wearing a veil](#) and a cross around her neck. She was in fact the most piously dressed of any of her analogues, including the Queens of Spain and Belgium, [both Roman Catholics](#).

If this is a new era, as one dares to hope, it will be an improvement on the last one.

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