

Pope Francis' Unholy Alliances II

By Eric Rozenman

"The not-so-quiet talk on the next pope; Candidates are emerging even as Francis recovers from health crises," the March 15 *Washington Post* advised readers. "Vatican officials warn that it's disrespectful to discuss the conclave that will elect Francis's successor while the 88-year-old pontiff is still in his Rome hospital suite recovering ..." the newspaper noted.

Nevertheless, *The Post* [speculated about a number of cardinals](#)—liberals, conservatives, "peace-makers" and financial managers—who might someday succeed Pope Francis. What the paper failed to note was that as former Central Intelligence Agency director and defense secretary [Robert Gates said of Joseph Biden](#), this pontiff has been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and ideological question for decades.

Francis seemed consistently unable to render "unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." For example:

*Five days before leaving office, the Biden administration announced removal of Cuba from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. Both sides said the Catholic Church helped arrange the deal, which involved release of Cuban political prisoners, and that President Biden had spoken with Pope Francis beforehand. (Back in the Oval Office, President [Trump restored Cuba](#) to the terrorism list.)

*Also in January, Biden awarded Pope Francis the Medal of Freedom "with distinction." *Wall Street Journal* columnist William McGurn dissented: "Biden will leave behind a weakened

American presence on the world stage at a time of heightened global conflict. In Rome, meanwhile, Pope Francis has [diminished the papacy's moral witness](#) in similar ways and for similar reasons."

McGurn noted that "a new book by the pope calls for an international investigation into whether Israeli actions in Gaza meet the definition of genocide. ... The Vatican's job isn't to bless wars. But under Pope Francis it appears to have abandoned just-war principles" long taught by the church and by which free Western societies defend themselves.

Playing politics in the U.S.

Author Melanie Phillips said the pope's attack on an Israel fighting for its life was influenced by "[Palestinian Christian liberation theology](#)" that designates Palestinian Arabs as Jesus oppressed by the Jews. This inversion hijacks both history and morality.

*On the fourth anniversary of the Jan. 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol riot the pope appeared to mix politics with pastoral appointments in naming San Diego's Cardinal Robert McElroy as new archbishop of Washington, D.C. During Trump's first term as president, McElroy criticized administration policy of separating children from illegal immigrant parents. At the news conference announcing his selection as archbishop, McElroy said Trump's "wider, indiscriminate massive deportation" of illegals would [contradict Catholic teachings](#).

*Pope Francis hoped to unite China's "underground" Catholic house churches, which are loyal to Rome, with the Beijing-dominated official branch. He wanted to win full diplomatic recognition for the Vatican from Communist China, which is busy and at times brutally "Sinicizing" all religion.

In 2023 the pontiff acquiesced to China's appointment of a [new bishop in Shanghai](#). The move ignored church prerogatives and seemingly violated a 2018 Vatican-China agreement.

Similarly, the pope had little or nothing to say about China's best-known dissident, the imprisoned Catholic Jimmy Lai, and delayed for years acknowledging President Xi Jinping's slow [genocide of the Uyghurs](#).

*Three months after Russia invaded Ukraine the pope said the "[barking of NATO](#) at the door of Russia" may have led to the invasion. He deplored the war's brutality but said he did not know if other countries should supply more weapons to Kiev. Meanwhile, the head of the embattled country's Greek Catholic Church accused Russia of [killing scores of Ukrainian religious leaders](#) and damaging or destroying hundreds of churches.

Liberation theology: Benedict versus Francis

*When Peruvian Rev. Gustavo Gutierrez, known as the father of "liberation theology," died last year, obituary writers noted that Pope Benedict XVI termed liberation theology a "fundamental threat to the faith of the church." But Pope Francis, under whose tenure Gutierrez's reputation improved, once described liberation theology as "[a positive thing](#)" in Latin America.

*Complaining of a "[very strong reactionary attitude](#)" among some U.S. Catholics, the pope in 2023 removed Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas. Strickland had warned that a pending Vatican synod could cast doubt on "basic truths," including sinfulness of sex outside of marriage and "undeniable biological and God-given" gender identity.

*In 2018 U.S. bishops considered calling for a Vatican investigation into how Washington, D.C.'s Theodore McCarrick, who resigned as cardinal, climbed the church hierarchy despite years of rumors about his alleged sexual predation among seminarians. Francis reportedly was [warned about McCarrick](#) soon after becoming pope, but came to rely upon him nevertheless. Last year, Catholic World Report [castigated the pope](#) for talking a good game about abusive homosexual priests

but failing to achieve real reform.

The Catholic Church is global institution. The beliefs and actions of its leader matter to non-Catholics as well as Catholics. Let us all pray the church's next leader is more like Pope (now Saint) John Paul II than Francis.

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