

## Rome Diary 51 / 16 December 2003

First, I want to wish you all a Merry Christmas. If you read no further than this, at least you know that I remembered you at a time when it is important to remember – and be remembered.

I started my Rome Diaries in September 1999, when I first arrived in Rome for *Newsweek*, mainly to alleviate my loneliness there. So many of you began responding that, soon, I was not lonely any more. In a little more than four years, cyberspace has become a warm, exciting place.

Right now I am living in San Francisco. Does that mean no more Rome Diaries? No. Let me explain.

In September, I took on a special research-and-writing assignment in San Francisco. But I am still under contract with *Newsweek* and CBS to cover the last days of John Paul II's papacy and the conclave that will surely come soon – though no one can really say how soon. So I have a peculiar status, not unlike some men and women who work for international corporations. You all have friends who, I am sure, have two addresses, in London and Hong Kong, or Amsterdam and Jakarta, or Washington and Singapore. Now you can count me among them. I am living in San Francisco, but I go to Rome when I have to.

I had to do that for ten days in late October during the celebration of the pope's 25th anniversary. That was quickly followed by the beatification of Mother Teresa, and the altogether unexpected creation of 30 new cardinals – not because I or my editors saw much news value in these events themselves (*Newsweek* is not a Catholic magazine) but because this was a kind of pre-conclave conclave – for the cardinals, and for the press.

Most of the world's cardinals were there – in fact, it was the largest collection of cardinals that had ever come together in the history of the Church. They were the very men who would elect the next pope – to look one another over, and to gossip about the so-called pope-ables among them.

And that's why hundreds of media people were there, too, not only to do retrospectives on the lights and shadows of John Paul's 25-year-papacy (many saw more lights, less shadows than I did), but also to look for clues that could help them assess the mood of the next conclave. Many were frankly hoping to find evidence that the College of Cardinals might elect someone who could help turn the Church in a new direction.

In this hope, of course, they are biased. Reporters would rather write about trailblazers than caretakers. But, at this particular point in history, they're not ruled by that bias alone. The most analytic among them see a Church in deep trouble, and they're wondering how many of the cardinal-electors realize the

urgency of the crisis. Or, realizing it, whether they can find a pope who will do some creative things to meet that crisis.

These reporters are not only looking at the priest-sex-abuse scandal. They also see a much more radical need: for the official Church to get beyond what A.W. Richard Sipe calls "a pre-Copernican stage of understanding regarding human sexuality" based as it is "on a patently false anthropology that renders magisterial pronouncements noncredible."

The current pope and his most loyal yea-sayers do not see that need. And that, of course, is the problem. To begin with, as Sipe argues in a new book called *Celibacy in Crisis*, they are caught up in ten different kinds of denial about the priest-sex-abuse phenomenon that has been dominating Church news for almost two years now: 1) There is no problem; it can't be true. 2) It may exist, but it is rare. 3) The media distorts everything. 4) The problem is no worse in the Church than it is elsewhere. 5) Victims wanted it; they liked it. 6) Abusers are sick. 7) The consequences are not dire and the victims were sick, too. 8) Father is only human. 9) We must forgive and forget. 10) We are not responsible; we just have a few bad apples.

Whether anyone can make a case for any or all of these statements is beside the point. They are just excuses for not doing anything about an even deeper problem that affects us all: Catholic taboos about sex.

The official Church, says Sipe, cannot recognize and celebrate healthy sexuality or, in the case of seminarians and priests, cannot even talk about it as a good that can be "joyfully and voluntarily renounced." Sipe is a former Benedictine monk and a psychiatrist who has written as much about sex and the priesthood as any man alive. He has seen a good many troubled priests. And he knows why they are troubled.

They suffer from something that the Redemptorist Bernard Haring, one of the 20th century's most admired moral theologians, called an "ecclesiogenic pathology." Which means that the system itself is making some priests ill – not to mention those of us who keep listening to spokesmen for that system.

What spokesmen? Well, for instance, Pope John Paul II. The world has admired him for speaking out against institutional evils outside the Church. In a talk on November 17 to the bishops of Madras-Mylapore, Madurai and Pondicherry-Cuddalore, for example, he inveighed against the caste system in India. But he pays no attention to the caste system in his own Church, the self-protecting club of celibate males. And he, too, is caught up in denial about what the Church has done to its priests (not to mention many of us) with its pre-Copernican teaching on sexual morality.

The pope could launch a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of the Church's pathogenic system. Not only has he failed to do that; he has intimidated others who'd like to do so.

At the Synod on the Family in 1980, he blew up when San Francisco's Archbishop John Quinn suggested that the Church revisit its teaching on birth control – and forced him to make a public retraction. Through the years, he has had numerous theologians disciplined for their attempts to do some new moral reasoning on a host of sexual issues. And in late September of this year he clobbered the newly nominated Cardinal Keith Michael Patrick O'Brien, the archbishop of Edinburgh and St. Andrews in Scotland, for telling the press he welcomed a Church debate on contraception and promising that he would continue to speak out on other sexual issues that hadn't gotten enough of a public airing in the Church, including homosexuality and priestly celibacy.

After a furious phone call from the nuncio in London, one that implied the nuncio was speaking for the pope, O'Brien made a solemn (and craven) profession of faith at a special public ceremony in his Edinburgh cathedral. In addition to the standard profession, he added this statement:

I accept and intend to defend the law on ecclesiastical celibacy as it is proposed by the magisterium of the Catholic Church; I accept and promise to defend the ecclesiastical teaching about the immorality of the homosexual act; I accept and promise to promulgate always and everywhere what the Church's magisterium teaches on contraception. So help me God and these Holy Scriptures which I touch with my hand.

When I approached O'Brien at a reception on October 21, the day he received his Red Hat, he recoiled, looking like a deer caught in the headlights. Press people had gotten him into trouble. And I was a press person. *Atqui ergo*. Same afternoon, John Allen of the *National Catholic Reporter* couldn't get near O'Brien until he assured O'Brien's aide that he only wanted to offer his congratulations. He said he would ask Keith no questions.

I didn't have the heart to ask him any questions either. "I just wanted to give you my best wishes," I said.

Still looking shell-shocked, he mumbled, "Thank you." And I was on my way, quite disturbed to see how even an archbishop can be marginalized and infantilized by the man who is often referred to inside the Roman Curia as "the Supreme Authority."

You guess the pope is too weak now to keep using that authority? If he is, his minions in the Holy Office are strong enough, and feisty enough to go after anyone attempting to challenge the rule on mandatory celibacy. I think it is only a

matter of time before Archbishop Harry Flynn of Minneapolis-St. Paul gets a note from Cardinal Ratzinger's office demanding to know what Flynn has done about his 113 priests who signed and sent a letter to the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on December 11. They challenged the law that mandates no marriage for priests in the Western Church. That was one-fourth of the priests in the archdiocese. And they were joining in with priests in six other American cities who have written similar letters in the past two months.

Those rumblings must tell many U.S. bishops that they must soon reevaluate mandatory celibacy, but they know how furious the pope can get if anyone even dares bring it up. So the pope's fury rules and they pull back from what they know they have to do. In 2002, two famous Chicago priests, Andrew Greeley and Eugene Kennedy, proposed doing some thorough sociological and psychological studies on the priesthood in America. The bishops turned them down. Says Sipe: "The bishops don't want to know." Know what? That the sex-abuse scandal has "deep historical and institutional roots." (A curious kind of bishop, who doesn't want to know. If he were my banker and he didn't want to know why his tellers were looting my bank account, he'd soon be in jail.)

And so, what do the bishops do? A curious thing. At their annual fall meeting, led by Charles Chaput, the archbishop of Denver, they voted to commission a pamphlet for general distribution all over America re-affirming the Church's so-called teaching on the immorality of contraception. It was a move that made no sense at all in light of the major problems facing the U.S. Church today.

Birth control is not an issue for most American Catholics. At one time, before Vatican II and before the deliberations of the papal birth control commission were leaked to the world, we did take Church teaching on this question rather seriously. But after a huge public debate in the 1960s about birth control, good Catholics realized that Church teaching on this issue was skewed. It created untold hardship on families, particularly on good Catholic moms and dads who feared making love because they couldn't chance having another mouth to feed. It made them a little crazy – another example of Sipe's "ecclesiogenic pathology." When Paul VI turned aside his own commission's recommendations to change the Church's teaching (which had been leaked to the press by the late Gary MacEoin) and signed the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, it was almost universally rejected, and not only by lay folks.

A third of the world's bishops issued their own highly nuanced statements that added up to one thing: their people should continue to make love, even if they had to take some measures to prevent having another baby. Some went even further, saying, with the commission members, that couples who had good reasons not to make a baby had a duty to use the most efficacious means to prevent that from happening. And not stop making love to each other.

Now, moral theologians everywhere say Church's teaching on the immorality of contraception is not a teaching at all, because it hasn't been "received." Father James Coriden, a former president of the Canon Law Society of America, has written a neat paper that explains the ancient doctrine of reception. (You can get it [online](#) on the website of the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church.)

So why are the U.S. bishops bringing up birth control now? Am I paranoid – to think that Chaput and company were only trying to impress the pope with their orthodoxy? Who else will care? Or even read what the U.S. bishops have to say about a subject they know absolutely nothing about?

This move did nothing to shore up the bishops' dwindling moral authority. They have come down hard against a practical conscience-decision – it is not a faith issue at all; I put it in the category of sexual politics – that has already been made by 85 percent of the Catholic couples in the land. By doing that, they lose whatever little credibility they have left on a host of other moral issues, This move compels many to say, "If the bishops can be so wrong about birth control, what makes anyone think they can be right on any other moral issue?"

Right now, California's Catholic bishops have a case before the state supreme court, asking that their employees be exempt from a state law that says health insurance plans must authorize prescription contraceptives as part of their coverage. The bishops are maintaining this rule puts people who work for the Church in a conflict situation, because artificial forms of birth control are banned by the Church.

Whose Church? The bishops' Church? Or the peoples' Church? Their people – who decided long ago to exile the pope from their bedrooms – simply ignore their silly bans. Can the bishops be so stupid – not to know that? I think they do know. I suspect they simply want to be able to tell Rome they are following the pope's orders. If so, they are forgetting their role as bishops – not to serve the pope, but to serve the people.

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So what will happen at the conclave? Will the cardinal-electors pick another John Paul II, or someone who will surprise the world with a radical new vision? You may well wonder why we even ask such a question. After all, of the 135 cardinal-electors who would be eligible to vote if the conclave were held today, all but five of them have been appointed by John Paul II. They should elect a Wojtyla clone, right?

Right. But not necessarily. Richard McBrien maintains in his *Lives of the Popes* that every conclave in the last 200 years or so has elected a pope who is quite different from his predecessor. Pius IX, a conservative, was followed by Leo XIII,

a liberal, who was followed by Pius X, a conservative, who was followed by Benedict XV, a liberal, who was followed by Pius XI, a conservative, who was followed by Pius XII, a complicated man who was both a liberal and a conservative, who was followed by John XXIII, a liberal, who was followed by Paul VI, another liberal (which makes Paul VI an exception to the rule), who was followed by John Paul II, a conservative.

McBrien's theory is born of simple observation, but it is predicated on a Biblical image, that the cardinals represent a pilgrim Church, one that is picking its zigzag way through history, trying, like the members of any human institution, to figure out what works.

I would like to think that that pilgrim-Church metaphor will soon be in play, more than ever before in history. In 1978, the conclave elected a man who turned out to be a perfect bookend at the end of the millennium for a man who set the Church's march toward monarchy at the beginning of the millennium: Pope Gregory VII (1073 - 1085). This conclave, I would hope, could prove McBrien's theory by looking for a candidate who spurns that monarchic model – not by electing a so-called liberal pope who would, single handedly, "solve" the Church's 21st-century dilemma, but by choosing a candidate who will let local bishops be bishops.

In fact, one of the new cardinals, Stephen Fumio Hamao, an official of the Roman Curia, has already suggested the Church needs just that kind of pope. Hamao was reported on December 12 to have told an Italian magazine that the Vatican should have "more respect for, and listen to, the local churches", and not behave as if its role is simply "to instruct, to teach, and to correct."

Hamao, who comes from Japan, said he would favor convening a new council, in which Church leaders could discuss "the necessity of greater autonomy for the local churches."

I know Hamao. He is a friend of mine. I can assure you, he has no ambition to be the successor. But, by launching his fearless suggestion, he challenged the new cardinals (74 of them appointed in the last two years) to start thinking about a pope who will not be such a power-freak.

But will they do that? Fully 25 percent of the new cardinals come from the Roman Curia; they've moved up in rank by minding their p's and q's, hunkered down in bureaucratic nonsense. Most of the others are the archbishops of large cities that traditionally "get a Red Hat." Men like Justin Rigali, who moved up the clerical ladder "without blotting his copy book," as they say, a metaphor that compares these rising ecclesiastics to school boys, which, in a sense they are (and always will be, as long as they pay absolute homage to their absolute ruler).

Rigali, who is 68, is a Californian from Los Angeles whom I have known since he was 14. He was a pompous young man then, and he comes off as a pompous old man today. He worked in the Roman Curia for more than 30 years, got an expected assignment to a U.S. city he knew nothing about (St. Louis) then parlayed that into a call to Philadelphia, a cardinalatial see, just in time to join the pope's last batch of cardinals.

Boston, also a cardinalatial see with a new archbishop, the Capuchin Franciscan Sean O'Malley, didn't get a call. Go figure. Most of the other new residential cardinals have taken the same analogous routes: small diocese to larger diocese to a cardinalatial see. Four years ago, Cardinal Gantin of Africa, then the dean of the College of Cardinals, inveighed against this kind of careerism (he said a bishop should stay put and serve his people, period) and many applauded his words.

Even the pope has given lip service to the notion as recently as his homily to the cardinals on Oct. 22 (purportedly written by himself in long hand, in Polish) when he gave them a pointed message about the need for cardinals to avoid careerism and personal gain.

But the pope, like many an ancient emperor, says one thing and does the opposite. He keeps moving bishops from one smaller city to another, larger city, rewarding them if they have said and done nothing to rattle Rome, or, even better, if they have found a public way to flatter the pope. Avery Dulles, the American Jesuit theologian, didn't hurt his chances for a Red Hat (he was the first U.S. Jesuit to get one) when he delivered a speech at Georgetown University in November 2002 that played up to the pope.

According to a story in the *Washington Times*,

Cardinal Dulles said the greatest post-Vatican II misunderstanding is that the church gave up its claim to be the only way to salvation and that popes are not the final authority. "The primacy of the pope, as it had been defined by Vatican I [in 1870], remains intact," he said. Non-Catholic groups are respected as churches with ministries, "but there is no reason to reckon them as constituent parts of the one true church, which is Roman and Catholic," he said. Dulles also said, that the more conservative interpreters have won on the Vatican II legacy. "To some extent this [liberalizing] rhetoric still exists, but it seems to be dying down," said the Jesuit scholar who, as son of a former secretary of state, converted to Catholicism while a Harvard student.

Inevitably, these are the kind of men who wound up as cardinals in the reign of John Paul II. They are cardinals today because they found favor with the sovereign – in often arcane ways. This fall, the pope named Gustaaf Joos, 81, of

Belgium (one of four honorary choices, honorary because they were all too old to vote in the next conclave). When I asked a well-placed Belgian priest for a rundown on Joos, he wrote back:

I never heard his name. He is a priest of the diocese of Ghent, a canon lawyer and has been president of the diocesan tribunal. Very few priests know even his name. A surprising appointment.

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So many of the rookie-reporters who were in Rome in October asked me which, if any, of the pope-ables were likely to change the Church's official position on birth control, or the ordination of married men, or the ordination of women. I told them they were asking the wrong questions. Their queries implied an old fashioned, top-down kind of authoritarian Church in a new kind of bottom-up world. I told them we should be asking a more general question about a candidate's basic orientation – like, does he see himself as a dictator or a democrat? A dictator will preside over one kind of Church; a democrat over another. A dictator will try to provide the people of God with what he thinks they need. A democrat will ask the people of God what they think they need. A dictator will demand uniformity, a one-size-fits-all kind of clerical Church. A democrat will listen to his bishops, and put his blessing on their diverse, local solutions to their most pressing problems.

On the afternoon of Oct. 21, hours after they'd received their Red Hats, the new cardinals took up places around the Vatican Palace to stand at the head of receiving lines, and accept the best wishes of their friends and family. I took the opportunity to propose my democrat-dictator question. "Do you favor a clerical Church or a people's Church?"

I managed to buttonhole eight of the 30 new cardinals. (I had to skip the men who had long lines of people waiting to see them.) George Pell, Josip Bozanic, and Peter Erdo told me, "We belong to a hierarchical Church." Stephen Hamao, Rodolfo Quezada Turuno, Telesphore Toppo, and Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson said, "We are a people's Church." Jean-Baptiste Pham Min Man said, "I'd like to have a peoples' Church in Viet Nam. But you will have to show me how to get it."

Interesting, that the negative responses – no people's Church – came from Europe and Australia. And that the positive responses – yes to a people's Church – came from cardinals representing the Third World. In Europe (and Australia), people are deserting the Church. My guess is that those people have decided: "If you want a clerical Church, fine. If there's no room in it for me, goodbye."

In the Third World, and in parts of Asia, a peoples' Church makes sense, and it is precisely there that the Church is growing: in Guatemala, in India, in Viet Nam, in

Ghana. I was most impressed with Peter Turkson of Ghana. Young, handsome, articulate, intelligent. He didn't patronize me, and seemed to enjoy sparring with me. I later learned that he had studied in the U.S. and that he got his graduate degree in scripture from the Jesuits at the Biblical Institute in Rome. At 55, he is too young to get votes in this conclave. In ten years, however, he will be pope-able.

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Of all the new cardinals, I thought George Pell, the cardinal-archbishop of Sydney, the most interesting, on several counts. In Australia, he's very visible, very controversial, truculently outspoken in the John Paul-mode. He was probably typical of those new cardinals who had been setting themselves up for this culminating honor. Like Rigali (and many other of the world's bishops), he studied in Rome (at the Propaganda Fidei College) and was ordained there in 1966. Twenty-one years later, after a number of parish assignments and a variety of academic posts (with time out to get a doctorate in Church history at Oxford), he was ordained an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne. In 1996, he became Melbourne's ordinary. That was only a stepping-stone. On March 26th, 2001, he moved over to Sydney, Australia's major city, which put him in line for the Red Hat he received on October 21, 2003.

On the night of October 22, Pell was kind enough to give me fifteen minutes (which turned into a half hour) at the tail end of a reception for his family and friends at the Palazzo della Rovere at 3 Via Cavalleri near the Vatican. I waited a few minutes for the cardinal's press secretary, Marita Franklin, to set things up and tried to size up the crowd. I saw more than a few members of Opus Dei. I saw Tom Williams, dean of theology at Regina Apostolorum, the huge new Roman seminary for the Legionnaires of Christ, reputedly the fastest growing (and most conservative) order in the Church. I saw George Weigel, the pope's semi-official biographer, who looked at me and glared and said nothing. Last year, I challenged Weigel to a debate and a group of Catholics in Australia offered to sponsor it, but Weigel declined. He wondered what there was to debate about. The Church of John Paul II is what it is, he said, and that's all there is to that.

And I watched Cardinal Pell across the room, cloaked in his made-to-order ensemble of scarlet cassock and mozzetta (an elbow-length cape) and a sash of watered silk. (Cost: \$650 at Rome's Euroclero shop, located just off St. Peter's Square, but twice that at the legendary Gammarelli, ecclesiastical tailors par excellence and papal outfitters.) He was laughing, joking with the last of his well wishers. At least six foot three, he towered over most of them, and outweighed them as well. Of all the new cardinals, Pell struck me as the very model of a John Paul II cardinal-archbishop. Like the younger Karol Wojtyla, he is a macho kind of guy, and an athlete. He played soccer for the Richmond Football Club in 1959, and he coached soccer and rowing and Australian Rules football.

Like Wojtyla, he was also a good politician. He has served on a long list of civic boards and commissions, helped build the new city campus of the University of Melbourne, and became president of its board of owners in 1996. And he became a player in ecclesiastic politics as well when, in 1990, he was appointed to Cardinal Ratzinger's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. That was the same year he was nominated by the pope to attend the Synod of Bishops in Rome on the preparation of priests, where he helped write the final Synod Message. He attended three more episcopal synods: in 1998 (at the Synod for Oceania), in 1999, at the European Synod (as a special appointee of the pope) and in 2001, for the International Synod of Bishops, after which he helped prepare the final post-synodal document for the pope. In April 2002, the pope named him president of the Vox Clara Committee to advise the Congregation for Divine Worship on English translations of liturgical texts. Vatican conservatives formed that committee to oversee and control the rather-more-independent International Commission on English Language in the liturgy (more well known as simply ICEL).

Cardinal Pell has published several books. Two most recent: *Rerum Novarum – One Hundred Years Later* (1992) and *Catholicism and the Architecture of Freedom* (1999). He has an easy way with the press, has written widely in religious and secular magazines, learned journals and newspapers in Australia and overseas and appears regularly on television and radio. He is a well-known public speaker, has lectured in the U.S., England, Ireland, New Zealand, Croatia, and every State of Australia (except Western Australia). Since 2001, he has been a weekly columnist for Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph*.

I asked him if we could talk about Vatican II. I said, "I know you have had some very negative things to say about the Council, but – "

He interrupted me and swore he had "never said anything negative about Vatican II."

I smiled. "I can't give you your exact words right now. It's been a long, long day. I am tired and so are you. But I will dig them up and send them to you. Perhaps we can continue this discussion on email?"

Somewhere in my computer, I had a May 30 article from the *Sydney Herald*. There, Pell was reported to have slammed Vatican II for its "excessive optimism" and "over-confidence." The Council, he said, had directly contributed to declining church attendance, the collapse of priestly vocations and the "spread of doctrinal and moral confusion." In this article, Pell was quoted as calling on Catholics to reject "the mischievous doctrine of the primacy of conscience," which he said was being used to justify many un-Catholic teachings, from denying the divinity of Christ to legitimizing abortion and euthanasia.

Faced with his denial, indeed, his affirmation that he was a firm supporter of Vatican II, I asked him, "Which Vatican II do you support? Do you support the Vatican II that tried to give the Church back to the people?"

Pell surprised me, not by arguing with me, but by asking me how I could back up that interpretation – and he seemed genuinely interested.

I told him I was just reporting on the conciliar documents, starting with Chapter Two of the schema *de Ecclesia*, which redefined the Church as 'the people of God.' But the same notion shoots through many other Council documents. *The Constitution on the Liturgy*, which pushed for Mass in the language of the people, not Latin, the language of the elite. *Dei Verbum*, the document on the scriptures, which encouraged Biblical scholars to help the people understand what the Bible was saying – in concepts that made sense to people living today. In the documents on the missions, which put the Council's blessings on indigenous cultures everywhere. And finally the Council's crowning document, *Gaudium et Spes*, which encouraged the people of God to be 'the Church in the world, at the service of the world.'

Pell seemed impressed. He nodded. I took advantage of his silence to ask him what shape the Church must take in the 21st century. "Will it be a hierarchical Church," I said, "or a people's Church?"

He said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with hierarchy." I laughed. Of course, it was easy for Pell to say there was nothing wrong with hierarchy, him in his watered silk and his Red Hat, sitting at the top of the power pyramid. I said, "The hierarchy didn't begin to appear until quite late in the history of the Church, maybe as late as Leo the Great in the fifth century."

I was off by three centuries. Pell said he had written his doctoral dissertation at Oxford on St. Ignatius of Antioch (who died about the year 107), supposedly the first major witness to the primacy of Rome, "the Church holding chief place in the territories of the district of Rome." Ignatius wrote these words in his famous letter to the Church at Rome not long before he was martyred there. I couldn't check out Pell's dissertation then and there. Later, I found out that this letter by Ignatius of Antioch was the only one of his classic letters to the seven churches of the ancient Mediterranean world that made no mention at all of a local bishop. That would imply that there was no one in Rome at the time who was called "bishop." And, therefore, no pope either.

Nevertheless, I said to Pell that I stood corrected. "But that's the first proof of a hierarchical Church? Early second century?"

"Jesus," he said, "established the hierarchy when he appointed the twelve apostles."

"He didn't appoint them to rule," I said, "but to serve. How can you call that hierarchy as we know the term?"

Pell spread his hands and smiled. "Yes, but..." He stopped. "We can continue this discussion." He made sure I had his email address and stood. The interview was over. Almost.

"One more question?" I said.

"Okay."

"What will be the tenor of the next conclave?"

"I am quite sure it will go my way," he said.

"And what way is that?"

He gave me a tight smile. "Conservative."

Of course. Even Pell's Down Under Catholics know that. When word came down that Pell would be a cardinal, Bishop Pat Power of Canberra, Australia's national capital, said the honor was inevitable. But he told ABC Radio, his country's BBC, that he was disappointed. "In terms of what it means for the church, I think it further shows the church to be representing many elements that I think are not doing the church very much good at the moment.

Power went on: "I suppose what concerns me is that many of the values that I think are dear to Australian Catholics - such as the dignity of the human person, the primacy of conscience, the theology of communion, the need for dialogue in our Church, reading the signs of the times - I don't think that they're values that are particularly clearly enunciated by Archbishop Pell. I think for that reason, many people will be disappointed the Church is going further in that direction."

Bishop Power said that, recently, he had seen a real move away from the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and much of its teaching. He called it "a step backward for the Catholic Church.

I couldn't agree more. I saw the Fathers of Vatican II rally behind a cry for a Church that was less clerical, less juridical, less triumphal. But under John Paul II, the official Church has become more clerical (even as, paradoxically, the number of clerics is dwindling in most parts of the world), more a Church of laws (even as more and more Catholics choose to ignore them), and more satisfied with itself (even as a majority of the faithful have become increasingly dissatisfied over the Church's direction).

Am I saying that we now have a real split here, between a hierarchical Church and a people's Church? Yes. And, even though many would say that this is probably the kind of Church the world has seen operating for the past two centuries, we see a different situation today. In the past, the people at large seemed largely content to pray, pay and shut up. Now the people at large do not want to shut up, because they have grown up, intellectually and psychologically. They have more education than they used to; in fact, many of them – men and women – are far better educated than their priests. And, conditioned by the history of the 20th century (which was marked, mainly, by the passage of power from elites to the people), they have a new view of authority.

Pope John XXIII kept reminding the world that authority was not for domination, but for service. The Fathers of Vatican II went along with that view, and re-defined the Church as "the people of God." The hierarchical priesthood had a place – as a serving-subset of the priesthood of all believers. And so, the Council gave the people at large every reason to expect that their post-conciliar Church would become a Church that could listen (for how can the official Church serve unless it listens to what the people say they need?)

Pope Paul VI seemed to endorse a listening Church by his own example. In 1963, soon after he became pope, he re-appointed the six-man Commission on Population, the Family and Birth set up by John XXIII and enlarged it to 73, with the inclusion of a host of experts, including some psychiatrists and psychologists and married couples. That ended up badly, because the pope didn't listen to his appointed advisors.

John Paul II learned nothing from that history. (He had been a member of that papal commission, but never attended a single meeting.) For him, Church teaching was still a top-down affair – he talked and the people were supposed to listen – which meant that there was very little actual teaching going on (since no one really learned anything). It was more like a whole lot of spouting off. For 25 years, John Paul II wouldn't appoint a bishop who dissented from the Church's official ban on birth control. In fact, he seemed obsessed with his own monkish views on the meaning of sex, now contained in a huge tome he calls his *Theology of the Body*. As a result, more than 4000 bishops around the world hold John Paul's official position (publicly at least) and maybe a billion Catholics think otherwise (if they think about "Church teaching" at all). This fact alone helps emphasize the split in the Church today, with the priest-people on one side and the people-people on the other.

So how likely is it that the priest-people (i.e., the College of Cardinals) will elect a pope who thinks any differently than they do? Not very likely. To be sure, in 1958, by some kind of miracle, the cardinal electors voted for Angelo Roncalli, Pope John XXIII, who helped set the stage for Vatican II's endorsement of a people's Church. So, if the Holy Spirit descended on that conclave, she can do it again.

But no one can guarantee this Divine descent will happen. "History tells us," said no less an authority than Cardinal Ratzinger not long ago, "that the Holy Spirit isn't there at every conclave. How else can we explain the election throughout history of so many bad popes?" So I cannot do any reporting based on my hopes that the Holy Spirit will make up for the inability of the electors to read the signs of the times. I can only report on what I see and hear. And what I saw and heard in Rome during October 2003 does not augur well for a people's Church.

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At the evening Mass in St. Peter's Square on October 19, I stood in front of a huge television screen, watching John Paul II, barely able to keep his head up. I asked myself, "Why are they putting this man through this torture?" Then I realized that "they" aren't putting him through anything. This is his own idea.

What should we think? Well, we could, with many cardinals, express our simultaneous admiration and sorrow for the pope. Admiration for his courage, because though the pope was so obviously weak, he insisted on going through all those ceremonies.

Sorrow, too, because we knew that what we were seeing was all we were getting. Aside from making these ceremonial appearances, the pope just wasn't getting the job done. None of the new cardinals had any private encounters with the pope. He was seeing almost no one. And when he did see someone, it was turning out to be a joke.

Two items:

1) On Oct. 4, he received Rowan Williams, the new Archbishop of Canterbury in the Vatican, along with a big entourage that even included the Roman Catholic primate in England, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor. After an exchange of short speeches – the pope himself labored through one himself in which he alluded to the "doctrinal difficulties" that still prevent complete union of the Anglican Communion with Rome – and the usual picture taking, the meeting was over. As everyone was filing out, one of the Archbishop's aides overheard the pope say, "Who were those guys?" His secretary shouted in his ear, "They're from England."

2) On Oct. 10, he received the president of East Timor and his entourage. After an exchange of greetings and the usual picture taking, the pope and the president retired to the pope's study for a private one-on-one chat. The two of them talked for four minutes or so. Then the pope dozed off. For 17 minutes. The president didn't know exactly what to do. So he did nothing, except look at his watch. Eventually, the pope roused himself, said, "Nice talking to you" and rang for his aide.

When some Churchmen have said publicly that the pope ought to think about retiring, John Paul II has said over and over again that he has no plans to do so. He said it most recently at the beatification of Mother Teresa on Oct. 19.

But that may not have been the last word. On Oct. 24, *La Repubblica's* Marco Politi, one of the best pope watchers in Rome, reported that Cardinal Jorge Mejia, the head of the Vatican Library (and once a journalist himself at Vatican II) told him that "il Papa aveva gia nel cassetto una lettera di dimissioni firmata in anticipo." (The pope has had a letter of resignation in his desk drawer signed in advance.) In advance of what? Of the pope's incapacity. But what would make the pope "incapax?" Whoever knows isn't talking. (That's the way it is in a court culture, which is how the Vatican sees itself, working as it does under someone they regard as a ruler by divine right.) It is clear that the pope, with his Parkinson's, could get worse and still be technically alive, and nothing more than a hidden, ghostly, absolute ruler. At that point, one can only guess what would happen. Most likely: that the pope's secretary Stanislaus Dviciz would pull the note out of the sleeping pope's drawer and take it to the pope's prime minister, Cardinal Sodano.

#

Every Vaticanista plays around with his list of pope-ables. None of us really knows enough to even make such lists. In 1978, Andrew Greeley published his top ten. None of his choices even came close. On November 10, John Allen updated his top ten, a re-do of the list he had published last year in his book *Conclave*. He can make such a list on one basis: what "they say." But such a list depends on who Allen's "they" really are and, hard-working as Allen is, he cannot make more than wild guesses. In alphabetical order, here are Allen's pope-ables:

- Francis Arinze (Nigeria, 71), prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship
- Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Argentina, 66), archbishop of Buenos Aires
- Godfried Danneels (Belgium, 70), archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels
- Ivan Dias (India, 67), archbishop of Mumbai (Bombay)
- Cláudio Hummes (Brazil, 69), archbishop of Sao Paolo
- Walter Kasper (Germany, 70), president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity

- Norberto Rivera Carrera (México, 61): archbishop of México City
- Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga (Honduras, 60): archbishop of Tegucigalpa
- Christoph Schönborn (Austria, 58), archbishop of Vienna
- Dionigi Tettamanzi (Italy, 69), archbishop of Milan

I was surprised to find Dias on the list. He had given a fine talk to the assembled cardinals on Oct. 18, and so perhaps, on that account, there was some kind of Curial buzz going on about Dias that Allen overheard.

I was also surprised to find Arinze there. There are at least three other cardinals from Africa who are more qualified than Arinze (most notably Wilfrid Napier Fox) and Arinze is dumber than seven horses. Maybe, in a conclave where 25 percent of the electors are from the Roman Curia, choosing Arinze makes some sense, for the Curia would be able to manipulate him like a marionette.

I was even more surprised to find that Allen's list did not include my own favorite: Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, S.J. If I had \$100 to bet on this election, I would bet it on Martini (and I would probably get good odds). For years, he was on almost everyone's list. He was the giant in the College of Cardinals. A Biblical scholar, author of more than two dozen works, a pastor in Milan who drew thousands of young people to his Saturday evening homilies, and, of course, a Jesuit who spoke seven languages and gave well-attended talks to every kind of intelligent audience around the globe. In the summer of 1998, he spoke to the faculty at Harvard and got a standing ovation. Most pundits took Martini off their list of pope-ables when he resigned, at age 75, from his post as archbishop of Milan. But Martini is still a cardinal, a year younger than Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was when he was elected John XXIII.

Roncalli was elected because he was old: after the long papacy of Pius XII, the college wanted an older man who wouldn't be around for long. If this college is looking for such a man who won't be around for long (and some of my sources say they are looking for such a man), then they will elect Martini. He is still a giant. Two supposed drawbacks to his candidacy: 1) he is a Jesuit, and 2) he suffers from Parkinson's disease.

But he does not have Parkinson's. He has said only this: "I am old, with the usual infirmities of old age." My sources say the Parkinson's story has been spread maliciously by Martini's enemies in the Roman Curia.

As for the Jesuit thing: I have found that those most pessimistic about Martini's chances – because he is a Jesuit – are Italian Jesuits, like Cardinal Roberto Tucci and Archbishop Giuseppe Pittau, a stalwart in the Roman Curia and one of

its few liberals. I suspect they are saying Martini doesn't have a chance so that it will not appear that the Society of Jesus is campaigning for Martini – which could hurt his chances. Too Byzantine? No. The Vatican is a very Byzantine culture, and these subtle Jesuits are perhaps the most Byzantine of all.

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