



Red birettas, a three-pointed hat, sit on a table in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 7 before Pope Francis' consistory to create new cardinals. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Two prominent conservative journalists are getting coal in their stockings this Christmas. Edward Pentin of the National Catholic Register and Diana Montagna of the Catholic Herald collaborated to produce the "[College of Cardinals Report](#)," an online profile of the men who will select the next pope. The report would be funny if it were not so tendentious.

The list of papabili doesn't just tilt to the right. It falls off the cliff. Among the report's 22 leading candidates for pope, Pentin and Montagna [name Cardinal Raymond Burke](#), the former prefect of the Apostolic Signatura. I will bet my house that Burke is not going to emerge onto the loggia of St. Peter's as the 266th successor of St. Peter. He is something of a laughingstock, parading around [in his cappa magna](#) and [criticizing Pope Francis](#).

The same goes for [Cardinal Robert Sarah](#), the former prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship. Selecting him would amount to repudiating Francis and it is unlikely the College of Cardinals will do that. Francis has [named 110 of the 140 cardinal electors](#). Besides, Sarah turns 80 next June 15, so he likely will not even be in the Sistine Chapel when the cardinals vote.

Why Pentin and Montagna put [Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco](#) on the list is equally mysterious. The former archbishop of Genoa, Italy, will turn 82 on Jan. 14, so we know there is no chance he will be among the cardinal electors. Technically, the cardinals can elect any baptized male, but the last time the cardinals picked someone who was not in the room voting was [Pope Urban VI in 1378](#).

Not every cardinal listed as a potential pope is ridiculous. [Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline](#), the archbishop of Marseille, France, is a name one hears whispered among those who support Francis. [Filipino Cardinal Luis Tagle](#), the pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, is also someone often considered a plausible candidate. And while [Cardinal Péter Erdő](#), archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Hungary, would like to chart a more conservative course than Francis has done, his selection is not impossible. He is probably the leading candidate of the conservative cardinals.

The College of Cardinals Report also has profiles of all the cardinals. I do not know many of them, so I can't question or vouch for the quality of all the sketches provided. But if the profiles of the U.S. cardinals are any guide, these are as tendentious as the list of papabili.

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For example, look at the report's profile of [Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich](#). It is not surprising that Pentin and Montagna list a lot of things Cupich has done that they don't like: limiting the use of the Tridentine rite; calling for a more pastoral approach to gay and lesbian Catholics; and offering a prayer at the 2024 Democratic National Convention, which was held in Chicago.

Funny that they did not mention that Cupich is the only diocesan bishop in the U.S. who was appointed by three popes. Pope John Paul II named him bishop of Rapid City, South Dakota, in 1998. Pope Benedict XVI named him bishop of Spokane, Washington, in 2010. Pope Francis elevated him to the rank of archbishop of Chicago in 2014, conferring the red hat in 2016.

Pentin and Montagna suggest Francis made a mistake — "Reputedly going over the heads of his Vatican advisers, Francis appointed Cupich Archbishop of Chicago in 2014" — but did all three popes make a mistake?

The report also criticizes [Cardinal Donald Wuerl](#), the archbishop emeritus of Washington, in part for his role in a controversial grant from the Papal Foundation. They provide as evidence an [article in First Things](#) that was more of a hit job by those who disagreed with Wuerl than an honest report on the disagreement.

In their profile of [Cardinal Timothy Dolan](#) of New York, the authors write, "In 2015, he also [drew headlines](#) when he agreed to be grand marshal of that year's St. Patrick's Day parade in New York when homosexual groups were allowed to take part for the first time." Heaven forbid!

The "College of Cardinals Report" is not a "report" in any journalistic sense of the word. It is revanchist propaganda.