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Will the next pope be eco-friendly?

by Brian Roewe

Eco Catholic
Conclave 2013

While it is all but assured the next pope entered the conclave Tuesday wearing a red hat, will he exit with a green mentality?

Pope Benedict XVI was lauded in both religious and environmental circles for his calls for environmental stewardship and care for creation. His sudden exit has left observers wondering whether his successor will follow his lead.

On Monday, Mother Jones began looking for the cardinal with the green tongue, profiling the environmental records of some of the cardinals whose names have been circulating before the conclave:

Despite other controversial aspects of his papal candidacy, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, they say, has spoken numerous times about protecting the planet, from the impact of surface mining to aiding the poor through environmental efforts.

In 2010, Cardinal Angelo Scola of Italy stated that "the way for urgent, collaborative convergence between ecology and theology is to continue the logic of creation with love."

In the Philippines, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle is known for ditching his car for a bike and public transportation as he makes his way to and from church services.

Mother Jones' front runner on environmental issues is Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez Maradiaga of Honduras. A former president of Caritas Internationalis, he has described climate change as a "faith issue," and has pushed for internationally binding carbon emissions regulations.

While many have set Benedict as the bar for these men or others in terms of environmental action, others still believe that bar remains too low. In an essay for *NCR*, Fr. Sean McDonagh colored the church's ecological teachings "light green," saying despite Benedict's writings, they still leave much to be desired.

"Despite an increased sprinkling of ecological language and concerns in addresses and documents from the Holy See, these still lack an accurate analysis of the problem," McDonagh wrote.

As environmental issues become more prominent -- particularly in the Global South and tropical locales -- in coming years, how the next pope addresses it will be closely watched.

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