



Prevost's Past, Leo's Future

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Papal transitions are opportunities to reflect on the direction and future of the Church. How do you perceive the first few months of Leo XIV's papacy? What has disappointed you, and what has excited you? What do you see as the two or three most important issues facing the Church today, and do you have an impression of how Leo will approach them?
2. Steinfels documents Leo's roots in the United States and beyond—and in particular, his connections to "Chicago Catholicism" from his upbringing in the South Side. What advantages do you think these experiences will provide Leo in steering the Church? On the other hand, do you think there's truth to the conventional wisdom against American popes—that Americans are already too powerful in every other sphere of life? Does his American upbringing bring disadvantages, too?
3. As Annett shows, Leo's choice of name has implications for the development of Catholic social teaching, especially around technology and society in the new "industrial revolution" spawned by artificial intelligence. What should an imagined "AI encyclical" say? Put another way, how should Leo develop the Church's technological social teaching?
4. Sweeney hopes that the new pope's Augustinian background will "call [us] toward community and away from isolation." Can you translate this hope into a more concrete set of focuses, actions, or approaches? From your experience, how is today's Church "isolated"—and what remedies do you prescribe?
5. Bauerschmidt argues that Catholics afford the pope—and commentary about him—too much attention in our oversaturated media environment, especially when compared to how little attention the pope received in the past. Is this true, or does today's unprecedented level of access to Vatican and papal news empower laypeople in the Church? On the other hand, have conclaves gotten too "newsy" or "political" nowadays?
6. Many in the United States have treated Leo's American background, for instance, as a counterweight to the Trump administration. But as some Italian tabloids put it, the new pope was considered "the least American of the Americans." How do we avoid unduly emphasizing the importance of Leo's American roots? To this end, how do you expect Leo's ministry in Peru will impact his papacy?
7. Most new popes, including Leo, enjoy a "honeymoon period." But O'Reilly notes that for women, the Church faces grave, immediate challenges: "All this is a handful of straws," she writes, "and I have grown tired of grasping at straws." Has all this analysis about Leo's background, hometown, nationality, and more been useful—or are we still grasping at straws about a fundamentally uncertain future? If we have no way of knowing yet, where should we place our hope instead?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Cathleen Kaveny, "Ordinary People," June 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/kaveny-ordinary-people-leo-pope-francis>
Daniel Rober, "Living Vatican II," May 27, 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/leo-pope-rober-conciliar-francis-church-vatican-ii>
Austen Ivereigh, "Bridge Builder," June 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/ivereigh-prevost-francis-pope-leo-austen>
Massimo Faggioli, "Young American," May 16, 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/leo-pope-xiv-massimo-faggioli-francis-synodality-vatican>
The Editors, "A Leo for These Times," June 2025: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/editorial-leo-xiv-pope-america-barron-francis-synodality>