



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Times letters: Pope Francis's legacy and the future of the church

[Letters to the Editor](#)

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Sir, [The Pope's death](#) ushers in a difficult period for the Roman Catholic Church. A man devoted to the poor, having grown up in Argentina during the postwar rise of right-wing states — many of which had harboured Nazis — the Pope had seen how they were supported by senior Catholic churchmen as well as the military hardmen controlling many South American countries. He saw the emergence of a strong swing from Catholicism to Pentecostalism and other free churches, where a welcoming hand was extended to the poor and to Catholics concerned about the disregard shown to them by their own cardinals and bishops.

When he was elected Pope, he foresaw the battle he was likely to have with ultra-conservative forces in the Vatican. Those forces are now keen to retrieve the crown of Peter — not for

themselves, they will argue, but for the good of the church they say has lost its way under Francis. The rivalry among conservative cardinals for that “top job” is intense. With Francis’s death, their efforts will redouble to claim the prize they have worked for and sought for so long.

Alastair Conan

Coulsdon

Sir, The Pope brought a refreshing sense of hope and optimism to the Catholic Church. His passing will be mourned by millions, who will miss his infectious smile. But the cardinal electors who must soon [choose his successor](#) should keep in mind the weaknesses of his pontificate. Francis disliked the old Latin Mass, and his attempt to restrict its use created division between liberals and conservatives that the tolerant policy of Benedict XVI had calmed. Francis also had an inclination to sympathise with strong leaders and regimes. He upset many with his comment that Putin may have been “provoked” into invading Ukraine, and his policy of appeasement towards Communist China has undermined the prophetic witness of Chinese Catholics. His successor will need to be able to deal with these issues to the benefit of both the church and the world.

Francis Bown

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Sir, The Pope gave a high priority to the care of prisoners. His visit, only days before his death, to the [Regina Coeli prison in Rome](#) was a reminder of his lifelong commitment. At a time when prisons in Britain are under dangerously high pressures, we must hope that churches, charities, opinion formers and the government may re-evaluate the priority they give to the men whom Francis – quoting the Gospel – called “The least of these my brothers”.

The Rev Jonathan Aitken

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