

## Who is Marc Ouellet?

A Cardinal who dreams of being pope.

From February 17 to 19, a "symposium on vocations" was held in Rome, presided over by Sulpician Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, the dicastery of the Roman Curia that handles the appointment and resignation of bishops throughout the world. He is well known to Vatican experts; he dreams of succeeding Pope Francis. Although Pope Francis trusts him, the prefect of the Congregation for Bishops is not theologically close to him. This could allow him to garner the votes of the anti-Francis cardinals during the next conclave.

Marc Ouellet was born in 1944 to a large family in Quebec: there were eight children. Young Marc wanted to become a priest and attended Major Seminary and the University of Montreal. He was ordained a priest in 1968 for the diocese of Amos, and left to teach at the seminary of Bogota, which the Sulpicians operate. He joined the Sulpicians and then studied in Rome at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas. He returned to teach at the seminary in Manizales, Colombia, and then resumed his studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where he earned a doctorate in dogmatic theology in 1983. Marc Ouellet quickly became an apparatchik, training priests both in Colombia and in Canada. He had had no real pastoral experience, except for two years as a vicar after his priestly ordination.

## A Stickler for Dogma

The man has the reputation of a stickler for dogma who is doctrinally reliable, even if in public he may seem warm and approachable. That is why John Paul II (1978-2005) appointed him to the chair of dogmatic theology at the Pontifical Institute John Paul II, a reactionary institute founded in 1981 and attached to the Pontifical Lateran University; its specialty is marriage and the family. In this position, Marc Ouellet trained the elite of seminarians, including many Frenchmen who went on to become bishops. This John Paul II institute advocated the "theology of the body," a theological doctrine that advocates in a new way the received teaching on sexuality and the traditional family. In 2019, Pope Francis thoroughly reformed this institute and handed its keys over to Philippe Bordeyne, the former rector of the Institut Catholique de Paris known for his open mind and his closeness to the Argentine pope. In 2001, Marc Ouellet was named secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and raised to the rank of bishop. A year later he was named Archbishop of Quebec City, and in 2003 he was created a cardinal at the age of 59.

In Canada, Marc Ouellet became close to the nuncio in Ottawa, Luigi Ventura, later apostolic nuncio to France, who was convicted in 2020 for sexual assault. He is also an intimate of Josef Ratzinger, Pope in 2005, whom he "consulted for the orientation of [his] life." How about Quebec City? Well the prelate was not well liked there. Many found him "intransigent." In fact, during his episcopate in Quebec, Marc Ouellet got bad press for "his numerous outbursts, even his relentlessness, against gay marriage, abortion, euthanasia and the Ethics and Religious Culture programme." For Marc Ouellet, in 2010 "nothing, not even rape, justifies abortion, which must be considered a 'moral' crime." His remarks created a lot of controversy and he was exiled to Rome. His position was untenable; the Christians of Quebec wanted him gone. That's when he became prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, a position he still holds today, for a few more weeks.

In this position, Marc Ouellet shaped the episcopate throughout the world for twelve years, promoting conservative profiles in keeping with the views of Benedict XVI. Papabile at the conclave of 2013, he kept his position under Francis, even though the latter wants bishops who are closer to the people and less rigid. It was Marc Ouellet who shaped the French episcopate as we know it today, with the precious help of Luigi Ventura. We had to wait for the arrival of the new nuncio in Paris, Celestino Migliore, in 2020, to see more pastorally open profiles in the episcopate.

### A “theological partner” and “strange academicians.”

But an unfortunate reputation for intrigue clings to the cardinal. Moreover, it is hard to know what to make of some of his associations. In 2014, he prefaced a book by the priest and "psychoanalyst" Tony Anatrella, suspended *a divinis* since by the Archbishop of Paris in 2018 after accusations of sexual boundary violations. The accusations dated back to 2006. The same Tony Anatrella participated, though without an invitation it seems, in the Symposium on the priesthood organized by Marc Ouellet. This is according to a Facebook post of Dominican Father Philippe Lefebvre, who has accompanied victims of this priest since forever and never misses an opportunity to denounce him.

Marc Ouellet was also recently cited in an obscure affair revealed by *Le Monde* concerning the Dominican Sisters of the Holy Spirit in Pontcallec (Morbihan) where unauthorized exorcisms were allegedly practiced. One of the sisters was dismissed for "serious misconduct" from this traditionalist congregation where the prefect of the congregation for the bishops enjoyed frequent stays. This religious sister is said to be at war with another sister, a friend of Marc Ouellet, with whom she maintains "a privileged relationship." Thus he prefaced the doctoral thesis on Saint Thomas Aquinas defended at the Sorbonne by this "theological partner [who] also serves as his assistant and chauffeur in Rome as well as in France.

Moreover this sister is a member of the scientific committee of the Symposium on Vocations, along with two members of the Catholic Academy who signed a response to the Sauvé report, to which the CIASE [which published the original Sauvé report on clerical abuse of minors in the French Church—*trans.*] gave a curt response. These academicians, known for their ultra-conservative positions, have very precisely torpedoed the work of the CIASE before it reached the pope.

### Behind the scenes of the next conclave . . .

This, therefore is the prelate who, negative balance sheet and all, eagerly desires to succeed Francis. Of course, in order for there to be a conclave, the pope must die or resign. Furthermore, for a cardinal to be elected, he must be under 80 years of age. This June, Cardinal Ouellet will turn 78, the age at which Josef Ratzinger became pope. But Francis is still in office, despite his health problems and his 86th birthday. And he's still making plans: he just announced a Holy Year for 2025 . . . .

But whether he is an elector or not, Marc Ouellet will certainly play a role in the next conclave, either as an actor or behind the scenes, promoting traditional doctrine, especially on priestly celibacy and the family. A shady character, his election would hardly be good news for the Church, shaken as it is by all sorts of scandals and difficulties arising from the lack of comprehensive reforms. Rather than an operator, the Church after Francis will need to consolidate the few reforms undertaken since 2013 to bring it fully into the 21st century. The task is arduous and far too heavy for Cardinal Ouellet, a man of the past who has never been known for his innovative impulses.

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