

The Pope is dead. As I might do for anyone, I hope that he rests in peace, and in his case, that all that he hopes for thereafter might be fulfilled.

I am aware that hundreds of millions of Catholics around the world will mourn his death.

I am equally aware that within the Vatican, and beyond, the plotting to replace this relatively progressive Pope with someone deeply conservative who might pursue policies profoundly contrary to the long history of relatively progressive Catholic social teaching will be beginning.

In this context, I am sorry that one of the last meetings that the Pope had on earth was with J D Vance. I really would not wish that on anyone. He represents, as a born-again Catholic, what appears to be the very worst of Catholic thinking at this point in time. It is, quite literally, impossible to reconcile the teachings of Jesus, whatever you might think him to be, with the idea of a white, male, theocratic and autocratic role, but that is what Vance would seem to wish to do. In doing so, he would appear to have joined those who have abused religion for the sake of personal advancement over centuries and millennia.

I cannot be alone in having watched Conclave relatively recently. That is an excellent film. I wouldn't be at all surprised if I watched it again, quite soon. There is much in it about the fight of the left and right in the Catholic Church, and the need for a Pope who believes in the sincerity of biblical teaching. I touched on the core of that in a blog post yesterday, again, I stress, without in any way suggesting that anyone should subscribe to the Christian faith.

What I am sure of is that in a world where fascism is advancing rapidly, the last thing we need is another fascist Pope. We have, after all, had at least one in the last century, and too many others antithetical to the best interest of the majority of people in the world. This fight is, therefore, critical at present.

Popes wield widespread, decidedly non-religious power. Their influence should be positive, but like most human constructs (and the office of Pope is just that), it is open to abuse. The risk of that is very high at present. In that case, I suggest that in

whatever form you might pray (and in my opinion, prayer is, among other things, a meditative consideration of meaningful action), I suggest you do so for a Papal succession dedicated to the interests of people, and not theocratic power.