

# Scenario

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The year is 2025. All eyes are focused on Vatican City. Three days ago, on January 17, 2025, Pope Adam Paul died suddenly. While this was unexpected, Pope Adam Paul was not a young man. He was a respected and much-loved pontiff. Those who knew him say that he would have preferred it this way, suddenly, rather than by the long, winding path of poor health that plagued Pope John Paul II or the medical shocks and uncertainty that marked the end of Pope Benedict XVI's reign. For two millenia, when the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church has left this world for God's Kingdom, the cardinals have come to Rome to choose St. Peter's Successor from amongst themselves.

In the distant past, this took months while the Cardinals came to Rome from around the world. But in this modern age, where one can travel across continents and oceans in a matter of hours, where the media can give instantaneous coverage of world events, and where religion has become more and more significant politically and personally, the Vatican can not afford to wait as long as it once did for a new leader.

Across the globe, religion has become the central focus of citizens and governments. Attendance at religious functions and worship of all faiths has increased drastically. Faith in God is a political necessity for aspiring politicians and elected officials are citing holy texts more and more. Fifteen years ago marks the beginning of what is known as the Religious Revolution in America. The Christian Right overthrew the leadership of the Republican party and then took decisive victories against the Democrats and other less conservative opposition. By 2016, the Christian Right had unassailable majorities in Congress and most state governments, in addition to electing their first President, a formerly unknown evangelical preacher from Iowa, Wesley Swift. In 2020, despite his advanced years, claiming that he had come to fulfill God's divine will, the American people elected Pat Robertson as their president. President Robertson won re-election again in 2024. The American government's new official Christian policy has led to the establishment of the Department of Faith, the reformation of the CIA into the Christian Intelligence Agency, mandatory prayer in schools, and other officially religious policies.

Evangelical America is not the only place where God and politics are mixing. Religious missionaries in Africa are finally seeing their work pay off in droves of enthusiastic converts. Unfortunately, countries like Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, and the rest of Africa's east coast have been hit by drought and famine recent years. Even the warlords controlling the supply of international relief cite God as they carry out their atrocities. In Russia, while President Putin serves his sixth term, the Russian Orthodox Church is enjoying greater influence politically and socially. Religious matters in Europe and Asia are becoming more important to the populations and parliaments (except in China, which has strictly maintained its Communist atheism). Governments take the opinions of religious leaders into account nearly as often as they consider the latest public opinion poll. New age and contemporary religious observance is also up. Only Australia seems baffled by this resurgence of religion in politics, but no one talks to those heathens anymore.

The Middle East, the historical and geographical nexus of the world's three largest religions, has undergone several transformations. Israel and Palestine have separated and a Palestinian state has been established. The situation is tense, but stable. Iraq, after years of American nurturing, emerged as a shining beacon of democracy. Despite Iraq's official claim to secularism, they are heavily influenced by theocratic Iran, which has maintained the same Islamic, anti-Israel stance it has held for the past quarter century. Like Christianity in the West, Islam is seeing a popular resurgence as well. There are new mosques constantly

under construction to accommodate the throngs of devout who turn five times toward Mecca to pray the daily prayers. Islam and the West are still in conflict. Islam's memory of the Crusades, the injustices of colonialism, and the degradation that the West has imposed upon the followers of Mohammed has not faded, and continues to fuel the rage of fundamentalist Islam in its jihad. America's continued Crusade Against Terror (formerly the War on Terror) still continues, much as it has since it was called by President Bush in 2001.

Geopolitics and international struggle now extend to outer space. China began colonizing Mars in 2014 with the establishment of the Shang Guo colony. From there, they quickly established several other small colonies. Not to be outdone, Russia established its own colony on Mars in 2016. China, however, claims the whole planet as their territory. This tension has led to struggles between the two sets of Martian colonists. The incidents have become worrying enough that the United Nations has been considering stepping in. This consideration became noticeably more pressing with the recent execution of Chang Xi, a purported rebel leader in Shang Guo pushing for the colony's independence from China.

Science and technology continue their steady march forward in other areas, too, particularly in the realms of espionage. Those with access to the technology now have the ability to drastically alter their apparent race. Computer crime has remained steady, but the cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, and android technology industries have made significant progress. No small part of that was due to Ernst Stavro Blofeld's work. Whether or not he was brilliant or a madman is still hotly debated, but the jury's decision was clear—he was a criminal.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, espionage—corporate and otherwise—flourished with advances in technology that gave individuals the means to move with greater subtlety and silence than ever before.

But not everything from the old world has been scrubbed away by the relentless march of modernity. Vatican City and Rome are home to stunning historical sites, vast archaeological treasures, museums housing rarities, and some of the greatest artwork to emerge in the past thousand years. Pope Adam Paul had arranged for an exhibition of the Vatican Collection. Twenty-five of the most valuable and important works were drawn from the Catholic Church's vast collection to be viewed, discussed, and debated in the coming days. A panel of experts has arrived in Rome to present and discuss the merits of the Vatican Collection. Each an expert in their own right, the panel consists of Father Lucio Di Rocco, Dr. Conor E Jones, Dr. Jenny Penny, Bartolomeo Quist, and Andrea Worhall.

Even with such advances in technology and the rise of religion, the nature of the game doesn't change that much. Countries and nations still find conflict and peace. History still tests leaders, and leaders still shape history. Presidents and kings come and pass and new presidents and kings follow. There is one thing, though, that some visitors to Vatican City are trying to change.

For two thousand years, Christian religion has been splintering. Schisms beget sects, and sects beget schisms, while new religions grow up on their own. Revolutions of faith have fragmented the community of religion that calls Christ their messiah. Pope John Paul II began working towards greater understanding between faiths. The end of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of new religious cooperation. Pope Adam Paul took up where John Paul left off, beginning a program not only to promote understanding, but to resolve differences, and if at all possible, bring separated faiths back to the fold.

The result was the Reconciliation Committee. A multi-faith effort to bring the split religions back into one, strong whole. Over the past several years, different denominations have made great efforts towards mending schisms and reunifying. The ultimate goal of the reconciliation was twofold. First was a new creed for the unified Greater Christian Faith that would be the religious profession of the new Church. Second was a new leader for the Greater Christian Faith, to shepherd the newly reformed bonds of religion. With the sudden death of Pope Adam Paul, it is hoped that the Reconciliation can be accomplished in honor of his memory, and that the newly elected pope can be the shepherd and leader of the Greater Christian Faith.

The mourning of the previous pope and the election of a new pontiff will have to proceed in any case. Many nations from around the world have sent representatives, ambassadors, and dignitaries to speak on behalf of their nation during the farewell to Pope Adam Paul. But as an old pope is gone, a new one will come. 2025 will mark the 268<sup>th</sup> recognized conclave. The man who emerges when *habemus papem*<sup>2</sup> is called out to those waiting in Saint Peter's Square will be the highest-profile religious leader

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<sup>1</sup> Blofeld reformed in prison, proved his commitment to leave behind his life of crime, and was released on parole. He later joined the Quakers.

<sup>2</sup> "We have a pope!"

in the world. The papal *preferiti*—those popularly considered to be the frontrunners in the election—are Alejandro Cardinal Costa, Archbishop Joseph Darjeeling, Mel Cardinal Gibson, Patriarch Peter Milanov, Michael Cardinal Ngozi, Vincenzo Cardinal Tesla, and Domencio Cardinal Sabatoni. Whether it will be one of these candidates or a dark horse, only the conclave will tell.

In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of visitors have come to Vatican City to watch the proceedings, to mourn the passing and see first hand the election of the leader of the Catholic Church. Old friends meet in crowded coffee shops, while old enemies race through the streets of Rome. Dark secrets wind through each visitor and hidden ears listen for the echo of your footsteps on ancient streets and in sacred halls. What does it all mean? Only the Holy See.

## **Events & Schedule**

There are several events scheduled for the coming ten days. Some of them are already scheduled, while others will be determined and publicized later.

**The Opening Ceremonies and Beginning of the Rite of Visitation** Friday, January 20, at 10 p.m. in 35-225

**The Remembrance Memorial** Saturday, January 21, at 9 p.m. in 4-370

**Burial of Pope Adam Paul** Monday, January 23, at 10 p.m. in 35-225

**Memorial Performances** Wednesday, January 25, at 7:30 p.m. in 24-407

**The Conclusion of the Vatican Collection Exhibition** Friday, January 27, at 8:30 in 4-149

**Votes of the Conclave** The Conclave will take votes for the election of the next pontiff in the evenings. Votes will be taken at the discretion of the electorate.

**Presentations and Lectures on the Vatican Collection** Expected to be the evenings of Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, time to be determined. This schedule is subject to change.

**I'Opera di Roma** The famous Roman Opera is open each evening from 8:00 to 8:30.

## **Meta Notes**

Our game is heavily crosscast. Set in Vatican City and the Catholic Church, it includes many priests and other Church functionaries that are traditionally male. Because of this, we have many more male characters than female characters. Where ever possible, we have tried to accomodate player preferences.

Many of you have a Religion Bluesheet. Some of you do not, but still have defined religions in your character's other sheets. If you have neither a Bluesheet nor a defined religion, it probably means that you don't care. Our game deals with many religious topics. These Bluesheets are intended to be guidelines so you have a general idea of what a particular religion believes, their important rites, rituals, and so forth. We have tried to be as accurate as possible in constructing these, but please forgive any errors we have made. Feel free to research your character's religion further.

In your sheets, "today" refers to the first day of game – Friday, January 20th 2025.