

OPINION

Carney and the Pope each have the power to help change the world

The Pope and Carney have a common mission: they are fresh faces commanding new attention, and they must use the microphones they have been handed to beat back the drums of war and lift up the hopes of humanity.

Douglas Roche

Opinion



EDMONTON—Two new leaders, the American Pope Leo XIV and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, have suddenly entered the world stage. With the election of both men, both the world and Canada are entering a new era. The election of each appears to be of a different realm, but they each possess the capacity to lift up large sections of the world through unifying messages.

The two elections are strangely related. One is spiritual, the other secular. One man is a missionary, the other a banker. Both are mild-mannered institutional people. Neither has charisma, but each inspires confidence. Perhaps that's why each got chosen.

Both men live in different milieus and have completely different backgrounds, but they each have suddenly acquired a powerful microphone. How each uses his new power to speak and to lead will determine in no small measure success in their new positions. Leo must hold together a fracturing Catholic Church, and Carney must unite Canada to overcome the economic damage already done to the country by a predatory American president.

Just as the elevation of Leo is a matter of importance far beyond Catholicism, the election of Carney will have an effect reaching beyond Canada. Each is now a world leader, and their arrivals have come at a time of deep anxiety in both at home and abroad.

If Leo uses his newly acquired moral voice to speak against war and the unbearable suffering of the people of Gaza and Ukraine caused by the rapacious greed that underlies these wars, a new sense of hope will be felt everywhere. If Carney can quell the avariciousness of United States President Donald Trump by fostering strong co-operation with a range of other countries, our nation will once again be a significant player in international politics.

Pope Leo, known as Cardinal Robert Prevost before last week's papal conclave, was born in Chicago and thus the church now has its first American pope. The relationship between the church and the American presidency will now be in the spotlight.

It remains to be seen how much influence Leo will have on American policy. If the spiritual leader who has no army can influence the superpower spending the lion's share of world military expenditures to invest in the development of peoples rather than inventing new weapons of war, it will be no small miracle.

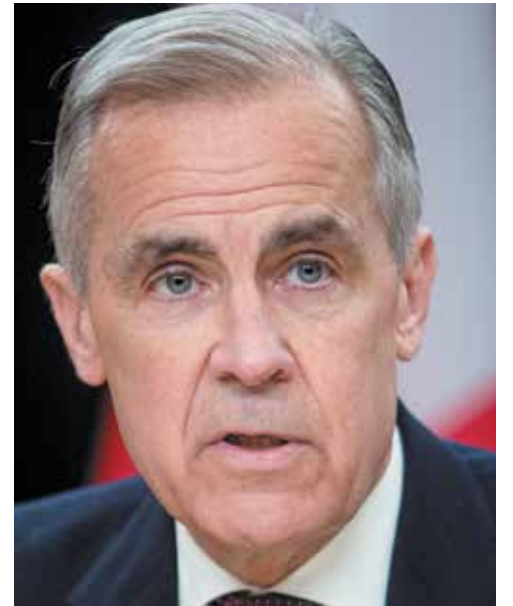
Previous popes have called out for the world's resources to be devoted to the development of peoples rather than enriching the arms merchants, but to little avail. The social justice encyclicals of Leo's predecessors have laid out a course for economic justice, a green economy and preservation of the planet. The world's major governments—not just the American one—have virtually ignored papal teaching, only once in a while giving it lip service.

Leo's background working with the poor in Peru suggests that he will be a worthy successor to Pope Francis, who held the poor close to heart. But will Leo have the strength and passion to hammer home social justice messages? And did the cardinals actually elect him to do this, or did they have uppermost in mind electing a peer whose resume offends neither liberals nor conservatives, and thus preserve a facade of unity?

We cannot yet assess Leo, but we must hope that his pontificate will, as he said from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica on May 8, "help each other to build bridges—with dialogue, with encounter, uniting all of us to be one people always in peace."

Carney also speaks of dialogue, and certainly his encounter with Trump in the Oval office on May 6 showed that dialogue does not depend only on words. It depends on determination to communicate an attitude of respect so that opposing forces can find mutual interests to allow them to move forward.

Carney needs to influence the American president that the common good is served by recognizing—first of all—the integrity of the other side, so that each can contribute to a stronger whole. In Carney's case, this would lead to a stronger Canada, which is his primary responsibility. And in so doing, Carney would enable this country to further the interests of global security by strengthening the pillars of peace—the United Nations system—rather than deluding ourselves that more arms equals peace. After all, on what reasonable grounds can we expect peace in the world to be strengthened by increasing still further Canada's military budget? Instead, it is Canada's vision for peace through a fairer system of economic development that Carney must explicate.



If Pope Leo, left, uses his moral voice to speak against war and the unbearable suffering of the people of Gaza and Ukraine, a new sense of hope will be felt everywhere. If Prime Minister Mark Carney, right, can quell Donald Trump by fostering strong co-operation with a range of other countries, Canada could be a significant player in global politics. Photograph courtesy of Wikipedia, and The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Here, the Pope and Carney have a common mission: they are fresh faces commanding new attention, and they must use the microphones they have been handed to beat back the drums of war and lift up the hopes of humanity.

Former Senator Douglas Roche's latest book is *Keep Hope Alive: Essays for a War-free World* (Amazon).
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