

On Page and Screen: Adaptations of Literature in Recent Film

Session 4: Conclave

Welcome



Daniel Cordle



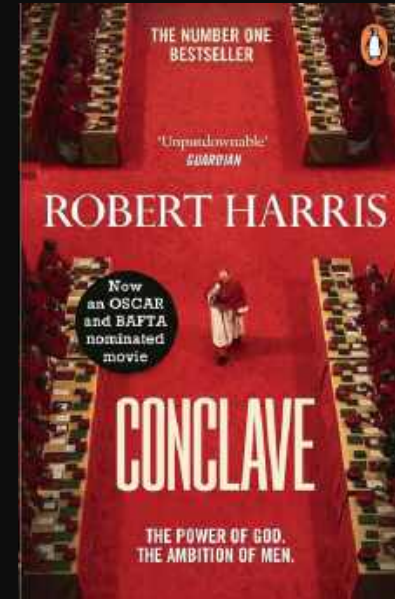
- [Sabbadin:] ‘We are mortal men. We serve an ideal; we cannot always *be* ideal.’ [p. 244]
- A line of Kant’s came into [Lomeli’s] mind: *Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made* ... The Church was built of crooked timber – how could it not be? But by the grace of God it fitted together. It had endured two thousand years; if necessary it would last another two weeks without a Pope. He felt suffused by a deep and mysterious love for his colleagues and their frailties. [p. 310]



Epigraph: human fallibility

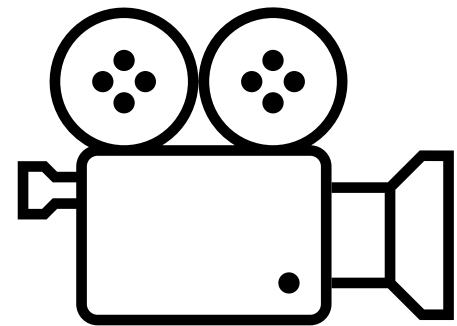
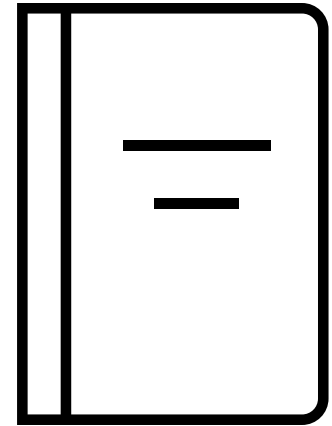
What did you think of this week's book and film?

- What interested you about the book and/or film?
- What did the film do differently to the book?
- What is gained in the translation from book to film and what is lost?
- What, for you, were the main issues in the book/film?
- What do you think of the artistic choices made by Robert Harris and Edward Berger?
- Were there any moments in book or film that struck you as particularly interesting?



A few of the differences between book and film

- Minor changes fit the film to the actors/time: Lomeli becomes Lawrence; Benítez's ministry is in Kabul, not Baghdad
- The camera roams (slightly) more freely than the narrative perspective in the book – e.g. in the book we only see Sister Agnes and the nuns when Lomeli encounters them; in the film, their work features in brief montages that punctuate the main scenes
- Lawrence's frustration is expressed visually in the film (tearing at the toiletries bag, etc)
- There is a preliminary explosion in the film that does not occur in the book
- The explosion shatters the windows of the Sistine Chapel where the cardinals vote in the film; in the book, it shatters the windows to the hallway outside
- In the film, Bellini asks Lawrence for forgiveness for suspecting him of maneuvering to be Pope, resolving the tension between them
- Benitez gets a better speech in the film!
- The film introduces new symbolism – e.g. the turtles







Political thriller / detective fiction

- [T]o Lomeli, whose guilty recreation was **detective fiction**, [the sealed room] looked disturbingly like one of the **crime scenes** he had often read about. Red ribbon ran back and forth in a cat's cradle between the door and its frame. [pp. 39-40]
- [W]hen Lomeli gestured to [Tremblay] to follow, he did – the length of the lobby, around the corner and into the chapel. The annexe was deserted and in semi-darkness. Behind the toughened glass, the spotlit Vatican wall glowed greenish-blue, **like an opera set for a midnight assignation, or a murder**. The only other illumination came from the lamps above the altar. 'This is mysterious,' the Canadian said. 'What is it?' [p. 263]
- In the bluish half-light, Tremblay's face seemed suddenly stupefied [when he realises Lomeli has rumbled him]. He looked **as if he had been struck a heavy blow on the back of the head**. He sat down quickly on the nearest chair. He said nothing for while, but just stared straight ahead, at the crucifix suspended above the altar. [p. 264]

Conclave ... is as much about the details as the drama. ... You will certainly come away from *Conclave* knowing more about thurible swinging than you ever thought it necessary to know. [**Guardian review of novel, 2016**]



Use of detail

[H]e took his time in dressing, meditating on the sacred nature of each element in an effort to heighten his spiritual awareness.

He slipped his arms into the scarlet woollen cassock and fastened the thirty-three buttons that ran from his neck to his ankles – one button for each year of Christ's life. Around his waist he tied the red watered-silk sash of the cincture, or fascia, designed to remind him of his vow of chastity, and checked to make sure its tasselled end hung to a point midway up his left calf. Then he pulled over his head the thin white linen rochet – the symbol, along with the mozzetta, of his judicial authority. The bottom two-thirds and the cuffs were of white lace with a floral pattern. He tied the tapes in a bow at his neck and tugged the rochet down so that it extended to just below his knees. Finally he put on his mozzetta, an elbow-length nine-buttoned scarlet cape.

p. 137

Some topics we might explore this week

Body and Spirit



Design of the Fisherman's Ring (Pope Leo XIII)

Faith and Doubt



Michelangelo, The Crucifixion of St Peter



The Vatican and
the Wider World



Simplicity and Ostentation



Theatricality and authenticity



Church and God

Body and Spirit



Design of the Fisherman's Ring (Pope Leo XIII)

Sede Vacante: the interregnum between popes



Lomeli had to step over the backs of their legs to get round to the pillows where the Pope lay slightly propped up, his body concealed by the white counterpane, his hands folded on his chest above his plain iron pectoral cross.

He was not used to seeing the Holy Father without his spectacles. These lay folded on the nightstand beside a scuffed travel alarm clock. The frames had left red pinch-marks on either side of the bridge of his nose. Often the faces of the dead, in Lomeli's experience, were slack and stupid. But this one seemed alert, almost amused, as if interrupted in mid-sentence. As he bent to kiss the forehead, he noticed a faint smudge of white toothpaste at the left corner of the mouth, and caught the smell of peppermint and the hint of some floral sharpness.

pp. 4-5

The ring did not come off easily. Poor Wozniak, sweating with embarrassment, had to work it back and forth over the knuckle. But eventually it came free and he carried it on his outstretched palm to Tremblay, who took a pair of shears from the silver box, the sort of tool one might use to dead-head roses, thought Lomeli ...

p. 8



Corporeality in *Conclave*

It was also agreed that the Pope's body should be embalmed. Lomeli said, 'But we must ensure it's done properly.' He had never forgotten filing past Pope Paul VI's body in St Peter's in 1978: in the August heat, the face had turned greyish-green, the jaw had sagged, and there was a definite whiff of corruption. Yet even that ghoulish embarrassment wasn't as bad as the occasion twenty years previously, when Pople Pius XII's body had fermented in its coffin and exploded like a firecracker outside the church of St John Lateran. 'We must make sure no one takes any photographs of the body.' That indignity, too, had been inflicted upon Pius XII, whose corpse had been shown in news magazines all over the world.

pp. 23-24



Corporeality in *Conclave*

Lomeli finds inspiration in the pope's bedroom

What he was quite sure of was that at some point during this time, the Holy Father entered his mind and spoke to him. Of course, it *could* have been a trick of the imagination: the rationalists had an explanation for everything, even for inspiration. All he knew was that before he knelt he was in despair, and afterwards, when he scrambled to his feet and stared at the bed, the dead man had told him what to do.

p. 273





Lomeli feels the spirit pass over him during the final vote

Afterwards, when he tried to describe his emotions to Bellini, he said that he felt as though a great wind had briefly lifted him off his feet and whirled him into the air, only to set him down abruptly and go whirling after someone else. 'That was the Holy Spirit, I suppose. The sensation was terrifying and exhilarating and certainly unforgettable – I am glad to have experienced it – but when it was over, I felt nothing except relief.' It was the truth, more or less.

p. 363

Faith and Doubt

Michelangelo, The Crucifixion of St Peter





Lomeli contemplates Michelangelo's frescoes

While the cardinals voted, Lomeli passed his time in contemplation of the ceiling panels nearest to him. The prophet Jeremiah lost in misery. The anti-Semite Haman denounced and slain. The prophet Jonah about to be swallowed by a giant eel. The turmoil of it struck him for the first time; the violence; the force.

pp. 200-01

Lomeli contemplates Michelangelo's *Creation of the Sun and Moon*



He craned his neck to examine God separating light and darkness. The creation of the sun and planets. God dividing water from the earth. Without noticing, he allowed himself to become lost in the painting. *And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in great perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken ...* He felt a sudden intimation of disaster, so profound that he shuddered, and when he looked around he realised that an hour had passed and the scrutineers were preparing to count the ballots. **[pp. 200-01]**

Lomeli contemplates Michelangelo's *Creation of the Sun and Moon*



[Lomeli:] '[W]hat a ferocious work it is, when one has time to study it. So much disaster bearing down upon us – executions, killings, the Flood. One detail I hadn't noticed before is God's expression when He separates light from darkness: it is pure murder.'

p. 205

The eyes of St Peter

[T]ogether they walked towards the altar, between Michelangelo's frescos of St Peter and St Paul. Peter, on the right of the aisle, was depicted being crucified upside down. His head was twisted in such a way that he seemed to stare out in angry accusation at whoever had the temerity to look at him. Lomeli felt the saint's scorching eyes on his back all the way to the altar steps.

pp.141-42

He looked up to find the chapel had almost emptied. Leaving the altar and passing St Peter's crucifixion for a second time, he tried to keep his gaze fixed on the door ahead. But the force of the painting was irresistible. *And you?* the eyes of the martyred saint seemed to demand. *In what way are you worthy to choose my successor?*

pp. 143



Lomeli feels a connection with Michelangelo's depiction of St Peter

As ever, the reproachful eyes of St Peter, about to be crucified upside down, stared out at him from Michelangelo's fresco. He pressed on up to the altar, genuflected, then on impulse turned, and walked back halfway down the aisle to contemplate the painting. There were perhaps fifty figures depicted, most of them staring at the well-muscled, near-naked saint on the cross, which was in the process of being hauled upright. Only St Peter himself gazed out of the frame and into the living world, and not quite of it – but out of the corner of his eye, as if he had just spotted you passing as was daring your to walk on by. Never had Lomeli felt such an overwhelming connection with a work of art. He took off his biretta and knelt before it.



Lomeli prays to St Peter

O blessed St Peter, head and chief of the Apostles, you are guardian of the keys of the heavenly kingdom, and against you the powers of hell do not prevail. You are the rock of the Church and the shepherd of Christ's flock. Lift me from the ocean of my sins and free me from the hand of all my adversaries. Help me, O good shepherd, show me what I must do ...

He must have spent at least ten minutes praying to St Peter, sunk so deep in thought that he never heard the cardinals being ushered across the Sala Regia A wonderful feeling of peace and certainty had stolen upon him. He knew what he should do.

May I serve Jesus Christ and you, and with your help, after the close of a good life, may I deserve to attain the reward of eternal happiness in heaven where you are forever the guardian of the gates and the shepherd of the flock. Amen.

pp. 333-34



Lomeli finds faith

‘Fortify yourself, Ray. Look at this extraordinary work, as I have been doing, and consider how prophetic it is. Do you see, at the top of the painting, the shrouds of darkness? I used to think they were merely clouds, but now I’m sure it’s smoke. There is a fire somewhere, beyond our field of vision, that Michelangelo chooses not to show us – a symbol of violence, of battle, strife. And do you see the way Peter is straining to keep his head upright and level, even as he is being hauled up feet-first? Why is he doing that? Surely because he is determined not to surrender to the violence being done to him. He is using his last reserves of strength to demonstrate his faith and his humanity. He wishes to maintain his equilibrium in defiance of a world that, for him, is literally turning upside down.

‘Isn’t this a sign for us today, from the founder of the Church? Evil is seeking to turn the world on its head, but even as we suffer, the Blessed Apostle Peter instructs us to maintain our reason and our belief in Christ the Risen Saviour. We shall complete the work that God expects of us, Ray. The Conclave will go on.’

pp. 335-36





The Vatican and the Wider World

The world outside

Occasionally above the noise of the helicopter floated the distant sounds of protest: thousands of voices chanting in unison, punctuated by klaxons and drumbeats and whistles. Lomeli tried to distinguish what it was they were complaining about. It was impossible. Supporters of gay marriage and opponents of civil union, pro-divorce advocates and Families for Catholic Unity, women demanding to be ordained as priests and women demanding abortions and contraception, Muslims and anti-Muslims, immigrants and anti-immigrants ... they merged into a single undifferentiated cacophony of rage. Police sirens cried out somewhere, first one and then another and then a third, as if they were courting one another from opposite ends of the city.

We are an Ark, he thought, surrounded by a rising flood of discord.

p. 45



- They had recommended that **every window should be boarded up**. Lomeli had vetoed the proposal. The lack of daylight and the **claustrophobia would have been intolerable**. [p. 32]
- He opened the window and tried the shutter, forgetting **it had been sealed**, like all the others in the building. Every television and radio had been removed. The cardinals were to be **entirely sequestered from the world** for as long as the election lasted. ... He wondered what view he would have had ... He had already **lost his bearings**. [p. 41]
- He wished he could have opened the shutters for some fresh air. **He felt claustrophobic**. The great bell of St Peter's had ceased tolling at midnight. In the **sealed chamber**, the dark early-morning hours were long and trackless. [p. 109]
- He promised himself that the next morning he would walk to the Sistine, whether it was raining or not. This **airless seclusion** was not merely unhealthy: it was uncondusive to spiritual reflection. [p.168]
- [Lomeli :] 'It's not so much the lack of space as the **lack of light and air** that I find oppressive. It's **giving me nightmares**.' [p.239]

Sealed off from the outside



The bomb



The full extent of his perjury did not strike him until he stood before the altar to place his ballot paper on the chalice. At that instant he found himself eye to eye with Michelangelo's depiction of the damned being turfed out of their barque and dragged down to hell. *Dear Lord, forgive my sin.* But he could not stop now.

As he tipped his vote into the urn, there was a terrific bang, the floor quivered, and from behind him came the sound of panes of glass shattering and crashing on to stone. For a long moment Lomeli was sure he must be dead, and in those few seconds, when time seemed suspended, he discovered that thought is not always sequential ... Thus he was at once terrified that he had brought God's judgement down upon his own head and yet simultaneously elated to be given proof of its existence

[pp. 318-19]

The world outside

The air had become chilly. Through the broken windows came a strange, soft, immense sound – a murmur, a sigh. The cardinals looked at one another. They couldn't comprehend it at first. But Lomeli recognised it immediately. It was the noise of tens of thousands assembling in St Peter's Square.

...

In the silence, rising and falling like a giant wave in the distance, came again the low, faint cry of the faithful.

pp. 360-61





Simplicity and Ostentation

The Pope's room

- Fifty anonymous square metres, furnished to suit the income and taste of some mid-level commercial salesman. There was nothing personal in it. Pale lemon walls and curtains. A parquet floor for easy cleaning. Standard-issue table, desk, plus sofa and two armchairs, scallop-backed and upholstered in some blue washable fabric. Even the dark wooden prie-dieu was identical to a hundred others in the hostel. The Holy Father had stayed here as a cardinal before the Conclave that elected him Pope, and had never moved out: one looked at the luxurious apartment to which he was entitled in the Apostolic Palace, with its library and its private chapel, had been enough to send him running. **[p. 9]**
- [T]here was a part of Lomeli that rather hankered after Renaissance flummery [as he thinks about thrones that are no longer used], and privately he thought the late Pope had occasionally gone too far in his endless harping on about simplicity and humility. An excess of simplicity, after all, was just another form of ostentation, and pride in one's humility a sin. **[p. 33]**





Inside/outside the Sistine Chapel

Lomeli never failed to be disappointed by the dull dun brickwork of the [Sistine] chapel's exterior. Why had every ounce of human genius been poured into that exquisite interior – almost too much genius, in his opinion: it gave one a kind of aesthetic indigestion – and yet seemingly no thought at all had been given to the outside? It looked like a warehouse, or a factory. *Or perhaps that was the point. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in God's mystery.*



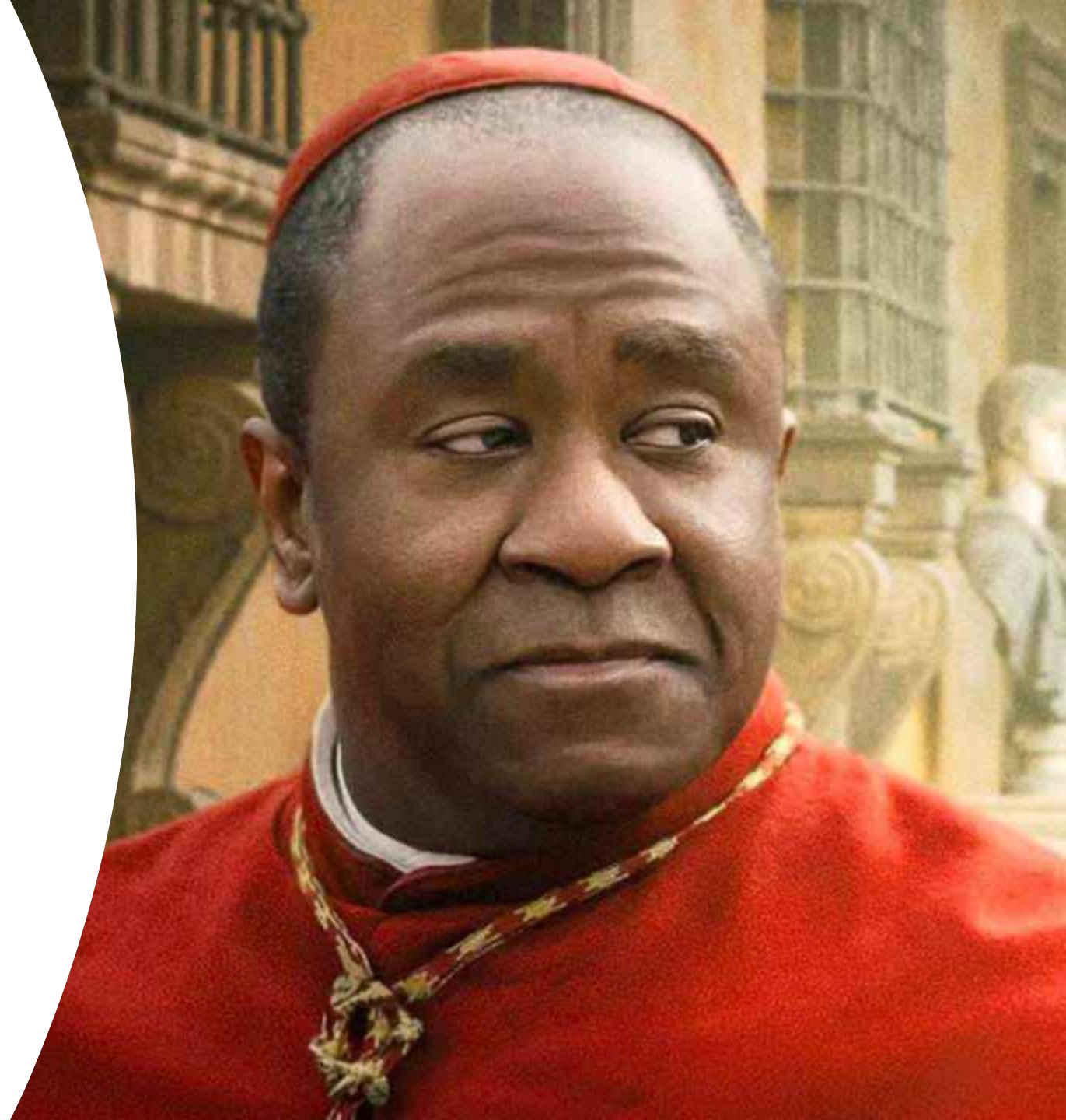
Theatricality and authenticity

Cardinal Adeyemi

‘The papacy *is* a huge burden,’ [Adeyemi said]. ‘People need to be reminded of that.’

Tremblay frowned and said nothing. Bellini glanced at the floor. A slight but definite tension had arisen, and it took Lomeli a few moments to realise why. Reminding people of the immense burden of the papacy carried the obvious implication that it was an office best filled by a younger man – and Adeyemi, at just over sixty, was nearly a decade younger than the other two.

pp. 17-18





Cardinal Tremblay

Now [Lomeli] rather regretted [allowing Tremblay to celebrate morning Masses]. He saw that he had given the Canadian the perfect opportunity to remind the Conclave of his skill at performing the liturgy. He sang well. He looked like a cleric in some Hollywood romantic movie: Spencer Tracy came to mind. His gestures were dramatic enough to suggest he was infused with the divine spirit, yet not so theatrical that they seemed false or egocentric. When Lomeli queued to receive Communion and knelt before the cardinal, the sacrilegious thought occurred to him that just this one service might have been worth three or four votes to the Canadian.

pp. 188-89

Cardinal Lomeli

The elevator lurched to an abrupt halt but his stomach seemed to go on rising, and he had to grip the metal handrail to steady himself. ... The cardinal raised his chin. His public mask. The doors opened. **[p. 3]**

Before the evening was over, [Lomeli] had managed to speak in turn to each of the other three leading candidates, and to each he repeated his pledge to withdraw. ...

Tremblay frowned and rubbed his chin. 'Forgive me, Dean, but if we do that, won't we simply make you look like a paragon of modesty? If one was being Machiavellian about it, one could almost say it was a clever move to swing votes.'

It was such an insulting response, Lomeli was tempted to raise the issue of the so-called withdrawn report into the Camerlengo's activities. ... Instead he said politely, 'Well that is the situation, Your Eminence, and I shall leave you to handle it as you see fit.' **[pp. 179-80]**



- He was a little below average height, with a fine, handsome face. It was hard to put an age to him. His skin was smooth, his cheekbones sharp, his body thin almost to the point of emaciation. He had a feathery handshake. **[p.78]**
- [Benítez's arms] were bone-thin, although yet again he sensed a certain inner wiry strength. **[p.81]**
- The choir dress ... was too long. His rochet hung almost to the ground and he nearly tripped over it as he reached the altar. ... The Filipino had an attractive quality, [Lomeli] thought, not easy to define: an inner grace. **[p. 157]**
- [Lomeli] noticed the little kit of toiletries ... a toothbrush, a small tube of toothpaste, a bottle of deodorant, and a plastic disposable razor, still in its cellophane wrapper. **[p. 253]**
- 'Your Eminence, I will be heard!' ... The high-pitched tone cut through the murmur of conversation. **[p. 344]**
- With the cardinals at his back and on either side looking down at him, applauding him, he appeared, at his moment of triumph, even smaller and more out of place than before – a tiny figure, head still bowed in prayer, his face obscured by a tumbling lock of black hair just as it had been the first time Lomeli saw him with his rosary in Sister Agnes's office. **[p. 364]**

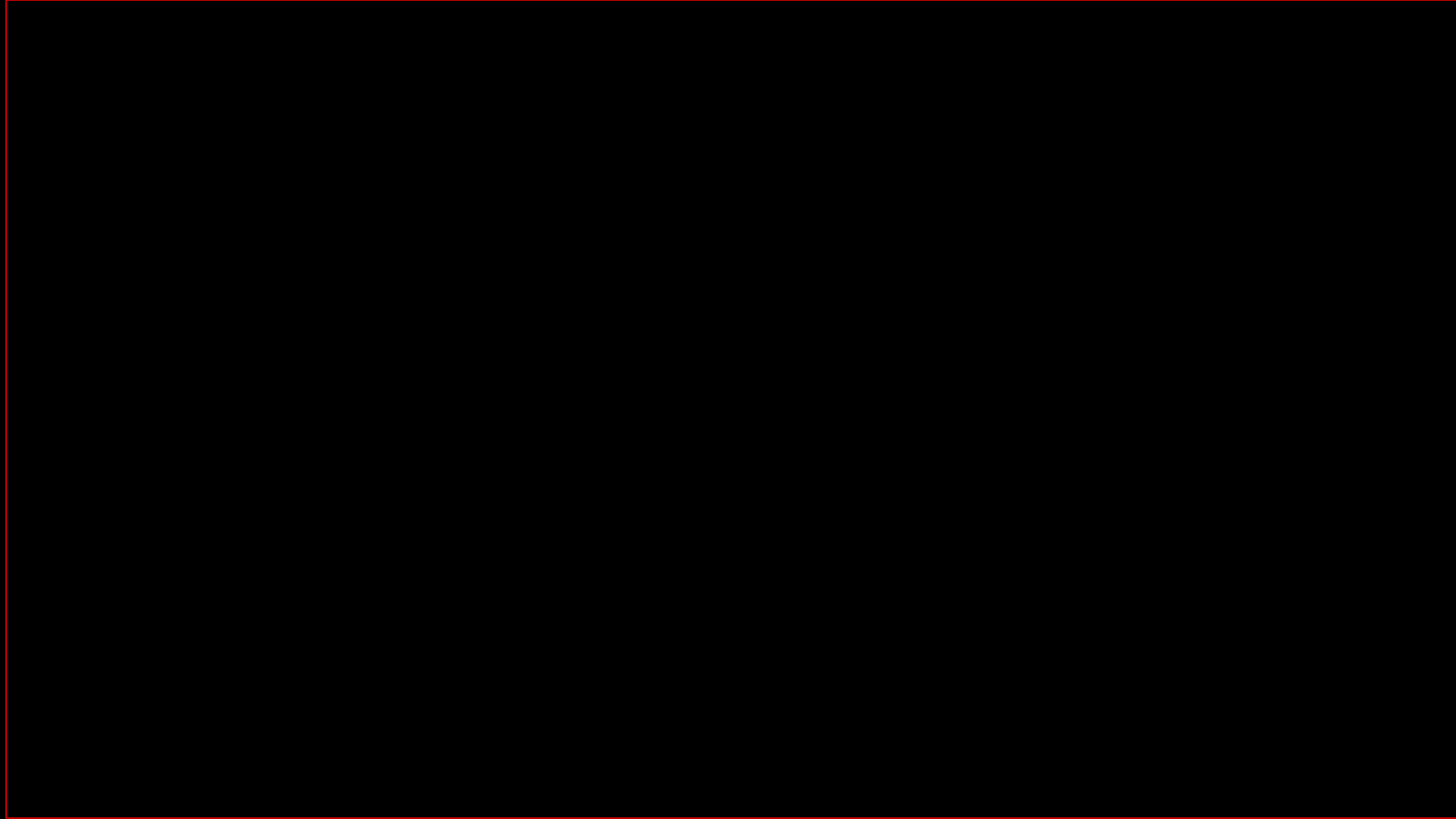


Cardinal Benítez



Church and God

Lawrence's impromptu homily



Tedesco's and Benítez's speeches



Next week:
more
politicking!

