



FILM: **CONCLAVE**

FDG RATING: 4.3 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Edward Berger: *director*
Ralph Fiennes: *actor, Cardinal Lawrence*
Stanley Tucci: *actor, Cardinal Bellini*
John Lithgow: *actor, Cardinal????*

DATE: January 19, 2025

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **CONCLAVE**

The 2024 Oscar nominated film, *Conclave*, stars Ralph Fiennes as Cardinal Lawrence, who by virtue of his position as Dean, will preside over the College of Cardinals, sequestered in a special dormitory to select the next pope. They meet in the Sistine Chapel to cast their ballots that are written by hand and counted by hand. The voting repeats continuously until a two thirds majority is achieved for a single cardinal. After each vote, the ballots are burned creating a spiral of gray smoke rising from the top of the chapel and white smoke only when a pope has finally been selected which can take several days.

We agreed the acting was outstanding. A stellar cast includes John Lithgow as Cardinal Tremblay, a candidate whose currying of support may have crossed a line from unseemly to unethical; Stanley Tucci as Cardinal Bellini who is candid about his liberal views and thus scares off many potential supporters; and, of course, Ralph Fiennes.

For those who had no idea about the ancient, mysterious process to choose a new pope, the insight was fascinating. But in a broader perspective, we see that every human has flaws, even those we hold in utmost spiritual respect. Leaders whom we hold in highest esteem and look to for guidance, can be hiding petty, and immoral behaviors. Watching the flaws of specific cardinals be exposed, and seeing the back stabbing they resorted to as they competed against each other gave the film its depth. It appears that cardinals are no different than other human beings who have a need to increase their power over other people or over situations, to be the one in charge, in control. As one published critic observed, "it is the universal humanity, the ambition, the manipulation, the grand visions, the pettiness, the disagreements about faith vs. doubt, progress vs. tradition, "we" vs. "they" that resonate most deeply." The intolerance of other religions becomes apparent. We couldn't help seeing parallels to our own political situation where selecting leaders in our country and cabinet, brings past indiscretions to the forefront with efforts to sway votes to gain the majority needed to win.

An extremely intelligent and well written script noted one discussion participant. Another said the story was surprisingly gripping. Plus, the captivating cinematography was outstanding.

It is sometimes said that positions of great power should go only to those wise and humble enough not to want them. That could especially apply to the position of pope. Some of us thought the ending was predictable. The quiet, humble, cardinal from Kabul who exhibited the most "priestly" behavior was selected. And that would have been a satisfying closure. But when he reveals to Cardinal Lawrence who privately asks the new leader of the Catholic church about his time providing service in a "clinic", Cardinal Benítez, explains that he was born an intersex person and he had checked into a hospital for a procedure which he did not go through. Some of us thought the jolting twist, although true to the 2016 novel, went too far and interfered with the satisfying closure.

Was the point of the film to show the hypocrisy of the Catholic institution: the most qualified cardinal would not even be allowed to be a cardinal because of his physical body? And that if those humans who have risen to highest level of respect in religious institutions continue to exhibit bad judgement, immoral behavior, how can we expect better from regular people? Thought provoking questions.

Outstanding acting, entertaining, literate, informative, but not exceptional was one opinion. But our votes were uniformly high, praising *Conclave* with a collective priestly score of 4.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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