

## All in the Family

Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party has tagged her son, Bilawal Zardari, to represent them in the upcoming election. Following the assassination of the former prime minister her followers quickly dragooned the young man onto the ticket in her stead.

He is nineteen years old, an Oxford undergraduate, and has no political experience. Everyone admits the symbolic nature of his candidacy. If elected he plans to remain in England to hit the books while his dad Ali Asif Zardari actually runs things.

This is hard for Americans to conceive, but in the middle east it makes sense. Political attitudes still hark back to the days of dynasty. The name Bhutto rings with the sort of de facto royalty once associated with the name Kennedy here in the States. This explains why the young man has chosen to hyphenate his surname to include the matriarch, now styling himself "Bhutto-Zardari."

In a society where lineage confers authority, leadership passes from a martyred elder to a promising descendant.

All of this bears on the violent death of another middle eastern leader, also a reformer who challenged the self-styled rulers in a time of social turmoil. The world of Jesus did not differ all that much from today's Pakistan. A foreign superpower interested itself in the region for reasons of economic exploitation and national security while various local opportunists sought to wield what power the empire left on display as a token of local sovereignty. When various local revolutionaries arose and refused to play the game like gentlemen, they found themselves occupying center stage of a bull's eye.

When Jesus' various enemies converged in a perfect storm of realpolitik to end his life, history and culture suggested a response similar to our own modern analog.

The curious thing is why it didn't happen.

Historian N. T. Wright argues that Rome rubbing out a Jewish revolutionary was no unusual occurrence. When the Romans rubbed out your Messiah you had about three options: slink back home and hope your picture never appeared down at the local post office, retranslate revolution as faithfulness

to Torah as the rabbi's did, or (and this was the top choice) *go get yourself a new messiah, usually a family member.*

Messiah was to be a descendant of David. Name and lineage mattered more than charisma or talent. And, Wright points out, Jesus' followers had just such a candidate handy: James, the carpenter's half-brother who, by all accounts both sacred and secular, was a powerful speaker and respected leader.

History then poses the question of what the early disciples actually did. Given a choice of door number one, door number two, or door number three, they instead insisted on continuing to follow their original messiah because they believed he had risen from the dead and remained alive.

Benazir Bhutto was a courageous woman and a powerful leader. Her followers will, doubtless, continue to quote her words and claim her as their inspiration. What they have not even vaguely suggested is that they will leave her name on the ticket because, though she died in front of plenty of witnesses, she now lives. Yet this is just what the early Christians did, the belief for which they willingly died.

The resurrection of Jesus insults logic and defies belief. But any other explanation is even harder to swallow.

He is Risen!  
Doug