CONCLAVE — The Certainty Speech

Nuclear stress, intonation & persuasive rhetoric — C2

Cardinal Lawrence (Ralph Fiennes) delivers this sermon to the cardinals at the opening of the conclave. Mark the nuclear stress and intonation contour (↗ rise / ↘ fall / ↘↗ fall-rise) for each tone unit (separated by /), then justify your choice. Compare with the clip afterwards.

Model example

Sentence 0 (model)

If there was only CERtainty, ↗

and if there was no DOUBT, ↗

there would be no MYStery. ↘

Why this word / this contour?

The two conditionals are parallel (same fall-rise contour, left "open"); the final nucleus falls on "mystery" — the resolution of the period.

Your turn — 4 sentences from the same sermon

Sentence 1

Certainty / is the great enemy / of unity.

Why this word / this contour?

Sentence 2

Certainty / is the deadly enemy / of tolerance.

Why this word / this contour?

Sentence 3

Even Christ / was not certain / at the end.

Why this word / this contour?

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Sentence 4

Let us pray / that God will grant us / a pope who doubts.

Why this word / this contour?

Rubric

Criterion	4 – Excellent	3 – Good	2 – Developing	1 – Limited
Nuclear stress placement	Stress consistently placed on the semantically prominent word; matches native contour or offers strong justification.	Mostly accurate placement; one or two minor mismatches with weak or no justification.	Placement inconsistent; stress often on grammatical rather than lexical words.	Little to no evidence of contrastive/nuclear stress awareness.
Intonation contour	Rise/fall/fall-rise marked accurately for all 4 sentences; contour choice is justified.	Contour marked correctly for most sentences; justification is partial.	Contour marked for some sentences only, or applied inconsistently.	Contour not marked or applied at random.
Justification (metalanguage)	Uses precise terms (focus, contrast, given/new info) to justify every choice.	Justification present but relies on intuition more than terminology.	Justification vague or missing for some sentences.	No justification given.
Spoken production (shadowing)	Reproduces the target contour and stress with clear, natural-sounding rhythm.	Recognisable attempt at the target contour; occasional flattening of stress.	Contour largely flat or syllable-timed; little differentiation of stress.	No clear attempt to reproduce contour or stress.

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