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The next pope will not come from the United States

Tom Gallagher | Feb. 14, 2013 NCR Today
Benedict Resigns

Simply put, no U.S. cardinal has the chops to be the next pope, whether it's due to depth of theological writings, expert managerial capability, the facility of languages, or a global presence, among other reasons.

My *NCR* colleague, John Allen, has done his level best to introduce into the mainstream media the notion that Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York and Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C., are contenders for the papacy at next month's conclave. To be sure, Allen has as much, if not more, experience covering the Vatican as any U.S. journalist.

From CNN on Monday [1]:

> Wuerl is a top American contender for the papacy, according to Allen. Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York, could also be considered, but both Americans would be on the "C or D list" of candidates, Allen said.

With no disrespect to either of His Eminences, I respectfully disagree.

Let's start with Cardinal Dolan.

His pluses include his happiness as a priest and his desire to use the media to advance his goals on behalf of the church. After an introverted pope, the thinking goes, the universal church needs an extroverted pope. With Cardinal Dolan, one gets an extrovert.

But upon review, what do we really know about Cardinal Dolan?

For starters, he lacks episcopal experience. He was ordained an auxiliary bishop for the St. Louis archdiocese in 2001. In 2002, he became archbishop of Milwaukee archdiocese. Then in 2009, he came to New York as the new archbishop and became a cardinal in 2012. Meteoric by any measure.

But let's take a closer, albeit brief, look.

In Milwaukee, his performance is less than stellar [2], especially when it comes to the priest sexual abuse scandal, transferring cemetery funds out of the reach of bankruptcy proceedings and operating with not the fullest of transparency. He got high marks for being a baseball-, hot dog- and beer-loving archbishop.

In New York, his attempt to dissuade the state's legislature and broader community against marriage equality was feeble at best. In fact, during the most crucial, final days prior to the vote, Cardinal Dolan was in Seattle, attending a U.S. bishops meeting he was leading. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a practicing Catholic, and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg marshaled enough support to pass the legislation and enact the law. Irrespective of one's view of marriage equality, Cardinal Dolan seemed to have checked out of that political fight at the most crucial time.

As president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Dolan's leadership on the HHS contraception mandate has been checkered, to say the least. He has been silent when a number of his fellow bishops hurled awful comments at President Barack Obama.

Early on in this dispute, Cardinal Dolan voluntarily said that "best thing U.S. bishops did" was hiring an attractive woman to lead the anti-abortion fight. He also said in a speech that perhaps a doctor ought to prescribe a prostitute to help a man with a sexual dysfunction. Hardly the kind of prudence necessary to be pope.

Moreover, Cardinal Dolan offered up for a vote a very poorly conceived and written statement on the economy at November's U.S. bishops' meeting, which was withdrawn [3] after withering criticism. A novice move. Concerns exist about Cardinal Dolan's lack of understanding of how to properly deploy USCCB staff without micromanaging them.

It remains unclear whether Cardinal Dolan can actually manage the New York archdiocese. Some believe Cardinal Dolan is very weak administratively. With the appointment of New York's vicar general, Bishop Dennis Sullivan, to become the new bishop of Camden, N.J., additional administrative demands will be on Cardinal Dolan.

Whether it's Cardinal Dolan's administrative inexperience or a constitutional disinclination to administration, the next pope has to pay attention to basic management of the Vatican. It takes hard work, focus and follow-through away from the cameras or the ballpark. For the last two papacies, proper management or stewardship of the governing apparatus of the church has been left unattended.

Cardinal Dolan is not a well-traveled priest and lacks a global reputation (beyond widely circulated media reports). Cardinal Dolan lacks the deep, theological writing skills, or at least he has not demonstrated them since he's been a priest.

He is not a linguist, a trait so necessary for the leader of the universal church. It is true that at the last consistory, Cardinal Dolan gave a speech in Italian that was well-received by the other cardinals, the only constituency that matters in a conclave.

The next pope needs to be fluent in one or more languages critical to the future of the church besides English and Italian. The church does not need a pope traveling with a bag of Rosetta Stone tapes. You can just see it now on the Alitalia papal plane: "Hey, Monsignor: Do you have the Portuguese tape? Are we in Brasília yet?"

No, for all of his charisma, the papacy is not in the cards for Cardinal Dolan. The world needs someone other than the Budweiser cardinal from New York.

What about Cardinal Donald Wuerl?

Cardinal Wuerl is a serious person for sure. He is a hardworking priest. He is a seasoned bishop, having served as an auxiliary bishop in the Seattle archdiocese for just under two years then as bishop of the Pittsburgh diocese for 18 years. He has been the archbishop of Washington, D.C., since 2006, and was elevated to the College of

Cardinals in 2010. Cardinal Wuerl is an experienced bishop, that is without question.

According to his official biography [4]:

> Cardinal Wuerl is known for his teaching ministry and is involved nationally and internationally in education, health care and social service organizations. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including the best-selling cathecisms, *The Teaching of Christ* and *The Catholic Way*. His recent books include, *Seek First the Kingdom* (2012), *Faith That Transforms Us: Reflections on the Creed* (January 2013), and *New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today* (January 2013).

The perennially gaunt cardinal has never been accused of having rock-star charisma. He is a loyal churchman. Cautious, perhaps to a fault. Not known as a global figure by any stretch, nor does he possesses the ability to speak and write in three, four or five languages.

Cardinal Wuerl is playing a critical role now in his current post by bringing a moderating voice to matters of federal public policy. Now more than ever, the U.S. church needs balanced, moderating voices. Cardinal Wuerl is where he needs to be: in Washington, not Rome.

Yes, both Cardinals Dolan and Wuerl will be critically important contributors to the development of a consensus necessary to elect the next pope, that is certain.

But no, the next pope will not be from the United States.

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