

What Would John Tracy Ellis Do?

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 16, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

During the coffee break, everyone was trying to discern the ideological significance of the just concluded elections. General agreement that some bishops, especially the younger ones, did not like the idea that the VP automatically gets promoted. Some younger bishops were not in the assembly three years ago.

Also, general agreement that Dolan's personality is so winning, he was broadly acceptable to the entire conference. One of the things that has long been told to me about Cardinal George applies equally to Archbishop Dolan: Everyone trusts him to keep the conference together, to listen to all voices and make sure no one feels like they "lost."

Dolan is not a fire-breathing conservative. Had Archbishop Chaput won the presidency or the vice-presidency, that would have been a signal that the bishops as a whole wanted to move in certain ideological direction. Dolan's election does not suggest such a shift.

One other thing to remember about Dolan. He was a student of Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, the noted and much beloved church historian who was also my mentor. Ellis had both a keen sense of the dynamics of the Church through history, and an equally sure grasp of the dominant currents in American public life. In his later years, he took a year to teach at Dunwoodie and became very close with Cardinal John O'Connor whom Msgr. admiringly called "a lion." I suspect that were he here today he would see some of that personal dynamism in the man who now sits on the archiepiscopal throne at St. Patrick's.

At the USCCB headquarters, where the staff must wonder what the new regime will bring, look for many to be asking: What Would Ellis Do?

Maybe they will make WWJTED? bracelets.

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