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Cardinal George: When selecting pope, must ask 'Can he govern?'

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NCR Today

Conclave 2013

Rome — Among several questions cardinals ask when electing one of their peers as the new leader of the global Roman Catholic church, said Chicago's Cardinal Francis George, is simply: "Can he govern?"

Speaking to CNN Friday, George, who participated in the election of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005, said the secret meeting of cardinals to select a new pontiff is "a very quiet time."

"You have a chance to contemplate the beginning of the world on the ceiling and the end of the world on the wall," said George, referring to the paintings of the Genesis accounts and of the Last Judgment on the walls and ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, where the conclave is held.

George said cardinals choose who to vote for by talking to peers who know those being mentioned as papal possibilities.

"What you do is you go to somebody who knows somebody who's being talked about and ask: 'What's he really like? How is his health?'" said George.

Continuing, George said other questions include: "How is his judgment? Can he govern? Does he have a universal heart, especially for the poor? Is he just a captive of his own place or his own culture?"

The reference to governance, while somewhat opaque, may reflect that at least some of the cardinals are taking into consideration the problems that faced Pope Benedict's papacy, including allegations that church governance had not been his specialty, especially in light of the document leaks that eventually led

to the trial of the pope's valet, Paolo Gabriele, in October.

In an interview Feb. 28, Australian Cardinal George Pell said that while Benedict was a "brilliant teacher," church governance "wasn't his strong point."

A clip of CNN's interview with George follows.

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