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Why is there no frontrunner in the papal election?

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Conclave 2013

As has been well reported by Joshua McElwee and John Allen, there are currently no frontrunners in the papal election. This could easily change in the next few days before the conclave starts, but it is surprising granted that it has been almost three weeks since Pope Emeritus Benedict announced his resignation. One would think that at least a couple of frontrunners would have surfaced by now.

Prior to the last conclave, everyone recognized Ratzinger was the front runner on the day the conclave began. The same was true for Paul VI and Pius XII. And although John Paul's election was a surprise, there still were front runners prior to the conclave: Cardinals Giovanni Benelli and Giuseppe Siri. When they deadlocked, the conclave looked for someone outside of Italy.

Why no front runner? Here are four hypotheses.

1. The cardinals need more time to get to know each other. Remember, 24 of the cardinals were appointed last year. That is one-fifth of the electors. While the curial cardinals and the more senior cardinals may know most of the cardinals, the newer cardinals are still matching faces to bios. The cardinals from outside Rome also know little about each other. This was the argument of those who did not want to rush into the conclave. Why hurry? This is the most important thing the cardinals will ever do in their lives.
2. The Roman curia is so divided that it is not capable of organizing a successful campaign as it did at the last conclave for Cardinal Ratzinger. Likewise, the Italians are divided. When it comes to church politics, these are the major players while the cardinals from outside Rome are from the minor leagues. So far, the outsiders don't even have someone to organize against. But Vatileaks

revealed and exacerbated the divisions within the curia. One faction is loyal to Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, and the other faction thinks he is the worst Secretary of State ever. They cannot work together. Even the anti-Bertone faction is not in agreement except in its opposition to him.

3. The College of Cardinals is filled with B students. This explanation argues that there are no outstanding members who are so good that they catch everyone's attention. Even the cardinals recognize this and therefore are having a hard time making up their minds. There is no Martini, no Ratzinger, no Pacelli, no Montini, no Benelli in this crowd. In selecting bishops and cardinals, Popes John Paul and Benedict put such a stress on loyalty that the talents necessary in a pope are lacking. On the other hand, it is doubtful that Christoph Schonborn or Gianfranco Ravasi ever got a 'B' in their lives. But are academic chops enough this time?
4. Or it could be that there are so many qualified candidates that the cardinals are having a hard time choosing. Check out John Allen's list.

There are only hypotheses. Are any of them true? Or is there another reason for a lack of frontrunners? Only the cardinals know and they are not talking. Give us your comments.

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