

Pope Francis' appointments will create church of the future

Arthur Jones | Mar. 27, 2013

Pope Francis

Analysis

If Pope Francis is serious about reforming the Roman Curia, God bless him. Further, if he undertakes that reform with the poor in mind, the first question is not where might he begin, but how long has he got?

Of our nine popes since 1913, only Pius XII, John Paul II and Benedict XVI have made it to 82 or beyond. So the question about a 76-year-old pontiff isn't as impertinent as it first may seem.

Francis lives simply, walks quickly and walks a lot. Can we assume (to achieve Pius XII's 82 years) the new pope has six vigorous years to work with?

If so, six years takes the story to 2019. By 2019 Francis will be able to appoint about 40 percent of the College of Cardinals, approximately 50 of the 120.

The first part of the conjecture looks then to the longer-term utility of significantly changing the makeup of his college.

Which traditional cardinalate sees might cease to get a cardinal? And which Vatican jobs that normally bring the coveted red hat might no longer get one? With apologies to Cardinals Edwin O'Brien and James Harvey (nothing personal intended), does the grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem need to be a cardinal? Does the archpriest of St. Paul's Outside the Walls have to be a cardinal to get the job done? Perhaps so. But unless Francis expands the numbers for the College of Cardinals, someone will lose out down the road.

If Francis has no consistory for six years, and therefore appoints no new cardinals, Italy by 2019 would have perhaps 12 cardinals still at conclave voting age compared to 28 today. The United States would have perhaps seven, down from 11.

If Francis is serious about the church representing the poor, then he probably has to consider cardinals representing the regions of the world with the greatest poverty, and if serious about evangelization, the fewest Catholics.

If he scans the world's 100 poorest countries the greater number are in Africa. No surprises there, and that offers possibilities.

A large number of poorer countries are predominantly Muslim. A friend of mine suggests that one way Francis could change the face of evangelization is to send all the bishops who have titular sees in North Africa over to North Africa to start their evangelizing in their other dioceses.

Further, Francis, if he wants to improve the church's influence in key areas of the world, could run his finger down a list of the world's 100 largest cities. He would see that Tokyo, with more than 13 million people, has no cardinal, while Malta, with 400,000 inhabitants, had one.

Rearranging the seating at the conclave table, however, is casting the curial reform into the future. Closer at hand, what to watch for is Francis' handling of two key congregations: the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

If Francis wants a caring church, he will have to see that caring bishops, pastoral men with simple lifestyles, are appointed. Unless he changes the system for the selection of bishop candidates -- by opening it up to wider consultation -- then the type of men in line to be cardinals doesn't change.

Currently, given the appointments of the past three decades, he doesn't have a large pool of compassionate pastor-types to draw from.

Which further means the type of men in line to be papabile doesn't change either, and the church returns to the old curial control.

That takes the topic back to the curial sourcing system for most of the past century's popes. Curial control has been almost total. Going back to the aftermath of Vatican I (1869-70), Leo XIII (1878-1903) was a protégé of Pius IX (Pio Nono of infallibility fame), whom he succeeded.

Pius X (1903-14) began as young Bishop Giuseppe Sarto, appointed assistant to Leo's pontifical throne. Sarto, as Pius X, appointed the future pope Pius XI, Achille Ratti, papal librarian. Ratti was a papal consultant.

Benedict XV (1914-22), Giacomo della Chiesa, succeeded Pius X. Della Chiesa had been a favorite of secretary of state Cardinal Mariano Rampolla. Benedict XV sent the future Pius XI to Poland as nuncio. Ratti returned from Poland to become Pius XI. The future Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) was Pius XI's secretary of state. The future Paul VI (Giovanni Battista Montini) was Pius XII's pro-secretary of state. John XXIII (Angelo Roncalli) preceded Paul VI.

Two relative outsiders, John Paul I (Albino Luciani, 1978) and John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła, 1978-2005) followed.

But then the old curial system was back in place.

Ratzinger, John Paul II's prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, became Benedict XVI. The old system lost its grip with Francis' election.

Which brings the analysis, as it must, to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly the Holy Office. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith today and the Holy Office before it have been the backbone of curial control.

To recount that part, an old name returns, that of Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (regarded by some as the Darth Vader of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65). By all accounts, he was a charming man and well-educated, with doctorates in philosophy, theology and canon law.

The Rome-born Ottaviani entered the service of the church as a teacher at the Lateran University, his alma mater. (The Lateran, originally the Athenaeum of St. Apollinaris, was also the alma mater of Josemaría Escrivá,

Opus Dei founder. Ottaviani was known for ordaining Opus Dei priests and supporting Franco's fascism in Spain and Opus Dei's integral support of the fascist government.)

Pius XI made Ottaviani a university rector and then undersecretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs (think the State Department). As such, Ottaviani traveled with Pacelli, the future Pius XII. Laboring under Pacelli and Ottaviani by this time was Montini, the future Paul VI.

By 1935 Ottaviani was serving in the Holy Office. In those years the pope was always the head of the Holy Office, served by its ranking official, the secretary. In 1939 Pacelli became Pius XII, and Ottaviani the Holy Office secretary. The Vatican said that "Pius reigns and Ottaviani rules."

In 1948 Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini of Palermo, Italy, urged Ottaviani to have Pius XII call a second Vatican Council. Pacelli accepted the notion, appointed Ottaviani to head a preparatory group. Two years later, Pius quashed the council idea.

Pius died in 1959 and John XXIII was pope. In 1963, Montini was Paul VI, and the old joke re-emerged as "Paul reigns and Ottaviani rules."

In 1965 Paul VI recast the Holy Office as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with Ottaviani in charge. Ottaviani retired in 1968 but continued to participate in congregation meetings and served on commissions. In 1978 John Paul II was elected; Ratzinger was appointed to the doctrinal congregation, and Ottaviani died the following year.

In 2005, Ratzinger became Benedict XVI.

In 2012, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, older brother of the pope emeritus, wrote that he and his brother felt that Ottaviani had been on the right track, that Ottaviani "was thought to be narrow-minded, but that was a big mistake."

What to watch for: who gets the Congregation for Bishops, and what is his background, and ditto the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

What we don't know is who Francis will draw on for advice about all this.

[Arthur Jones is *NCR* book editor.]

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