

NCR's Winters seems to have gotten his pope

Thomas C. Fox | Apr. 2, 2013 NCR Today

A tip of the hat to my colleague, father of NCR's [Distinctly Catholic](#), [1]Michael Sean Winters, who, when asked by the editors of [The Wall Street Journal](#) [2], before the conclave, "What kind of leader the next pope should be?" wrote that he should be a pope of the poor, that he needed to "identify himself more closely with the world's poor."

Winters was one of six observers questioned by the *Journal*.

Pope Benedict XVI had a penchant for elaborate, baroque dress. He did this, as I understand it, because of his commitment to the ideal of beauty in the church's liturgy," wrote Winters in the March 12th *Journal*. "But a simpler attire can be beautiful too, and it wouldn't make a parent struggling to feed her children wonder why so much money is spent on luxuries.

Like many bishops throughout the world, he can make time to go to soup kitchens and serve the poor, visit the infirm in hospitals and go to local prisons, spending time with those whom the rest of the world tends to shun. Such visits can become a regular part of the new pope's foreign travel schedule.

Identifying with the poor would allow the new pope to give visible evidence of Catholicism's deep-seated suspicions of modern consumer capitalism. Capitalism values thrift and aggressiveness, its heroes are the protean, self-made men of industry. It thrives on competition.

But Christians follow Jesus Christ, whose grace is gratuitous, not thrifty, whose life was characterized by contemplation, not aggression. Jesus was not a self-made man but radically dependent on his Father's will.

Jesus, and the church that Catholics believe he founded, valued solidarity more than competition. He characterized his ministry as bringing good news to the poor. Benedict XVI was not shy about criticizing capitalism in his writings. We need a pope who will critique it by his actions.

Asked what kind of leadership she wanted in the next pope, Peggy Noonan, who writes a weekly opinion column for the *Journal*, said he "should be a man who can greet the world with a look of pleasure on his face, with a smile of joy."

If Winters and Noonan have already gotten their wishes fulfilled, author George Weigel, it seems, might not have. He called for a culture warrior pope, a man who could drive home the message of the virtues of democracy. "Democracy," he wrote, "is more than the institutions of democracy; it takes a certain kind of people, living certain virtues, to make democracy work. That's been the teaching of the last two popes, and the next pope should drive home that message."

For his part, author James Carroll wrote the church needs a pope, who, like, Mikhail Gorbachev, who could dismantle a dysfunctional institutional. "The man who steps into the Shoes of the Fisherman should be a leader who can do for the church what the last general secretary of the Communist Party did for the Soviet Union. ...

The new pope must do as Mr. Gorbachev did?challenge his ruling elite, lay bare his power center's secrets and sideline the bureaucracies that oppose reform.?

We'll have to wait to see on this one.

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