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Cardinal DiNardo, the new kingmaker?

by Thomas Reese

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Fall bishops' meeting 2013

The election of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo as vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops puts him in the position to be a key player in the appointment of bishops in the United States, perhaps even the kingmaker.

DiNardo has all of the attributes necessary to be a kingmaker. As a former staff person in the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, he knows the process, the key players and the politics of episcopal appointments. As a cardinal, now as vice president and eventually as president in three years, he will make numerous visits to Rome, where he can make his recommendations known to the right people, including Pope Francis. He has the additional advantage of being able to communicate with the pope in Italian, since the pope is not at home in English.

Pope Francis has little personal knowledge of the United States. He will be dependent on people to advise him. The American prelate closest to him is Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, but O'Malley is a saint, not a politician. He will not push his favorites or even give his advice unless the pope asks him.

In previous papacies, Cardinals Joseph Bernardin, John O'Connor, Bernard Law, Justin Rigali, William Levada, James Stafford and, most recently, Raymond Burke have influenced episcopal appointments in the United States. Cardinal Burke is still a member of the Congregation for Bishops, a committee composed mostly of cardinals in Rome.

The appointment process begins when a bishop turns 75 or dies. The nuncio, the pope's representative to the U.S. church, is responsible for drawing up a list of three names (called a *terna*) that is sent to the Congregation for Bishops in Rome. The nuncio usually consults with all the U.S. cardinals and the archbishop of the province containing the diocese, as well as the retiring bishop.

The Congregation for Bishops reviews the *terna* and the nuncio's report. If they do not like the names, they tell the nuncio to submit a new list. Ultimately, they vote on the list, and the prefect of the congregation takes three names to the pope, listed in order of preference. The pope makes the final decision.

There is no question that Cardinal DiNardo will have influence. How much will ultimately depend on Pope Francis.

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