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Building Bridges

03.06.2013 | Faculty, Catholic, Hot Topics

Miguel Díaz (url: <http://americamagazine.org/users/miguel-d%C3%ADaz>)

Governing the Holy See in a pluralistic and globalized world

Whoever assumes the privileged role of serving as Pontifex Maximus—that is, the greatest among bridge-builders—will face the difficult task of bridging the divide that exists today among persons and nations of diverse human experiences, and between the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief. During his pastoral visit to the United States in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the present moment as a crossroads marked by increased interdependence among persons and nations, yet paradoxically also characterized by polarization, conflict and divisions. The speech he delivered at Westminster Hall in London in 2010, considered among his most important speeches with respect to foreign policy, underscored how the church and society needed to enter “into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.” As the shepherd of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics, as a world religious leader and as the sovereign head of the Holy See, the next pope will inherit this global context and challenge.

Soon after the white smoke clears the top of the Sistine Chapel, the cardinal elected pope will need to strike the right balance with respect to pastoral, diplomatic and managerial responsibilities. As a pastor, he will need to step out of Vatican City in acts of solidarity toward persons marked by great pain and suffering. The next pope will need to redouble the Holy See’s efforts to reach out to the victims of sexual abuse and attend to the cries of the poor, immigrants, those suffering in conflict and war-torn areas, and others who experience marginalization and rejection within the church and society as a result of gender, sexual orientation, physical disabilities or other human conditions. As a diplomat, the pope will need to cultivate deep listening skills to engage the increased diversity of opinions and the complex, hybrid and fluid nature of human identity that defines the signs of our time. As a manager, he will be well served by justly, inclusively and wisely administering the financial and human resources available within his papal household and throughout the global church.

Gathering around himself a diverse and competent group of leaders and entrusting them with responsibilities related to the governance of the church might be the keys to success for a leader with such an extensive network of relations and a multilateral agenda. Choosing good collaborators would also be a first step in restoring international confidence in Vatican diplomacy, which in recent years has suffered from poor administration. Although the pope will continue to govern from the eternal city, he will need to look less to the past and ancient Roman rulers, and more to the present and future as sharing and cooperation increasingly become the model for our world’s servant leaders.

Read more at *America Magazine*.

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