NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER DONATE NOW!
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

The pope is 82. Who's next in line?

John L. Allen Jr. | Apr. 27, 2009

Spotting the next pope. A priest uses binoculars in St. Peter's Square while waiting for smoke to rise from a chimney atop the Vatican's Sistine Chapel in 2005 during the conclave that would elect Pope Benedict XVI. (CNS file photo)

Having just celebrated his 82nd birthday, Pope Benedict XVI seems living proof that German machinery is, indeed, built to last. The pontiff shows few signs of slowing down, and as a result, there?s little buzz about possible successors.

The few lists of *papabili*, possible future popes, making the rounds seem recycled from the end of John Paul?s reign. Irish bookie Paddy Power, for example, has Cardinal Angelo Scola of Venice, Italy, as the 6-1 favorite, with Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Honduras at 7-1, Christoph Schönborn of Austria at 8-1 and Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina at 9-1. Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze is tied with Italians Dionigi Tettamanzi of Milan and Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican?s secretary of state, at 10-1. All were considered front-runners last time, but only Bergoglio had traction.

An old Roman adage may apply: ?The next pope is not yet a cardinal.?

In that light, it may be useful to drill down past these familiar figures to some cardinalabili, meaning prelates in line to become cardinals, who might eventually be papal contenders. The following are three intriguing examples -- and if one of them breaks from the pack, remember you heard it here first.

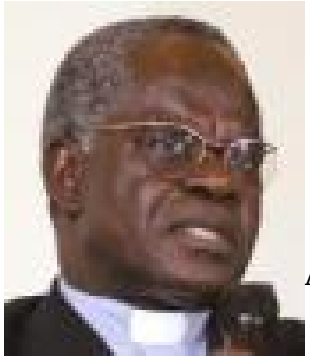
Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, 66

Gianfranco Ravasi comes off as a cross between the famed Italian Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini and Pope Benedict XVI. He blends the intellectual chops of both men, along with Benedict?s orthodoxy and Martini?s capacity to win a sympathetic hearing from secular modernity.

A renowned biblical scholar, Ravasi penned a series of bestselling commentaries credited with stimulating a scriptural ?awakening? in Italy. He?s also published front-page essays in Italian newspapers bringing biblical themes to average people.

As head of the Pontifical Council for Culture since 2007, Ravasi has projected intelligence, moderation and media savvy. For example, he recently declared the compatibility of the theory of evolution with Catholic theology. (Along the way, Ravasi managed to cite Claude Lévi-Strauss, Oscar Wilde, Friedrich Schelling, Max Blanc, Isaac Newton and Alexander Pope, all without breaking a sweat.)

If cardinals feel that communication has to be a priority of the next pope, Ravasi could be a compelling possibility. While some might question the idea of returning to an Italian or a pope from the Roman curia, Ravasi could benefit from the same reasoning that led to Benedict?s election: At the end of the day, he may simply be the strongest card in the deck.



Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, 69

In 2007, Laurent Monsengwo was named archbishop of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, making him a possibility to become the first African pope since St. Gelasius in the fifth century.

Monsengwo comes from a royal family in Congo?s Basakata tribe. (?Monsengwo? means ?grandson of the traditional chief.?) He was the first African to earn a doctorate in scripture from the prestigious Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. After being appointed a bishop in 1988, Monsengwo served as president of both the Congolese bishops and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar.

Monsengwo?s influence, however, extends beyond the church. When dictator Mobutu Sese Seko was losing his grip on power in the mid-1990s, the country (then named Zaire) needed someone of unimpeachable integrity to engineer the transition. Monsengwo was tapped as president of the Sovereign National Conference in 1991, president of the High Council of the Republic in 1992 and speaker of a Transitional Parliament in 1994. These efforts were not enough to avoid a civil war, but no one blames Monsengwo, widely seen as a champion of peace, dialogue and human rights.

Monsengwo also knows the Catholic world. During a 2003 conference in Rome, he was asked to compare liberation theology in Africa and in Latin America. Off the cuff, he replied, ?In Latin America, there were great rich families that owned all the land. This was never the situation in Africa. ? There was always land, and every family could develop it. Today we see this tradition of belonging to a family and a clan as our basis for inculturation, and not liberation in the social sense.?

Two-thirds of the 1.1 billion Catholics in the world today live in the Southern Hemisphere, and nowhere is

Catholicism more vigorous than in Africa. Assuming his health holds up, Monsengwo could become the face of a changing church.

Archbishop Angelo Amato, 70

Both previous hypotheses presume the cardinals will be in the mood for a change when they elect the next pope. If they prefer continuity, however, Angelo Amato could come into view as an obvious choice. He?s currently prefect of the Vatican?s Congregation for the Causes of Saints, after serving under then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Born in Southern Italy, Amato belongs to the Salesian order. As a young scholar, he was a fellow at a renowned Orthodox institute of patristic studies in Greece. He spent 1988 on sabbatical at The Catholic University of America in Washington, focusing on the theology of religions, and eventually headed the theology faculty at Rome?s Pontifical Salesian University.

During the 1990s, Amato became an influential consulter of the Vatican?s doctrinal agency, especially on issues of religious pluralism. He worked on the September 2000 document *Dominus Iesus*, which asserted that followers of other religions are in a ?gravely deficient situation.? He was also a driving force behind the investigation of Belgian Jesuit Fr. Jacques Dupuis, whose 1997 book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* generated alarm about religious relativism.

Playing a disciplinary role does not always breed popularity. When he was named secretary of the doctrinal congregation in 2002, a joke made the rounds that ?Angelo Amato? (meaning ?beloved angel?) is neither. Yet people who work with Amato describe him as approachable and gregarious.

If the feeling is that the next pope needs to continue the intellectual legacy of Benedict XVI, Amato could seem tailor-made for the job.

John L. Allen Jr. is NCR *senior correspondent. His e-mail is* jallen@ncronline.org.

The Next Step FORWARD [2]

DONATE NOW [2]

Enjoy this article?
Help support more like it by **donating today!** [2]

Source URL (retrieved on *05/05/2015 - 22:54*): http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-82-whos-next-line

Links:
[1] http://ncrnews.org/webathon/donate/in-content
[2] http://ncrnews.org/webathon/donate/article-end