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The College of Cardinals

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 21, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Some have already remarked on the fact, mostly unfavorably, that the new batch of cardinals to be created at the consistory next month, is weighted very heavily towards curial officials. It is stunning that only two Hispanic bishops made the grade, one of whom is retired from episcopal ministry, when Latin America has more of the world's Catholics than any other continent.

But, my complaint is a different one altogether. I regret that the Holy Father did not name any women religious or lay people to the Sacred College. Unlike the office of bishop, priest and deacon, the office of cardinal is not of divine institution. It is an entirely human creation and, so, the Pope could suspend the rule that says cardinals must be bishops. In fact, until Pope John XXIII, many cardinals were not bishops. Cardinal Ottaviani, who had long ruled at the Holy Office, resisted the requirement that he be made a bishop, but Pope John insisted. And, when Father Avery Dulles, S.J. was raised to the sacred purple, he asked for, and received, a dispensation from episcopal ordination, although strangely, he would wear episcopal vestiture at liturgy. So, if the rules are evidently made to be broken, let's go all the way.

Cardinals are either close papal advisors and/or leaders of large local churches. There is no reason that the Pope could not make a woman religious the head of a Vatican congregation and also a cardinal. There is no reason the Pope could not hire a layman or laywoman as his press secretary and make him a cardinal. (Hey, Holy Father: I would take the job!) Indeed,if Pope Benedict were to create a woman cardinal, entirely avoiding the complicated theological issue of women's ordination, he would rob critics of at least some of the force of their charge that the Vatican is a den of misogyny.

Currently, of course, cardinals are made titular pastors of Church's in Rome, although some are also Cardinal-Bishops and Cardinal-Deacons. But, the Holy Father could create [illegible] cardinals, call them cardinal-protectors or cardinal-patrons, again avoiding the issue of ordinat[illegible]
The idea of creating lay and female cardinals would also expedite [illegible] es of separating all decision-making authority within the Church and the authority unique to the ordained. Bishops have a divinely appointed role in the Church, to be sure. But, there is no reason one must be a priest or a bishop to handle the Church's finances, teach theology, or conduct media relations. Indeed, everytime I hear a bishop complain about the shortage of vocations, while having a priest chauffeur, or a too small seminary with a full faculty and a tiny enrollment, I roll my eyes.

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Now, I hate to admit it, but Pope Benedict did not consult me on the list of new cardinals. But, if he had, I would have told him I look great in red.

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