

## Hedging bets on a Scherer/Piacenza ticket

John L. Allen Jr. | Mar. 3, 2013 NCR Today

Conclave 2013

Rome

A news story yesterday got tongues wagging in Rome by suggesting that the Vatican's old guard is promoting a sort of "ticket" for the looming conclave: Brazilian Cardinal Odilo Scherer of São Paulo for pope, along with either Italian Cardinal Mauro Piacenza or Argentine Cardinal Leonardo Sandri for Secretary of State.

Without citing sources, the report claimed that the architects of the push are Italian Cardinals Angelo Sodano, who's already over 80, and Giovanni Battista Re.

Although the air is always full of speculation in the run-up to a conclave, the byline on this particular report gives it gravitas: Andrea Tornielli, widely seen as the best-connected of the Italian Vatican writers, and Gerard O'Connell, a respected Vatican-watcher not normally given to spitting in the wind.

Even before their story broke yesterday, I was contacted by a well-connected figure who asked if I could re-send my profile of Scherer, because he was detecting a "boom" for the Brazilian prelate. (That "Papabile of the Day" piece, by the way, is [here](#) [1].)

Before anyone starts fitting vestments for "Papa Scherer," however, they ought to look at the version of the story published by Tornielli in this morning's edition of *La Stampa*, which contains a number of qualifications and bet-hedging asides not developed in the original report.

First, Tornielli notes that there's no candidate in 2013 who enjoys the obvious early support that Joseph Ratzinger commanded in 2005, including Scherer.

Second, he quotes an anonymous cardinal-electoral as saying that one has to wait for the General Congregation meetings, which get underway tomorrow morning at 9:30 am, to gauge the mood of the electorate.

Third, Tornielli asserts that at least on paper, the strongest candidate at the moment seems to be Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Vatican's all-important Congregation for Bishops. He also mentions Angelo Scola of Italy, Péter Erdő of Hungary, Gianfranco Ravasi of Italy, Malcolm Ranjith of Sri Lanka, Sean O'Malley of Boston and Luis Antonio Tagle of the Philippines as possibilities.

In other words, even in the eyes of one of the guys who floated it yesterday, the Scherer/Piacenza "ticket" is far from a done deal.

It's also worth noting that Tornielli's colleague Giacomo Galeazzi has a separate piece in *La Stampa* this morning noting that there are 38 voting cardinals from the Roman Curia in this conclave, well short of a two-thirds majority. (Given that we expect 115 electors, it will take 77 votes to elect a pope.) As a result, Galeazzi writes, "The bloc of curial cardinals is in a position to stop the election of a pope they don't like, but not to impose their own candidate."

Though Galeazzi doesn't make the point himself, even that scenario assumes the curial cardinals would act as a unified group — and anybody who knows the lay of the land would probably find that a deeply improbable hypothesis.

All this by way of making a simple point: Speculation at this stage about who's up and down is endlessly amusing, as long as you don't take it too seriously. Most cardinals remain genuinely uncommitted, and will begin this week to sound one another out to see whose candidacy really has legs.

Yes, Scherer is a serious candidate to be pope, and either Piacenza or Sandri could make a compelling pick for Secretariat of State. Connecting the dots, however, is not the same thing as casting ballots.

*(Follow John Allen on Twitter: @JohnLAllenJr)*

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