

Papabili who just missed the cut

John L. Allen Jr. | Mar. 11, 2013 NCR Today
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Now that my "[Papabile of the Day](#)" series [1] is over, several readers have asked if there were cardinals who just missed the cut, meaning contenders I would have liked to profile if time had permitted, even if I regard them as long shots.

At one level, I'm tempted to say I would have liked to profile all 115 electors, so no matter what happens I can't possibly be wrong!

Seriously, however, there are a few plausible candidates I would have liked to get into the mix had not the clock run out.

For instance, I would have liked to consider one of the residential French cardinals, either André Armand Vingt-Trois of Paris or Philippe Xavier Ignace Barbarin of Lyon. I probably would have given the nod to Barbarin, who's generally considered the more dynamic of the two, and at 62 rather than 70, arguably in a better position to be the "energetic" pope many cardinals seem to be seeking.

Barbarin also won beauty points during the pre-conclave period by riding his bicycle to the General Congregation meetings.

Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne of Peru is another long-shot possibility I would have enjoyed profiling, in part because he's always a terrific interview, in part because he's a member of Opus Dei, which always exercises a certain fascination.

One thing going for Cipriani is he's probably the lone candidate for pope who could hold his own with President Barack Obama in a game of pickup basketball. He was once a member of the Peruvian national team that finished fourth in the Pan American Games and was slated to play in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, but his studies got in the way.

Reinhard Marx, the cardinal of Munich, is also a beguiling figure. He's a deep thinker, a skilled pastor, and he's got a terrific name for a potential pope (whether you want to play off Karl or Groucho, it works either way). He's also been a leader in promoting reform on the church's child sexual abuse scandals, speaking strongly on the subject during an international summit on the crisis at Rome's Gregorian University last year.

In the end, however, one German pope after another (and a former archbishop of Munich to boot) seemed a bridge too far.

For sure, I would have enjoyed doing a piece on Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, if for no other reason than he's one of my wife's favorite cardinals and was a gracious host for both of us when I was writing my book *The Future Church*.

In the end, however, I decided against Onaiyekan, in part because I wasn't picking up any serious buzz around him as a papal contender and in part because [I've written about him](#) [2] so often I worried some people would think I was campaigning on his behalf.

Finally, I regret not doing a profile of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the 78-year-old Secretary of State. That's not because I regard him as a candidate to be the next pope -- fairly or not, Bertone shoulders the lion's share of blame for perceived management failures in the Vatican over the last eight years. Those failures, in fact, have left many of the 115 cardinals in a strongly anti-establishment mood.

A profile, however, would have given me a chance to make three points that often get lost in the discussion about Bertone.

First, at a personal level, he's a gracious and affable person, not at all the Renaissance prince model of what it means to reach the pinnacle of ecclesiastical power. He's never lost that Salesian pastoral touch and seems to genuinely enjoy the company of ordinary people.

In his book on the 2005 conclave, Fr. Andrew Greeley describes being at dinner with me in a Roman restaurant when Bertone, at that time still the cardinal of Genoa, came over to say hello. Greeley styled it as proof of how wired I am; I never had the heart to tell him it was just Bertone being Bertone.

Second, there's no evidence Bertone is corrupt, either in the literal sense of being in someone's pocket financially or more broadly using his job to advance his own personal interests. Even if he was sometimes out of his depth trying to manage a complex global institution, no one really ascribes that to anything other than being unsuited to the role.

Third, though Bertone's failures are well documented, people sometimes fail to acknowledge he also got some things right. For instance, he brought in a talented lay editor to run *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper. Under Gian Maria Vian, the paper has become a much more engaging read, a rare bright spot on the landscape of Vatican communications.

Bertone also signed off on the Vatican's participation in the Moneyval process, a historic first in which the Vatican opened its financial operations to outside secular inspection. That was a fairly stunning turn of events, and it wouldn't have happened without Bertone's approval.

Although Bertone's influence in this conclave may be limited because of the strong concern about breakdowns in business management, doing justice to someone requires bringing their strengths and achievements into focus alongside their weaknesses and failures.

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