

Next pope: 'We are going to be surprised,' says Allen

By Paula Doyle

As far as the next pope is concerned, expect the unexpected.

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That's the message National Catholic Reporter Vatican correspondent John Allen, Jr. stressed in his 2005 Religious Education Congress Feb. 20 workshop, "Four papacies, four futures for the church" highlighting four differing points of view among the 118 Cardinals under age 80 who will elect the future pope.

Although Pope John Paul II has appointed all but three of the cardinals who will elect his successor, Allen said it is a misconception that the next pope will be similar to the current one.

"It doesn't work like that," declared Allen before a rapt audience of hundreds. "Colleges of cardinals appointed entirely by one pope do not elect a reproduction of that pope as his successor."

This is borne out historically. For example, noted Allen, while Pope Pius XII appointed all but two of the 51 cardinals who elected his successor, the next pope elected was the "strikingly" different Pope John XXIII.

"We are going to be surprised by the next pope," said Allen. He remarked that one of the ways cardinals approach the election of the next pope is thinking about both the strengths and the weaknesses of the former pontificate. They'll look at "unfinished business" and consider how they can elect someone who can address pressing concerns. Allen said a majority of cardinals that he has interviewed identify the top three challenges facing the church as: internal church governance, growing secularization and the relationship between Christianity and Islam.

While Pope John Paul II is generally acknowledged as a magnificent evangelist and wonderful source of moral authority, some cardinals feel he has been unable to get his hands around the internal administration of the church "in a fully satisfactory way," Allen explained.

As far as affecting culture in the highly secularized, post-Christian western world, Pope John Paul II's record is viewed as "mixed," in contrast to his many accomplishments championing human rights in Eastern Europe and developing nations. Finally, there is a great sense among church prelates that the next pope is going to have to engage Islam even more than in the past.

"In the post-9/11 world, there is a terrific acknowledgement inside the College of Cardinals that very little is going to be more decisive in terms of where the world goes in the future than whether or not Islam and the Christian west can figure out a kind of 'modus vivendi,'" Allen remarked. Both "tough love" (Hawk) and "harmonious coexistence" (Dove) approaches to the question of Islam exist within the Vatican, noted Allen.

Four futures

Allen identified four groups within the College of Cardinals based on their distinct points of view to current challenges facing the church. While the next pope will likely hail from one of these four parties, "no one party comes close to being a two-thirds majority" necessary to elect a pontiff, said the CNN Vatican analyst.

The first group within the College of Cardinals Allen identified represents the "Border Patrol." The core concern of cardinals in this group is the issue of maintaining Christian identity. Border Patrol cardinals --- including Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Edward Egan of New York, Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia and the Archbishop emeritus of Boston prelate, Cardinal Bernard Law --- fear cultural assimilation and would police religious/secular boundaries "with great vigilance."

The second group, Allen dubbed the "Reform Party." The main concern of cardinals within this party is moving forward with the reforms of Vatican II. They are interested in continuing liturgical reform, collegiality (giving more power to bishops' conferences), promoting the laity's role in the church and ecumenism. Allen named Cardinal Roger Mahony in this group along with Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, as well as Cardinal Karl Lehmann and Cardinal Walter Kasper, both of Germany. Allen estimates that the Reform Party and the Border Patrol each represent about 20-25 percent of the electorate.

The third and largest group, according to Allen, encompasses the "Social Justice" contingent, which considers issues outside the church --- such as globalization, economic justice, racial relations and the fight against AIDS --- to be of main concern. Members from this party seek to promote understanding across cultural and ethnic divisions. American Cardinal Ted McCarrick from Washington, D.C., reflects the thinking of this group as well as Cardinal Juan Sandoval from Mexico, Cardinal Claudio Hummes from Brazil, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga from Honduras, and many other cardinals from developing nations.

The fourth and final group Allen named "Integralists." Members of this "cultural warrior" group want to see the church's teaching on such issues as abortion, gay marriage and stem cell research incorporated into civil law. Integralists would include Cardinal Alfonso Trujillo of Columbia who heads the Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Juan Cipriani from Peru (one of the two Opus Dei cardinals in the world), and Cardinal Angelo Scola from Venice. Representatives in the American hierarchy would be Archbishop Ray Burke of St. Louis and Archbishop Charles Chaput in Denver.

Since no one group has the necessary majority to sway the vote, Allen believes it's plausible that members of different parties will form "alliances." It's conceivable, Allen explained, that members of the social justice and reform parties could align as well as representatives from the border patrol and integralists. "I don't think you're going to get a pure representative of any one of these four camps as your pope; inevitably, it's going to be a compromise," declared Allen.

According to Allen, it's unlikely that eligible members of the College of Cardinals will elect somebody presently working in Rome, such as Nigerian-born Cardinal Francis Arinze, prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. It will probably be a candidate outside of the Vatican who is acceptable to two or more groups.

"The story of the next election is being written right now," declared Allen. "You have an opportunity to be involved in this conversation." He urged Catholics to "engage" themselves by communicating with cardinals who will be electing the next pope.