



National/World

Cardinal: LA's Mahony should help select pope

Monday, February 25, 2013

AP Associated Press

VATICAN CITY -- The former archbishop of San Francisco said Monday that Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony has a rightful place among Vatican officials who will choose the next pope, even though Mahony has been battered in recent days by disclosures about his role in covering up clergy sex abuse.

The comments by Cardinal William Levada, a high-ranking Vatican official until recently, came in the wake of a grass-roots campaign to shame Mahony into refraining from participating because of his role protecting sexually abusive priests.

Mahony left for Rome over the weekend after recently released church documents showed he had covered up for other priests who raped and molested children.

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"There are some victims groups for whom enough is never enough, so we have to do our jobs as best we see it," said Levada, 76, who spoke with reporters from a Menlo Park seminary as he prepared for his trip to the Vatican for the papal conclave.

"He has apologized for errors in judgment that were made," Levada said. "I believe he should be at the conclave."

On Monday, Mahony took to social media and his own personal blog to write about persecution and forgiving one's enemies. He said he has a special prayer group for people who "cannot forgive me for my past hurts and offenses," including members of the media, attorneys, protesters and those who "hate and despise me." He also tweeted from Rome, writing: "Anyone interested in loving your enemies, or doing good to those who persecute you? See my blog for today. Wow, Jesus is demanding."

Levada said Cardinal Keith O'Brien's decision Monday to step down as archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh and to opt out of the conclave will "provide the freedom to do a good independent investigation and decide on appropriate measures to take on this case."

Levada, who leaves for Rome on Tuesday, retired in 2012 after spending six years as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican's orthodoxy watchdog, which also defrocked pedophile priests.

He played a key role in several church sex-abuse reforms. While serving previously as an archbishop in California and Oregon, he kept some accused molesters in the church and failed to share some allegations with police or parishioners.

On Monday, Levada drew a sharp divide between gay men and pedophile priests.

"By nature homosexuality is a not a predatory activity, it is a sexual activity that the Catholic church does not condone," he said. By contrast, he said pedophile priests are violating the sanctity and

purity of young people.

Levada also said bureaucratic reforms at the Vatican will require a lot of attention from the next pope. He said he'll be looking for a candidate with deep faith, someone who has shown leadership and has language skills. He said youth is also a factor, and he extinguished any rumors that the next pope might be from the U.S. "I don't know what the Las Vegas oddsmakers are saying today," he said, "but I don't think it's likely that we would see an American pope. It would be an additional complexity for an American pope to have to deal with the perception that some of his decisions might be perceived to be dictated by American governmental policy." Levada also said he respects Pope Benedict's decision to withhold findings from an investigation into Vatican leaks to cardinals voting on his successor.

"If his judgment is that there's nothing in that report that's necessary for the cardinals then I think we can rely on that," he said. "Pope Benedict is a man of very good judgment."

Levada and Mahony will join more than 100 cardinals on Thursday in Rome to begin the historical process that will choose a successor to Pope Benedict XVI, whose decision to retire took worldwide Catholics by surprise.

Levada, whose Vatican job was held by the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger before he became Pope Benedict XVI, said in all his years of service, he never anticipated being called to a conclave.

"Never. Never," he said. "It's very challenging. It's pretty exciting." Prior to the election, the cardinals meet and discuss the qualities of the candidates.

"We begin to make some judgments," he said.

Then, in silence, the cardinals vote, sometimes repeatedly, tucking ballots into a closely observed box which is then openly counted in front of them.

UK cardinal skips conclave amid accusations

Britain's highest-ranking Catholic leader will not take part in the

conclave to elect the next pope after being accused of improper conduct with priests.

Benedict accepted O'Brien's resignation as archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh - submitted back in November because he is due to turn 75 next month, the normal retirement age for bishops. But simultaneously, O'Brien issued a statement Monday saying he would also skip the conclave because he didn't want to become the focus of media attention at such a delicate time for the church.

O'Brien has said through his spokesman that he is contesting allegations made Sunday in a British newspaper that three priests and a former priest have filed complaints to the Vatican alleging that the cardinal acted inappropriately with them. The Observer newspaper did not name the priests, but it said their allegations date back to the 1980s. There were no details about the alleged inappropriate behavior.

It was the first time that a cardinal has said he was staying away from a conclave because of personal scandal, and comes in the wake of a grass-roots campaign to shame another cardinal, retired Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony, into refraining from participating because of his role protecting sexually abusive priests.

Mahony, however, has said he will participate in the voting for the new pope.

With O'Brien's decision and the illness of an Indonesian cardinal, there are expected to be 115 cardinals under age 80 who are eligible to vote in the conclave.

Separately Monday, Benedict changed the rules of the conclave, allowing cardinals to move up the start date if all of them arrive in

Rome before the usual 15-day waiting period between the end of one pontificate and the start of the conclave. Benedict signed a legal document, issued Monday, making some changes to the 1996 Vatican law governing the election of a new pope. It was one of his last acts as pope before resigning Thursday.

The date of the conclave's start is important because Holy Week begins March 24 and Easter Sunday is March 31. In order to have a new pope in place for the church's most solemn liturgical period, he would need to be installed by Sunday, March 17, a tight timeframe if a conclave were to start on March 15, as per the previous rules.

And in another development Monday, Benedict decided that the contents of a secret investigation into the 2012 leaks of Vatican documents won't be shared with the cardinals ahead of the conclave. Benedict met Monday with the three elderly cardinals who conducted the probe and decided that "the acts of the investigation, known only to himself, remain solely at the disposition of the new pope," a Vatican statement said.

Speculation has been rife in the Italian media that the three cardinals - Julian Herranz, Jozef Tomko and Salvatore De Giorgi - would be authorized to share the information with fellow cardinals before the conclave. That assumed the cardinal electors would want to know details about the state of dysfunction in the Vatican bureaucracy and on any potentially compromised colleagues before possibly voting one into office.

Benedict appointed the three men last year to investigate the origins of leaks of the pope's documents, and they had wide-ranging powers to question cardinals. The leaked documents revealed petty wrangling, corruption, cronyism and even allegations of a gay plot at the highest levels of the Catholic Church. The pope's butler was convicted of aggravated theft in

October for having stolen the papers and given them to a journalist who then published them in a blockbuster book.

While the three cardinals cannot share the full contents of their investigation, it's unclear if they could give subtle hints about potential papal candidates.

O'Brien's decision to remain home rather than participate in the conclave made him the first head to roll in the remarkable two weeks since Benedict, 85, stunned the world and announced he was becoming the first pope in 600 years to resign. The pope said he simply didn't have the "strength of mind and body" to carry on.

The Vatican confirmed that O'Brien had resigned as archbishop of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh but insisted that the accusations against him had nothing to do with his resignation. The Vatican said the pope accepted the resignation on Feb. 18 under canon law due to O'Brien's age; he turns 75 on March 17. The Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, refused to say whether the allegations had any effect on Benedict's decision to accept O'Brien's resignation, saying merely that Benedict was clearing his tasks before retiring himself.

O'Brien said in a statement that he is in "indifferent health" and had offered his resignation last November.

"Looking back over my years of ministry: For any good I have been able to do, I thank God. For any failures, I apologize to all whom I have offended," O'Brien said.

"I do not wish media attention in Rome to be focused on me - but rather on Pope Benedict XVI and on his successor," O'Brien said. "However, I will pray with them and for them that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they will make the correct choice for the future good of the church."

During a briefing with reporters at the Vatican last week, a Vatican historian, Ambrogio Piazzoni, was asked about the campaign to keep Mahony away from the voting because he covered up sexual abuse by priests. Piazzoni said while in the past some cardinals have been impeded either by illness or by interference from their governments, none has stayed away because of a stain on his own reputation.

He noted that any decision would have to be approved by the full College of Cardinals, given that the main duty of a cardinal is to vote in a conclave.

"The thing that characterizes a cardinal is to be an elector of the pope," he told reporters.

O'Brien's decision to skip the conclave is far different from that of Cardinal Bernard Law, who was forced to resign as archbishop of Boston in 2002 when the U.S. sex abuse scandal erupted. Law, accused of having covered up the actions of pedophile priests, participated in the conclave that elected Benedict and kept a plum job of archpriest of one of Rome's main basilicas until his retirement.

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