

Failing the Diversity Test

Written by Dr. Julianne Malveaux
Friday, 22 March 2013 09:23 -



The selection of Argentinian cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the next leader of the Catholic Church was, in some ways, inevitable. Latin America is home to the largest Catholic population in the world, and it has been more than overtime for the tradition of selecting European popes to end. Hopefully, Cardinal Bergoglio, to be known as Pope Francis, will be able to stem the tide of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church as well as put the church on the path of more transparency and integrity. Proposals to allow women to be priests and to allow married priests into the clergy are, for Catholics, revolutionary ways to modernize the church. Pope Francis, who brings a reputation of frugality and humility to the church, may well be able to deal with these proposals.

With some competition for the papal position, I am not sure why the College of Cardinals settled on Pope Francis. A nod to diversity may or may not have played a role in the selection. Still, Catholic cardinals have been able to embrace diversity in ways that other world institutions have not been. When we look at world monetary institutions - the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, we find no such nods to the way that world demographics and realities have changed. While the United States and Europe are still seen as trend leaders in world economic matters, China is nipping at our heels, and both Latin America and the African continent, despite internal problems, are world players. These continents are excluded from G8 meetings where global economic leaders gather to talk policy.

The custom that the United States should nominate the head of the World Bank, and that Europe should nominate the head of the International Monetary Fund speaks to the hegemony that these two countries have assumed in world monetary matters. When Christine Lagarde was selected to lead the International Monetary Fund (succeeding the disgraced Dominique Strauss-Khan), France declared their "victory". But, Lagarde faced unprecedented competition from countries out of the US/Europe monopoly. A Mexican finance minister threw his hat in the ring, and attracted attention, if not sufficient votes to outpoll Lagarde.

Similarly, the US nominee to lead the World Bank was former Dartmouth President Jim Yong Kim. While Kim is Korean born, as President Obama's nominee to lead the bank, he maintains

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the tradition of a US nominee to lead the bank. He has also been criticized for his lack of monetary experience. At the same time, the amazing Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, a Nigerian economist, was a strong contender for World Bank leadership. Apparently the selection of a woman of African descent was too far of a stretch for the bank.

Speaking of stretches, why has President Obama been so unable to find African Americans to sit on his cabinet? Only Attorney General Eric Holder and International Trade Representative Ron Kirk remain on the Cabinet, and Kirk is not a key cabinet member. Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, leader of the Congressional Black Caucus, has taken on the President in a stern letter that reflects the concern of many in the African American community. Why, when Obama garnered 97 percent of the African American vote, should the African American community be so underrepresented in the Obama cabinet? Is the Obama administration running behind the conservative Catholic Church in its commitment to diversity?

Either for diversity or for merit, the College of Cardinals stepped outside its history of European domination to select a Pope from Argentina. What might have happened if the World Bank had decided to step outside the tradition of US domination to select a candidate as qualified as Ngozi Iweala who, one might argue, is a far superior candidate to the US selection of Jim Yong Kim? What might have happened if France had not assumed that another French leader instead of someone outside the US/Europe sphere should replace its flawed leader of the International Monetary Fund?

If our country ever gets its economics straight (instead of continuing the crisis of the month club), it will continue to be a world leader, though not forever. World demographics are changing. Catholic cardinals acknowledged it. Why can't the US and Europe?

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