

POPE FRANCIS INSPIRES; WINS WORLDWIDE APPLAUSE

It didn't take long before the world embraced Pope Francis. The election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to be the new leader of 1.2 billion Catholics was greeted with applause around the globe, but nowhere was it more apparent than in Latin America.

Ten days before the election, Bill Donohue was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* expressing what he would like to see in the new pope. "If the new pope embodies the attributes of humility and courage, he will likely succeed," Donohue said. Pope Francis certainly fits the bill. Indeed, his humbleness instantly proved to be irresistible, and not just within Catholic circles.

Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said he is "encouraged that Pope Francis has worked with Lutherans in Argentina," and praised him for his "humility and solidarity with those who live on the margins of society." Gary Bauer, a key evangelical leader, congratulated Pope Francis saying, evangelicals "have a stake in who is elected pope, because without a strong pope, evangelicals will lose their best allies in the most important cultural and political battles of our age."

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference said the cardinals who voted for Bergoglio proved their "courageous, bold and catalytic determination." Nihad Awad, director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, pledged "the Muslim community's support and cooperation."

The reaction from most Jewish leaders was ecstatic. Abraham Foxman of the ADL praised the leadership of Pope Francis,

especially for his outreach to Jews in Argentina. Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee said the pope was a “warm and sweet and honest man” who often expressed his “solidarity with the Jewish community.” The president of the World Jewish Congress, Ronald Lauder, said the pope was “no stranger to us,” noting his “open-mindedness.” Rabbi Joseph Potasnik of the New York Board of Rabbis lauded the pope for his “history of outstanding relationships with the Jewish people.”

Pope Francis has rightly received kudos for his dedication to the poor. Perhaps less well known is his rejection of liberation theology, a Marxist-infused ideology that claims solidarity with the needy, but in reality is more interested in fomenting class warfare. In other words, he sees through those who want to hijack Catholicism to serve a political agenda.

The Catholic League will run a tribute to Pope Francis on April 15; it will appear on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*.