

THE NEXT POPE

William Donohue was asked by the Fox News Network to submit a short piece on the next pope; it was posted on its website.

Those who are banking on the next pope to be someone who will undo much of the work of Pope John Paul II are in for a grand disappointment. There are two good reasons why major changes will not be made: a) John Paul II has appointed over 95 percent of the cardinals who will vote on the next pope, and b) issues like abortion and gay marriage are defined by Scripture and Tradition, and thus will never change.

Now it is likely that the next pope will have a new style and will seek to carve his own place in Church history. Perhaps he might even entertain some changes in such Church disciplines as the celibacy requirement, or seek to expand the role of deacons. But the kinds of glacial changes that many Church dissidents desire are not going to happen.

What will prove to be as interesting to watch as what the next pope does is what the critics of John Paul II decide to do once they realize that they've lost again. Will they quit and join another religion? Or will they park themselves in the Catholic Church and continue pressing for a transformation of Church teachings? If they really respect diversity, they will join a religion that gives them what they want (there is no shortage of such "relevant" religions, though none of them is posting the membership gains that the Catholic Church is).

Most Catholics love John Paul II and someday he is likely to be known as John Paul the Great (he would be only the third pope in history to hold this honorific title). But even he can't please everyone, and what's comforting to know is that he really doesn't try. He just speaks the truth, and lets the chips fall where they may.