

The Reyes Appointment

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 18, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

The news that Jonathan Reyes has been tapped to lead the USCCB's Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development raises some interesting questions. Mr. Reyes is currently the president and CEO of Catholic Charities and Community Services of the Archdiocese of Denver.

First, let it be stated that there is always a case to be made for introducing new blood into any organization. But, there is also a reason people compile resumes. In the press release announcing the appointment, Msgr. Ronny Jenkins stated, "Jonathan Reyes brings vital experience with on-the-ground charities work and with young adults and is a proven administrator." Great. But, the job that Mr. Reyes has been given also includes lobbying Congress and the administration. It is unclear from Mr. Reyes' resume that he knows which Metro stop to get off at Capitol Hill, let alone which doors to knock on. At a time when the USCCB is engaged in very delicate and important negotiations, on everything from budgetary matters to promoting religious freedom at home and abroad, it might have been advisable to get someone who was better known and more familiar with the ways of political Washington.

Second, leading this department of the USCCB requires a person who not only has great industry, smarts, and commitment to the Church, but someone of stature. It is one of the most frustrating things about bureaucracies, be they governmental, academic or ecclesiastical, that you want to hire someone who can walk away from the job, someone with sufficient independent stature to stand their ground, but that many in leadership positions are reluctant to hire such a person. Better to find someone who will do the bidding of their superiors. This line of thinking is precisely wrong, but it is common. Mr. Reyes' resume is a little thin. That should have worried those who decided to hire him.

Third, at a time when there are obvious divisions within the hierarchy regarding which public policy issues should be emphasized, and how those issues should be framed, it seems to me imperative to have selected someone who was not so obviously aligned with one wing of the current ideological divisions within the Church. I am not one of those who sneers at Christendom College. Nor at FOCUS. But, to deny that there is an agenda there, one which does not necessarily invite greater unity within the Church is, I think, mistaken. I will note in passing that Mr. Reyes founded the "Augustine Institute" while in Denver, tasked with forming lay faithful, a task near and dear to my heart. I will also note that according to their website, they have not a single woman on the faculty.

Finally, the choice raises questions about how these appointments are made, questions it never occurred to me to ask previously. Were the bishops of the committees Mr. Reyes will serve consulted in this choice? (They should have questions I am not even in a position to think of!) Might they have wanted someone with a little more experience in Washington to brief them before important meetings with congressional and administration leaders? The culture of the USCCB is quite different from that of a local diocese, there are 200 leaders not one, and is this the time, what with the HHS mandate, and the persecution of Catholics in many countries around the world, and key parts of the social safety net in danger of severe and drastic cuts, is this the time to bring in someone who must learn the culture of the USCCB as well as the intricacies and nuances of national and

international public policy?

Many of my friends on the left yesterday were exceedingly nervous about this appointment. I hope they will be proven wrong and that the questions I am posing will find satisfactory answers. My response to my nervous friends yesterday was simple: Reyes had better be a star. I am hoping he is. He has some huge shoes to fill. And, my friends who worry about the USCCB becoming an arm of the GOP have this to console them: No matter the inner machinations of the conference, those of us who are committed to social justice have 120 years of explicit social teaching on our side.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/28/2017 - 13:51): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/reyes-appointment>