

Vatican Secretary of State searches for deputies

John L. Allen Jr. | Sep. 1, 2006 All Things Catholic

As September 15 approaches, the date Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone takes over as Secretary of State, speculation is mounting about who will be named his two key deputies: the Secretary for Relations with States, basically the Vatican's Foreign Minister, and the *Sostituto*, the official responsible for day-to-day administration of internal church affairs.

Vatican sources this week said there seems a consensus that the Secretary for Relations with States will likely be French, partly because the French are seen as a bridge between the Atlantic powers and other geopolitical blocks (especially the Arab world, Russia, and China), partly because the *Sostituto* is likely to be an Italian, and it would be unseemly to have the three top jobs occupied by Italians.

Most people believe the choice will fall on Archbishop Christophe Pierre, 60, currently the nuncio in Uganda. Pierre has served at the Holy See's Observer Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, so he has a background in both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. He also served in Haiti from 1995 to 1999.

Should Pierre be nominated, the obvious comparison will be with the last Frenchman to hold the post, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, now the head of the Vatican Library. Tauran was the voice of the Holy See during the run-up to the war in Iraq in 2003, and his unflinching insistence that the war was both unethical and illegal did not play well in certain sectors of American Catholic opinion.

I jokingly mentioned to a senior official in the Secretariat of State that the nomination of a Frenchman as the Vatican's top diplomat might irk some American neo-conservatives. His smiling answer was, "I don't believe the pope and Cardinal Bertone are basing their decisions on what American neo-conservatives think." (The official did not mean to say that the pope is deliberately looking to irritate neo-conservatives or anybody else, simply that he's not beholden to them).

On matters of substance, sources said there's not much to separate Pierre and Tauran. Where Tauran is cerebral and reserved, however, they say Pierre is a bit more affable and warm, with a strong "human" touch.

If the "French hypothesis" falls through, other names that continue to be mentioned include Archbishop Faustino Sainz Muñoz, 69, a Spaniard currently serving as nuncio in Great Britain, and Archbishop Celestino Migliore, 54, an Italian and the Holy See's Observer to the United Nations in New York.

The *Sostituto* may be an even more consequential appointment, since at 79 Benedict XVI cannot take a strong hand in day-to-day government. A popular saying in the Vatican these days is that Benedict "needs a Benelli," a reference to the *Sostituto* under Pope Paul VI, Giovanni Benelli, widely regarded as one of the most powerful and effective figures ever to hold the post.

A Vatican source said this week that names in circulation include Bishop Rino Fisichella, 55, rector of the Lateran University; Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, 66, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugee Peoples; and Msgr. Gabriele Caccia, the *assessore*, or number three official, in the Secretariat of State.

Caccia, a priest of the Milan archdiocese, is a career curial official who enjoys a reputation as diligent and effective. Fisichella is a close associate of Benedict's, who served as a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and who collaborated with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. He also has deep ties to the Italian political scene, and is known informally as the "chaplain of the parliament." Marchetto is a veteran of 30 years of Vatican diplomatic service, 20 of them in Africa. Marchetto is also known as a historian of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the leading critic of the progressive "Bologna school" of Italian scholars Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni, whose multi-volume history of Vatican II was published in English with Joseph Komonchak of Catholic University.

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