NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Papal appointments have been moderates and pastors

John L. Allen Jr. | Nov. 3, 2006 All Things Catholic

Though I detest ideological labels, especially in talking about ecclesiastical matters where they usually obscure more than they reveal, sometimes they're the only way to make a big-picture point quickly. One has to trust the *conoscenti* to understand that things are always more complex when the magnification is increased.

So, examining Pope Benedict XVI's major personnel moves to date, including an important one this week, here's the sound-bite style bottom line: "Moderates and pastoral figures trump conservatives."

For those expecting a "Reagan Revolution" with the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the papacy, meaning a clear swing to the right on virtually every matter of consequence, his appointments are therefore generating no small amount of cognitive dissonance.

The latest such move came on Tuesday, with Benedict's nomination of 72-year-old Brazilian Cardinal Cláudio Hummes as the new Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy. Hummes replaces Cardinal Dar'o Castrillón Hoyos, a 77-year-old Colombian.

Hummes is known as a progressive on social issues, though not at the expense of a strong Catholic identity on other matters, and a friend of Brazil's left-wing president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

To date, Benedict has made four top-drawer appointments in the Roman Curia: Cardinals Tarcisio Bertone of Italy as Secretary of State, William Levada of the United States as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ivan Dias of India as Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and now Hummes. This means that of the 10 most important positions in the Vatican (the Secretary of State and the heads of the nine congregations), four, or just one short of half, are now Benedict appointees.

Of the four, only one was seen within his national bishops' conference as representing the most conservative current: Dias of India. Levada and Bertone both had profiles as center-right figures, open to compromise, and Hummes was seen in Brazil as a quintessential centrist.

Tightening the focus to the United States, the same pattern is visible in major appointments so far in this country. In naming Archbishops George Niederauer to San Francisco and Donald Wuerl to Washington, Benedict opted for leaders with reputations as loyal churchmen but generally moderate and pastoral, rather than figures stemming from the more ideologically defined wings of the church.

The same also holds true with Benedict's decision to tap Italian Archbishop Pietro Sambi as his apostolic nuncio in the United States, a role in which Sambi exercises enormous influence in identifying future American bishops. A product of the Vatican's diplomatic corps, Sambi was described at the time of his nomination by a longtime colleague as "not having an ideological bone in his body."

Even in India, Benedict replaced Dias in Bombay with Archbishop Oswald Gracias of Agra, seen as representing a more centrist current on many issues. With the nomination, Gracias is now in line to enter the College of Cardinals.

To date, the profile of a "Benedict cardinal" thus seems to be a figure ready to defend core markers of Catholic identity, but not a crusader seeking to expand those boundaries or to do battle with the church's ideological enemies. Rather, it's a thoughtful, nuanced leader, more committed to the meat-and-potato pastoral basics than to rhetorical fireworks -- not unlike the pope himself.

To be sure, it's possible to read all this as mostly happenstance and the result of behind-the-scenes influence rather than any grand strategy. Brazil, for example, is the largest Catholic country on earth, yet since the retirement of the late Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves in 2000, it has not had a senior curial official. The Hummes appointment therefore can be seen as a nod to Brazil rather than an endorsement of his leadership style. Similarly, Niederauer arrived in San Francisco in part because he's a close friend of Levada, Wuerl in Washington because he's well-liked by the other American cardinals, and so on down the line.

Of the four major curial appointments I've mentioned -- Levada, Bertone, Dias and Hummes -- all have served as members of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which means that Benedict XVI knows their qualities well and trusts them. Personal respect may therefore be just as decisive, if not much more so, as their stances on particular issues.

There are exceptions to the centrist rule, such as Cardinal Carlo Caffarra in Bologna. Further, if one examines appointments to smaller dioceses, there are more assertive types to be found, such as the recent nomination of Bishop Paul Swain to Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Yet all that said, the fact remains that Benedict's most consequential appointments to date don't bear a strong ideological imprint. How to explain this?

One would probably do well to return to Pope Benedict's homily on April 24, 2005, during his Inaugural Mass: "My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole church," he said that day.

Most commentators assumed that this was little more than the pro-forma paean to unity that candidates who win elections always sing, and that his real agenda would emerge once Benedict got his hands on the levers of power. In fact, however, Benedict's major appointments suggest that by and large, he actually meant what he said.

This is not to say, of course, that one can't find elements of the pontificate after 18 months that match expectations for a more "conservative" course, at least as these things are measured in secular terms: the 2005 document on the admission of homosexuals to seminaries, a tougher line on Islamic extremism, and signals of greater openness to use of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, to name just three.

Yet the basic impression one has after a year and a half of Benedict at the helm is of a centrist and gradualist approach to governance.

The Hummes appointment thus confirms anew that Benedict in his own way embraces that bit of wisdom about the papal office memorably articulated by John XXIII: "I have to be pope," John once said, "both of those with their foot on the gas, and those with their foot on the brake."

* * *

I published a story on Sunday, as rumors of the Hummes appointment began to circulate, offering background on the Brazilian cardinal, which can be found here: Pope to name liberation theology ally to key Vatican post, report says [1]

As noted in that piece, Hummes is seen across Latin America as a friend of the moderate branch of liberation theology, the movement that took shape in the 1960s and 1970s to break the traditional alliance of the Latin American church with the ruling class and to place Catholicism on the side of the poor.

Extreme forms of liberation theology, which shaded off into Marxist-tinged insurrections, were the object of a critical Vatican document issued in 1984 under Ratzinger, which was followed by a series of investigations and disciplinary actions against some of the movement's key figures.

Hummes' association with liberation theology has at times made him a controversial figure. For example, in a 2004 interview, I asked Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani of Lima, Peru, about the rumors surrounding Hummes as a possible papal candidate.

Cipriani, himself a strong conservative, was unenthusiastic.

"Hummes is coming from a way of thinking very near the theology of liberation. He was raised in that environment," he said.

Cipriani also said Hummes is a strong proponent of collegiality and bishops' conferences, something about which Cipriani is lukewarm because of the potential, as he sees it, for undercutting papal authority.

For those supporting decentralization in the church, Cipriani said, "Hummes will be an extraordinary candidate," but "not for me."

Aside from Brazilians, social justice advocates and theological moderates, the Hummes appointment will likely be welcomed by one other constituency in the church, albeit mostly because of the exit of the man he replaces.

For many victims of sexual abuse by clergy and their advocates, Castrillón Hoyos has long been a symbol of the way, as they see it, that the Vatican "doesn't get it."

Barbara Blaine of Chicago, national president of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, released this statement on Tuesday:

"The departure of a radically insensitive Vatican official, Cardinal Dario Castrillón Hoyos, should be welcomed by Catholics everywhere. Of the many blame-shifting and excuse-making public comments made by church authorities on clergy sex abuse, Hoyos' remarks have been among the most harsh and off-the-mark," Blaine said.

"He treated journalists with disdain and arrogance at a now-famous Vatican news conference ? He repeated many of the tired and callous misconceptions about the clergy sex abuse crisis and cover up, including that this is largely an American phenomenon," she said.

The e-mail address for John L. Allen Jr. is **jallen@ncronline.org[2]**

Source URL (retrieved on *09/15/2014 - 22:26*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/papal-appointments-have-been-moderates-and-pastors

Links:

[1] http://ncrcafe.org/node/591
[2] mailto:jallen@ncronline.org