

Pope appoints German archbishop as new enforcer of Catholic doctrine

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI on Monday appointed German archbishop Ludwig Mueller, a conservative theologian with liberal leanings, to head up the Vatican's powerful orthodoxy watchdog.

The 64-year-old will replace American Cardinal William Levada, who retires from the helm of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, after seven years as enforcer of Catholic doctrine.

The important office was previously held by Benedict, then known as Joseph Ratzinger, between 1981 and 2005.

Mueller, the Archbishop of Regensburg in southern Germany, has a reputation as a defender of Catholic Orthodoxy and has been criticised by reform-minded German groups such as "Die Kirche von unten" (The Church from Below).

Mueller is a personal friend of the German-born pope and the two share many similarities. Both have an impressive academic background and both have published numerous works -- Mueller has already published 400 writings.

Mueller, however, is also known for his long-standing support for Gustavo Gutierrez, the 84-year-old Peruvian founder of the radical liberation theology movement.

Both Benedict and his predecessor Pope Jean Paul II have discouraged the movement, which was particularly outspoken in its criticism of several Latin America dictatorships in the 1970s and '80s.

Liberation movement, which champions the rights of the poor, has been criticised by some commentators as dangerously close to Marxism.

Mueller's appointment was greeted with apprehension by "Wir Sind Kirche" (We are Church).

Mueller "has been very reserved, hostile" towards fundamentalists in his diocese whose vision of the Church differs.

"A key issue will be to see if his long friendship with the South American liberation theologians will lead to a re-evaluation of that theory, which Ratzinger has fought against down the years," the group said.

His fierce reputation as a conservative but his close friendship with Gutierrez reflects a common contradiction in the Vatican hierarchy of openness in some quarters countered by an unshakable hard-line stance on Church morals.

Mueller, who travels to Peru almost every year to see Gutierrez, defended liberation theology in 2008, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru.

But the Vatican's criticism of liberation theology led to tensions with the university this year, when it insisted it fall into line with Lima's conservative archbishop.

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith plays a key role in the Vatican's governing body, holding the diverse theological strains within the global Catholic Church to account.

Mueller is expected to assume the post in the next few days when Levada retires and will have to take up the reins on a host of unfinished affairs, including the clerical sex abuse scandal that has engulfed the Church.

The watchdog cracks down on dissident factions, from rebellious priests challenging the Vatican's approach to priest celibacy, homosexuality and women in the Church, to feminist nuns in the United States.

<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/263900/news/world/pope-appoints-german-archbishop-as-new-enforcer-of-catholic-doctrine>

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