

Pope names German bishop as leader of Congregation of Faith

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POPE BENEDICT has appointed a fellow German to succeed to his old Vatican post as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).

Archbishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller (64) was until the announcement bishop of Regensburg in the pope's native Bavaria, and where he himself taught theology in the 1960s.

More recently it was at the university there in September 2006 that the pope gave an address in which he quoted a 14th century Byzantine emperor on the spread of Islam through violence, which angered the Muslim world.

The new prefect of the CDF became an archbishop on appointment and also becomes president of the Vatican's Commission Ecclesia Dei, its Biblical Commission, and the International Theological Commission.

The previous prefect of the CDF, Cardinal William Joseph Levada (76), has retired. Pope Benedict had been prefect at the CDF from 1981 until his election as pope in April 2005.

A personal friend of the pope's, Archbishop Müller was bishop of Regensburg since 2002, and oversees the Benedict XVI Institute, which is publishing a 16-volume Collected Writings of Joseph Ratzinger.

The archbishop has himself written more than 400 works on dogmatic theology, ecumenism, revelation, hermeneutics, the priesthood and the diaconate.

An avowedly conservative theologian, he is also known for sympathy he has shown towards liberation theology, a Latin American movement which the pope treated harshly as prefect of the CDF.

Responding to news of the archbishop's appointment, Germany's "We Are Church" group said a particularly important question would be whether his "friendly contacts over many years with South American liberation theologians ... can lead to a possible re-evaluation of liberation theology".

It noted that while in Regensburg the archbishop had taken "a very reserved or even negative attitude towards" the Pius X Society, now moving towards closer union with Rome, but that "he opposed the ordination of women vehemently".

In Regensburg he "very quickly generated a climate of servility and fear", it said, where "the enforcement of ecclesiastical discipline [was]" more important than the correction of obvious grievances".

On his handling of the clerical child sex abuse issue in Regensburg, it said "he committed fatal errors of decision-making, and even now will not admit that structural causes within the Roman Catholic Church bore an essential part of the responsibility for it".

Among Archbishop Müller's main tasks at the CDF will be to oversee that the church addresses properly the clerical child abuse issue.

