

On cardinals, consistories and 'Caritas in Veritate'

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 21, 2010



A red skull cap is seen as the world's cardinals gather in St. Peter's Basilica before the start of the last conclave in this 2005 file photo. (CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec)

If there's one thing even the most religiously illiterate person tends to get about the Catholic church, it's the difference between a cardinal and everybody else. Cardinals matter: they set a leadership tone, and, of course, they elect the next pope.

The news this week that Benedict XVI has named 24 new cardinals, including 20 who are under 80 and hence eligible to vote in a conclave, merits a few reflections. (My news story on the appointments, including the full list of names, can be found here: [Wuerl and Burke among 24 new cardinals](#) [1]).

First, it would not seem that Benedict XVI has stacked the deck in any ideological sense. While there are no real liberals in this crop (not by the standards of secular politics, or for that matter in ecclesiastical terms), neither is the Nov. 20 consistory stuffed with arch-conservatives. In general, there's a rough balance between traditionalists and pragmatists. The American appointments offer an example, with both the uncompromising Archbishop Raymond Burke and the centrist Archbishop Donald Wuerl.

If Benedict's aim had been to fill the College of Cardinals with the most conservative prelates available, he could have elevated Archbishop André-Joseph Léonard of Brussels, for example.

Read the full report here: [On cardinals, consistories and 'Caritas in Veritate'](#) [2]

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