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

Bertone named secretary of state

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 23, 2006 All Things Catholic

To the surprise of no one, Benedict XVI has appointed Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone of Genoa, who worked alongside then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger from 1995 to 2003 as the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to be his new Secretary of State.

The move makes Bertone, 71, the most powerful figure in the Vatican after Benedict XVI himself. Since the era of Paul VI, the Secretariat of State has played the role of a "super-dicastery," to some extent coordinating the work of all the other departments of the Vatican. It is also responsible for the Vatican's relations with states, hence its "foreign policy."

Bertone will officially assume his duties Sept. 15. He replaces Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who has held the post for 15 years.

Bertone is not a product of the Vatican's diplomatic corps, and thus reflects the priority of doctrinal concerns over diplomatic exigencies in the pontificate of Benedict XVI. (French Cardinal Jean Villot, Secretary of State under Pope Paul VI, was the last man to hold the post who did not have a diplomatic background, but the context was different, since Paul VI himself had served most of his career in the Secretariat of State).

Benedict has also accepted the resignation of American Cardinal Edmund Szoka as head of the Vatican City-State, appointing Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo as his successor. Lajolo is currently Secretary for Relations with States, effectively the Vatican's Foreign Minister.

Since Bertone may be expected to occupy himself more with the internal governance of the church, the choice of Lajolo's successor could be especially important for determining the diplomatic profile of the Holy See under Benedict XVI. Candidates are rumored to include Archbishop Fortunato Baldelli, currently the papal ambassador in France; Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Holy See's permanent observer at the United Nations; and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin.

While at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Bertone was at the heart of some of its best-known recent documents: the declaration *Dominus Iesus* on religious pluralism; new rules of procedure for investigations of theologians; a new profession of faith; and a document on the role of Catholic politicians. Bertone was also involved in the early stages of the congregation's response to the sexual abuse crisis, after Pope John Paul II assigned it juridical responsibility for cases of accused priests in 2001.

Bertone earned a reputation as a "fix-it" man under Ratzinger. He took the lead in publishing the infamous "third secret" of Fatima, and also was the point man for the Vatican during the soap opera in the summer of 2001 surrounding the on-again, off-again marriage of Zambian Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo to a follower of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

A Salesian, Bertone did his license in theology on "tolerance and religious liberty," destined to be critically important issues in relationships with both Islam and China, and then completed a doctorate at the Salesianum in Rome -- ironically, on the governance of the church under another Pope Benedict, this one Benedict XIV. Bertone eventually became the head of the canon law department at the Salesianum, and participated in the revision of the Code of Canon Law in 1983. In 1988, Ratzinger named Bertone as part of the commission that handled negotiations with the breakaway Society of St. Pius X, known popularly as the "Lefebvrites."

His academic ascent was rapid, and from 1989 to 1991 he served as the *rettore magnifico*, roughly the chancellor, of the Salesianum. In the early 1990s, Bertone was also tapped by the Secretariat of State as part of a European commission designed to aid the newly emancipated countries of Eastern Europe to prepare constitutional and legislative documents.

In 1991, Bertone became Archbishop of Vercelli, a post he held until his assignment in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Last year, Bertone earned international headlines by calling *The Da Vinci Code* a "sack full of lies," and calling on Catholic booksellers not to sell the book.

Bertone is a staunch conservative on doctrinal issues, and a man with a very positive and optimistic spirit. In true Salesian fashion, he is good at youth ministry, and has made outreach to the young a priority in Genoa. One of his first outings as archbishop was to a local disco, where Bertone was photographed on the dance floor. He has also taken a few turns at providing color commentary during broadcasts of Italian soccer matches.

Bertone's appointment was widely expected, given his ties to the pope. Benedict's emerging approach to top appointments seems to be to tap men

with whom he has a close relationship of trust, regardless of whether they fit the traditional profile for the post. (This was the case, for example, in his appointment of Cardinal William Levada as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith).

Many in the Secretariat of State are nonplussed by the appointment, since they regard a background in Vatican diplomacy, including a few tours in postings around the world, as a *sine qua non*; one told me last week that being Secretary of State is "no place for on-the-job training."

Currently, rumors in Rome suggest that Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, may replace Bertone in Genoa. If so, combined with the recent transfer of Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to Naples, it would mean the exit from the Vatican of the most senior officials associated with the diplomatic corps, and would be widely read as "clipping of the wings" of the church's diplomats in favor of officials with a stronger doctrinal background. Sepe's replacement, Cardinal Ivan Dias of India, although a longtime diplomat himself, is also known for a strong set of theological convictions close to those of Benedict XVI.

The logic for Bertone's appointment, aside from his personal connection to the pope, is no doubt that he can ensure that concerns of Catholic identity trump the logic of compromise that is often the stuff of diplomacy. Further, he's an Italian who knows the world of the Vatican well.

It will be interesting to see, especially in the early stages, if Bertone's relative unfamiliarity with the inner workings of the Secretariat of State renders him dependent upon the very diplomats he was named to oversee. Such is sometimes the case with "outsider" appointments, and hence observers will be paying careful attention for early assertions of independence from the man who is now, in effect, the Vatican's Prime Minister.

One sign to watch for may be Bertone's line on China. As a Salesian, he will have considerable sympathy for Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong, also a Salesian. Under John Paul, the diplomatic corps was frequently leery of Zen because of his outspoken challenges to Chinese authorities on religious liberty, at a time when improved relations with China is a top Vatican priority. Benedict's appointment of Zen as a cardinal suggested a break with this atmosphere of caution, and Bertone's appointment may well embolden Zen and the other critics of the Chinese authorities even further.

The e-mail address for John L. Allen Jr. is **href="mailto:jallen@natcath.org">jallen@ncronline.org**

Source URL (retrieved on *08/30/2016 - 12:59*): https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/bertone-named-secretary-state