

## Weinandy's tenure seen as significant shift from his predecessor's

Joshua J. McElwee | Feb. 8, 2013

Some might commend Capuchin Fr. Thomas Weinandy for nearly a decade of holding firm -- keeping the wider U.S. church aligned closely with a strict interpretation of Catholic teachings.

Others might tell him not to let the door hit him on the way out.

No matter what they think, very few are talking on the record.

One of Weinandy's predecessors at the Secretariat for Doctrine said he would not comment on his successor's work, even asking that his name not be used. Another did not return several phone calls.

Six former and current bishops' conference staffers and consultants to the Doctrine Committee also either refused comment or did not return calls asking for details on the committee's work or their experience with Weinandy.

Retired Galveston-Houston Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza, who served as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1998 to 2001, said he could not speak to Weinandy specifically as he hadn't worked with the priest.

But whoever serves in the role at the secretariat, Fiorenza said, has to "know the teaching of the magisterium extremely well" but also "know that there are different theological schools of thought and that sometimes on matters which are not yet theologically defined there is freedom of discussion."

Fiorenza pointed to his work with Weinandy's predecessor, Msgr. John Strykowski, as showing that the head of the secretariat "can't be wedded to one theological school of thought."

Commenting on the critiques of theologians issued during Weinandy's tenure, Fiorenza said that while those critiques are part of a "very, very necessary and valid role" for the committee, its members and staff "should be in constant contact with the person they're investigating or the work they're investigating."

"Sometimes, I think they take the position that what the theologian believes and says is what he has written and what's in print," Fiorenza said. "My opinion is that they should do that ? but also, at the same time, what's the harm in also discussing it with them? You have to make sure they have a clear understanding of what the mind of the theologian is."

One former key staffer at the bishops' conference who worked with both Weinandy and Strykowski said Weinandy's style of leadership was a significant shift from that of his predecessor.

"There was no sense of antagonism under John," said the former staffer, who asked not to be named because they still work in church circles. "When Tom came on board, that changed immediately. He just seemed to have

his own agenda."

Recalling a conversation at the conference following Strykowski's resignation from the post in 2005, the staffer said they told a colleague then they were concerned the new person wouldn't maintain a balance of theological viewpoints.

"I don't think there's an interest in balance anymore," the staffer said the colleague replied.

[Read the full interview with Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza](#) [1].

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