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Vatican writer describes ongoing 'implosion'

Robert McClory | Dec. 4, 2012 NCR Today

The Vatican is undergoing a historic "implosion," according to Robert Mickens, Vatican correspondent for *The Tablet*, published in Britain.

In a November speech to the City Club of Cleveland, Mickens said we are "viewing the collapse of an entire system, structure, ethos and culture, the crumbling of what is close to an absolute monarchy as ever existed and certainly the last absolute monarchy in the West."

Mickens said he often traveled with Pope John Paul II when he served for 11 years with Vatican radio before moving to *The Tablet*. In his view, John Paul set the scene for the collapse, he said, and Pope Benedict XVI has been busily moving it along.

His dire assessment from his current post offers little good news. *NCR* readers might want to listen to the almost hour-long speech linked below where, in a calm, relaxed voice, Mickens takes the Vatican to task piece by piece. Here are some of the signs of implosion he discussed: the bitter fights for promotion, the corruption, the cronyism among bishops and cardinals, as revealed in the Vatileaks scandal; the ongoing parade of Catholics out of the church; the relentless decrease of priests with the accompanying mergers and closings of parishes in the Western world.

A major sign and also a cause of the implosion, Mickens said, is the "cleric-centered" organization of the church, which leads inevitably to "clericalism." He sees a definite "resurgence" of clericalism, calling it "a cancer," spreading especially among the younger clergy.

He cited the priest abuse scandal as a byproduct of clerical control and power and criticized the way bishops "so inadequately handled the crisis" that continues to erupt in the world. He credited Pope Benedict XVI for acting to remove guilty priests but said Benedict has done "nothing" to hold accountable or discipline bishops who covered up the scandal.

The only solution is structural change, Mickens said, noting that the modern world employs myriad forms of democracy while the Vatican insists on a monarchic, feudal approach in all things. The pope's sole solution to mounting collapse, Mickens said, is the "conversion of individual persons," but he insisted this will be pointless without structural changes.

He left one hint of hope. As the crisis grows, Mickens said, the cardinals at the next papal election may be looking for "a healer," someone like João Braz de Aviz of Brazil.

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