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Biographer: In last six months, pope was exhausted, disheartened

Jonathan Luxmoore Catholic News Service | Feb. 18, 2013
Benedict Resigns
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Pope Benedict XVI was "exhausted and disheartened" well before his Feb. 11 resignation announcement, according to his German biographer, Peter Seewald.

In an article, "Farewell to my pope," in the Feb. 18 issue of Germany's *Focus* weekly, Seewald said he had held several Vatican meetings with the 85-year-old pontiff over the six months while preparing a new biography.

Seewald added he had "never seen Benedict XVI so drained of energy" and "deeply disheartened" as when he met him in last summer.

Asked what could still be expected of his pontificate, according to Seewald, the pope answered: "From me -- not much now. I'm an old man and I've lost my strength. I think I've done enough."

The 58-year-old Seewald, a fellow-Bavarian and former editor of Germany's *Der Spiegel* weekly, has published several interview-based books on Pope Benedict, including a biography in 2006 and 2010 bestseller, "Light of the World."

He said the pope told him the third volume of his "Jesus of Nazareth," published in November, would be his last book.

However, he denied that the 2012 "VatiLeaks" scandal had been a reason for the pontiff's resignation and said Pope Benedict had merely voiced incomprehension at the decision of his former butler, Paolo Gabriele, to leak information.

"It's true the butler's betrayal was a painful experience," Seewald told the Munich-based *Focus*, which was launched in 1993 and is Germany's third-largest weekly.

"But it certainly didn't influence his decision in any important way. In our 90-minute talk at Castel Gandolfo last August, the pope said he felt neither despair nor despondency. ... It was very important for the pope that the VatiLeaks exposure would ensure an independent judiciary in the Vatican -- that there wouldn't be a situation in which the monarch said he was taking the matter in his own hands."

Speaking to journalists Saturday, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, confirmed that Seewald had met the pontiff in August and late November, adding that he saw "no reason not to believe" the journalist's account.

The 66-member bishops' conference in the pope's native Germany, which will have six cardinals participating in the upcoming conclave, was to discuss Pope Benedict's resignation at a Feb. 18-21 plenary in Trier.

In an interview Monday with Germany's Catholic news agency, KNA, the conference president, Archbishop

Robert Zollitsch of Freiburg, said the plenary would also discuss the future role of women in the church and sexual abuse by priests, as well as formulating a stance on use of the morning-after pill by rape victims.

"Benedict XVI's successor can add new elements, unencumbered by such controversies as VatiLeaks and the crisis over the Society of St Pius X," Zollitsch said.

"For our part, we want look at what's coming up and discuss the future course of events. We think the principle of subsidiarity should be strengthened, allowing local churches to bring themselves into the global church while also retaining a certain variety," he said.

The former bishops' conference president, Cardinal Karl Lehmann of Mainz, told KNA he believed the pope had been "rather lonely" and had not always had "good people around him," adding that he thought the pope's decision to resign had been influenced by "disappointment at certain Vatican operations."

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