

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

February 26, 2013 at 9:45am

A new outfit for a new pope

by Robert McClory

NCR Today

Benedict Resigns

I fervently hope that whoever is elected pope in the upcoming conclave will abruptly depart from Benedict's fashion preferences. The public appearances of His Holiness in garish garments reminiscent of the Middle Ages (especially the red shoes) began to wear on me long before his announcement of resignation.

I acknowledge that a considerable number of Catholics glory in this sartorial splendor that represents in its own way the direction in which Benedict was struggling to move the church.

One such fan of papal attire called Benedict "the best dressed pontiff ever" and "the duke of Windsor of popes" in a recent article in the *Chicago Tribune*. Charlotte Allen admitted that her own "fashion sense is nearly non-existent," but she proudly recalled some highlights from memorable papal appearances: "Benedict saying Mass in 2008 at Washington Nationals Park in a billowing scarlet satin chasuble (a priest's outermost liturgical garment) trimmed with crimson velvet and delicate gold piping. Benedict greeting worshipers in Rome, his chasuble this time woven of emerald-green watered silk with a pattern of golden stars. Benedict on Oct. 21 canonizing Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th-century Mohawk woman, while attired in a fanon, a gold-and-white striped shoulder covering, dating to the 8th century, that only popes may wear."

It is fitting and proper, Allen said, that the pontiff be bedecked in such sartorial elegance, since he was using the beauty of his garments to counteract the ugliness of "clerical sexual predation abetted by clueless and self-promoting bishops." He was bolstering the idea, in Allen's view, that the faith itself remains nevertheless "beautiful and indestructible."

However, this display of finery was not bolstering my faith; it seemed more like a distraction, a pompous

display of what is old, outmoded, inauthentic and ridiculously expensive, lest we ask too many questions of church leaders, including Benedict, about the needs of the poor or the ugliness of corruption continuing to seep out even as the cardinals gather in Rome.

So I pray that the new pontiff will realize that this is not a time to get all dressed up as if to proclaim the triumph of Catholicism. It is a time for a pope to face the whole Body of Christ clothed in humility, apology and (if not sackcloth and ashes) at least outerwear appropriate to these times. Hopefully, he would require cardinals, bishops and priests to do the same.

Advertisement

In This Series

Benedict says he did not expect papacy, accepted it as duty to cardinals

Sep 9, 2016

Pope Benedict XVI's resignation: a retrospective

Feb 28, 2015

One year ago, Pope Benedict XVI resigned. What a difference a year makes

Feb 11, 2014

The unfinished business of communion ecclesiology

Mar 12, 2013

Final days of Benedict full of unclear calls for change

Mar 11, 2013

[View all ?](#)

Source URL (retrieved on 08/23/2017 - 05:15): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/new-outfit-new-pope>

Links:

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>