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Was Benedict launching a 'youth movement'?

Robert McClory | Mar. 1, 2013 NCR Today
Benedict Resigns

There is much speculation about the possible effects of Pope Benedict's resignation. Some consider it a mere glitch, a personal choice by an elderly and tired pontiff. Others think it could have a momentous, ongoing ripple effect that will alter the face of Catholic leadership for centuries. Promoting this latter school of thought is an article in the online publication *International Political Economy*, edited by Marvin Zonis.

The resignation, says writer Guy Fricano, is more significant for the future of the church than even the sex abuse scandal or the turmoil within the Vatican itself:

> The sex-abuse scandals and the leaked documents will prove transitory and rather inconsequential for the long-term future of the Church and its hierarchy. The history of Catholicism already shows that fractious internal relations are nothing new to its leadership and divergence in opinion has been, and continues to be, the subject of considerable debate behind Vatican walls.

Benedict's resignation, he argues, is unrelated to "infighting or the sex-abuse scandals," but has much to do with "anti-oligarchical orientation within his legacy. As a young theological consultant at the Second Vatican Council, Joseph Ratzinger was part of a power-clique that believed reform was needed to prevent the doddering elderly from becoming dead-wood bureaucrats. Several age-related factors were believed to contribute to bureaucratic uninvolvement, including fatigue, disinterest, senility, and health problems all of which interfered with travels to Rome required to participate in papal elections or other important bureaucratic processes."

In other words, Benedict/Ratzinger has been a longtime advocate of a youth movement at the top of the church.

Some age reforms were introduced in 1970, including barring cardinals from voting in a papal election after reaching 80, Fricano writes, but "such drastic measures were never taken due to intense opposition by elderly cardinals who liked their power as it was as well as others who imagined such reform as a Trojan horse through which a young and ideologically radical cabal could usurp power inherited legitimately through established traditions of leadership succession."

When Benedict publicly announces he is relinquishing his position, Fricano writes, "he's using the teaching authority of the papacy to practice what he and like-minded insiders have been preaching since the Second Vatican Council. He is setting a precedent that successors will be obligated to account for in their own reigns. Additionally, he will remain alive to observe -- and comment if necessary -- upon the fidelity of successors to that precedent."

I would like to believe this is the case, but Benedict certainly waited a long time to announce his precedent-setting inclinations; the elderly cardinals who like their power as it is are still in place. It would take a powerful, self-confident, reform-minded pontiff to clean the house and begin an exciting new era of Catholicism.

Read the whole article here:

"The Pope's Resigation: Not What You Think" [1] by National Catholic Reporter [2]

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