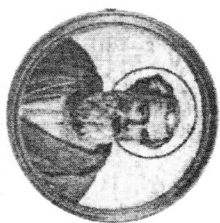


Ironing out contradictory tales about papal abdications

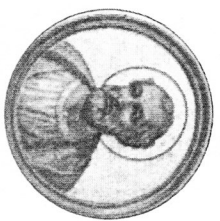
By Dr. John Aveline
Special to The B.C. Catholic

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's resignation, an immense decision of tremendous significance and personal courage, has ignited an interest in the history of the Holy See and the Latin language.

I have been interested to hear about previous Pontiffs who resigned voluntarily, but I have also been frustrated by different versions and contradictory tales, so, being an historian by education and interest, I have done a little research.



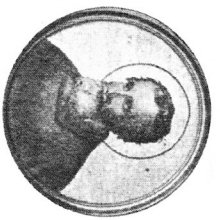
St. Pontianus



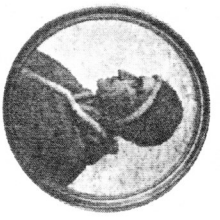
St. Marcellinus



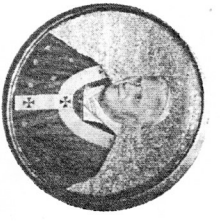
Benedict IX



Celestine V



Gregory XII



Benedict XVI

The variation appears to result from considerations such as whether the resignations were totally free and voluntary. For instance Pope Clement I (92-99) was exiled by the emperor, so many consider he was obliged to resign.

From what I can find out with any certainty, there have been five Popes who have voluntarily resigned from the See of Peter in the almost 2,000-year history of the papacy. Most of the time there have been oppressive circumstances which have forced the Pope's hand.

Starting in the early days of the Church, when it was still persecuted by the Roman Empire, there is St. Pontianus, exiled Sept. 28, 235, by the emperor Maximinus Thrax, who was intolerant of the Christian Church. He was condemned and exiled to hard labour in Sardinia.

At the time Sardinia was known as the Death Island, so Pontianus, recognizing his fate, resigned from office so that someone else could be chosen to carry on his ministry. Pontianus died in 236.

St. Marcellinus was also the subject of imperial persecution, this time at the hands of Diocletian, the last Roman emperor to carry out a systematic attack on the early Church. In order to safeguard the Church as a whole, Marcellinus is sometimes charged with handing Scriptures over to the emperor and sometimes with offering in-

cense to false gods.

Some reports say that, filled with remorse, he resigned; others that he was martyred when he repudiated his acts. It is possible that his death in 304 was by order of Diocletian.

Because of the emperor's persecution, a successor to Marcellinus was not chosen until 306.

The resignation of Pope Benedict IX reminds us that things were done differently in times past. It is almost 1,000 years ago that Benedict IX resigned from office in 1045, after a tenure of 12 years.

It is important to realize that at this time the patrimony of St. Peter included governing a section of central Italy. Also, secular groups had a great interest in the papacy. The people of Rome looked upon the Pope as their own bishop, which he was and still is: the Bishop of Rome.

Powerful local families applied their own influence, as did the major heads of Europe. It was in that context that the 20-year-old Theophylact was made Pope Benedict IX in 1032. In 1036 and 1044 he was forcibly expelled from the city of Rome.

In 1045 he was convinced by his godfather, the priest John Gratian, to resign his office for the unity of the Church. Money, possibly to support him in his retirement, changed hands. This caused scandal after the priest became the next Pope, Gregory VI, so he also resigned or was deposed.

By the time of his death, Benedict IX had served as Supreme Pontiff for three separate periods, having been deposed the other two times.

The precedent closest to Benedict XVI is St. Celestine V. His is a story of duty versus frailty. In 1294 the College of Cardinals had been trying for 27 months to choose a successor to Nicholas IV. They finally chose a man renowned for piety and spirituality, the 85-year-old Pietro Del Morrone.

He very reluctantly assumed the papacy and took the name Celestine V. His decision to assume the awesome responsibility at his advanced age was undoubtedly to help solve the deadlock of the conclave. After five months he found the burden too great and asked if a Pope had ever resigned.

Informed that a precedent did exist, he stepped down to devote the remainder of his life to prayer. Unfortunately, the story is clouded by the fact that his principle adviser, Cardinal Benedetto Caetani, was elected his successor.

The most recent resignation (and this was 598 years ago) may have been the most selfless act of all of these. Gregory XII was the duly constituted Pope, but this was during the Great Schism (1378-1417), when there were two other individuals who considered themselves Pope, one based in Rome and the other in Avignon.

By 1415, a third Pope had been elected by a splinter group of cardinals as their misguided attempt to end the schism.

Eventually, at the Council of Constance, an agreement was made: the two 'non-Popes' were formally deposed (with their consent) and Gregory voluntarily laid down his office to end the rivalry and bring the Great Schism to an end. Gregory continued to serve as cardinal until his death in 1417.

Dr. Aveline is a member of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Vancouver. □



Archdiocese
of Vancouver

EMPLOYMENT NOTICE

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT (Full-time) Office of Life, Marriage and Family

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver is seeking a full-time administrative assistant to support the Director of the Office of Life, Marriage & Family and its programs by performing day-to-day administrative functions and proactively contributing to program development.

Duties & Responsibilities:

- Manages the Director's files, calendar, tasks, and communications.
- General office administrative duties including the managing of phone calls, correspondence and maintenance of a filing system and databases.
- Assists in the planning, booking and organizing of events.
- Develops promotional brochures and service material and maintains the Office's website.
- Records and reconciles financial transactions.
- Assists in organizing meetings, recording minutes and related tasks.
- Researches programs and other ministry resources.
- Supports archdiocesan events as directed.

The successful candidate must have: