

Ex-Pope Benedict Denies He Was Forced to Resign

Former **Pope Benedict**, in one of the few times he has broken his silence since stepping down nearly a year ago, has branded as “absurd” fresh media speculation that he was forced to quit.

Church law says a pope’s resignation is valid only if he takes the decision in full freedom and without pressure from others.

“There is absolutely no doubt regarding the validity of my resignation from the Petrine ministry,” Benedict, 86, who now has the title “pope emeritus,” said in a letter to the Italian website Vatican Insider published on Wednesday.

“The only condition for the validity of my resignation is the complete freedom of my decision. Speculation regarding its validity is simple absurd,” he wrote in answer to a request by the website for comment on recent Italian media reports.

Benedict announced his decision to resign on Feb. 11, 2013 and formally stepped down on Feb. 28, becoming the first pope in 600 years to do so. Two weeks later, Francis was elected the first non-European pope in 1,300 years.

Benedict said at the time that he was stepping down because he no longer had the physical and spiritual strength to run the 1.2 billion member Church and that his decision had been taken in full freedom.

Earlier this month on the day after the first anniversary of the announcement of the resignation, Italian newspaper *Libero* ran a long story reviving speculation that Benedict may have been forced to resign because of scandals in the Vatican.

In 2012, Benedict’s butler was arrested for leaking sensitive

documents alleging corruption among Vatican prelates and irregularities in **Vatican** finances.

Italian media at the time reported that a faction of prelates who wanted to discredit Benedict and pressure him to resign was behind the leaks. The Vatican has always denied this.

Libero also suggested that Benedict chose to continue to wear white because he still felt like he was a pope.

Benedict, who lives in near-total isolation inside a former convent on the Vatican grounds, was also asked about this and responded:

“I continue to wear a white cassock and kept the name Benedict for purely practical reasons. At the moment of my resignation there were no other cloths available. In any case, I wear the white cassock in a visibly different way to how the Pope (Francis) wears it. This is another case of completely unfounded speculation.”

In an interview with Reuters earlier this month, Benedict’s personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, said the former pope saw his main function now as helping the Church and his successor through prayer.

Benedict has only responded to a few letters in the past year and has appeared in public only a handful of times. The latest was last Saturday when he attended a ceremony in St Peter’s Basilica when **Pope Francis** created new cardinals.

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