

Report: God Did Not Tell Pope to Resign in 'Mystical Experience'

The personal secretary of former **Pope Benedict** XVI denied that the pontiff resigned as a consequence of a "mystical experience" in which God "told me" to step back from the papacy.

The Catholic news agency Zenit published a story on Aug. 19 reportedly based on the account of one of the former pope's few visitors; Benedict is living in a refurbished monastery on the Vatican grounds.

According to the report, Benedict said he had decided to resign after what he described as a "mystical experience," stressing that this shouldn't be confused with a vision.

That experience sparked an "absolute desire" to dedicate his life exclusively to **prayer**, in a solitary relationship with God, Benedict reportedly said.

Zenit's account received wide attention but was met with skepticism by people familiar with the former pope.

Speaking on Aug. 25 to the Italian TV channel Canale 5, Benedict's personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, said the Zenit report was "made up from alpha to omega."

"There is nothing true in that story," he added.

While continuing to serve as Benedict's secretary in his retirement, Gaenswein also works with Pope Francis as Prefect of the Papal Household, charged with overseeing the staff who directly work with the new pope.

In the Canale 5 interview, Gaenswein described his role as

that of a “bridge between the pope emeritus and the reigning pope.” He also assured that the two men have an “excellent” relationship.