

WHERE WILL THE NEW POPE LEAD US?

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger has been a well known personality around world much before his election as Pope Benedict XVI. He was the Perfect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and also the President of the Biblical Commission and of the Pontifical International Theological Commission.

Some people recognize him as a conservative Cardinal in the light of some decision he had taken in faith and doctrinal matters in his official capacity holding different important jobs in the Church under Pope John Paul II.

Now Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger has become the Pope of one billion and ten crore Catholics and also the head of Vatican City State people speculate all sorts things about the new Pope. What all forces were at work in his election? What type of leadership he will provide to the Catholics and the world at large? Will he lead the Church forward or backward in this 21st century? In the context of these types of questions and specialization, it's worth making an attempt to understand the new Pope Benedict XVI.

When in the voting in the Sistine Chapel a Cardinal gets $\frac{2}{3}$ majority he becomes the Pope. Usually thousands of people congregate in St Peter's Basilica Square in Rome waiting to see the new Pope while the election is going on. This time during the conclave the journalists and other mass media persons from around the world alone numbered more than 6000 at Rome.

In a papal election when a Cardinal gets two-third majority, before he could appear at the main balcony overlooking the St Peter's Square, the newly elected Pope has three things to do. First, the dean of College of Cardinals asks him if he accepts the election; second, he chooses a new name as Pope and third, the new Pope accepts the Cardinals' greetings and their obedience.

An important job of the Cardinals is to help the Pope in the administration of the Church. The second job is to hold general meeting daily at Vatican after the death or resignation of a Pope and look after the affairs of the Church and prepare for the conclave between 15 to 20 days.

The third job of the Cardinals is to elect a Pope without any outside influence of pressure. In an atmosphere of prayer and total privacy the Cardinals cast their votes in Sistine Chapel. Once inside the conclave the Cardinals cannot contact or meet anyone outside the conclave. All the means communication like radio, newspapers, television, internet, etc. are closed for them.

The Pope in his free choice appoints a Cardinal who is known for his intellectual and spiritual powers and wisdom. Those who are appointed thus as Cardinals are usually well acquainted with the history of the Church and the papacy of last two thousand years.

So it is very significant when the newly elected Pope takes a new name as it reveals much. The new name indicates his ideals, his goals, his motivations, his politics and above all his vision. So when the newly elected Pope took the name of Pope Benedict XVI, the name says much. The first saint with the name Benedict was a pioneer in establishing educational enterprises and

monasteries in Italy and was a well known Christian saint in the 6th century Italy. He was a well known spiritual leader who worked hard for the spiritual upliftment on Christians and also the founder of Benedictine Congregation in Europe. So Pope Pius XII honoured him with the title of “The Father of Europe” and Pope Paul VI bestowed him the title of “The Patron Saint of Europe.”

Among the 264 Popes who succeeded Jesus’ disciple and the first Pope St. Peter there were 15 Popes who took the name Benedict. They were moved by the deep spiritual life and the achievements of St Benedict. Cardinals Ratzinger in taking the name Benedict 16th have also influenced by the life and the achievements of Pope Benedict 15th who played an important and decisive role in the history of the Church especially during the First World War.

Pope Benedict 15th was known as the Pope of peace and social concern. During the First World War he sent seven-point peace proposals to the countries at war calling them to peace and understanding. Pope Benedict 15th took many steps to lessen the suffering and other evil effects of the First World War. He established institutions and offices to find the missing people in the War and rehabilitated them.

As the head of Vatican City State Pope Benedict 15th took concrete steps to establish better relations with other countries. As a result during his papacy from 1914 to 1922 the number of countries with diplomatic relation almost doubled from 14 to 26 countries.

Pope Benedict 15th also played decisive role in establishing better contact and rapport with the Christians in the East. He established Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome and also set up the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches.

One of his most outstanding contributions and achievements was codifying and promulgating a new Code of Canon Law on June 28, 1917. During his eight years of papacy Pope Benedict’s intellectual leadership can be seen in his twelve encyclical letters. In these pontifical letters he discussed effectively the issues like peace, religion, social, spiritual and politics. He specially called for the intellectual preparation of missionaries and also for the formation of native clergies.

The newly elected Pope Benedict XVI was the right hand and able collaborator of his predecessors Pope John Paul II for 23 years especially in matters of doctrines of faith and morals, ecumenical and as well as inter-religious matters. One may recall here that as a theological scholar Joseph Ratzinger played an important role and contributed much to Second Vatican Council which paved the way for the Church to open up and put the Church on the path of progress and reawakening.

Those who know Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger closely and his co-workers and admirers say that the new pope is a respected authority in theology and bible. He is a intellectual known for his wisdom and wide knowledge. Pope Benedict XVI is the second German citizen to become Pope after Pope Victor II who was Pope from 1055 to 1057.

Appearing for the first time at the main balcony of St Peter’s Basilica immediately after his election Pope Benedict XVI addressed these simple but significant words to thousands of people

at St Peter's Square: "after our great Pope John Paul II, the Lord, Cardinals have elected me, a simple, humble worker in God's vineyard. I am consoled by the fact that the Lord knows how to work and how to act, even with insufficient tools, and I especially trust in your prayers."

In his first homily during the inaugural Holy Mass on April 20 indicating his vision and mission Pope Benedict XVI said, "I turn to all, also to those who follow other religions or who simply seek an answer to the fundamental questions of life and have not yet found it. I turn to all with simplicity and affection, to assure them that the Church wishes to continue to engage with them in an open and sincere dialogue, in search of the true good of man and of society."

The name taken by the new Pope Benedict XVI and his 23 years-long close association with his predecessors Pope John Paul II indicate that he will walk on the path of his predecessors. But in the long run he will make his own furrow in providing a unique and enlightened leadership to the Catholics and the rest of the world. Of course, it will take two-three years before Pope Benedict can throw away his past baggage and reputation as a conservative and traditional leader in the Church.