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## Author claims Pope Benedict XVI is thinking of retiring

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VATICAN CITY (Newscore) - A prominent Catholic author has caused controversy after suggesting that Pope Benedict XVI is thinking of retiring on his 85th birthday in April, The (London) Times reported Tuesday.

"For now it's a rumor (a personal idea of Joseph Ratzinger) and I hope that it never becomes a headline. But because it's circulating in the most important rooms of the Vatican it's worthy of attention," Antonio Socci wrote in a newspaper. "In short: the Pope does not discard the possibility of resigning when he reaches 85 in April next year."

The report, which was downplayed by the Vatican, reignited discussion about when an aging pope should stand down.

In a book-length interview published this year under the title "Light of the World," Pope Benedict, the former Cardinal Ratzinger, said, "If a pope clearly realizes that he is no longer physically, psychologically and spiritually capable of handling the duties of his office, then he has a right and, under some circumstances, also an obligation to resign."

In the book, Benedict said that his wide-ranging responsibilities "overtaxed" a man of his age and noted his powers were "diminishing." But he said that he trusted in God to furnish him with strength.

There are several precedents for popes preparing for departure. Pope Pius XII had prepared a letter saying that he would resign if he were captured by the Nazis during World War II. It said, "In that way, they will have Cardinal Pacelli, but not the pope."

Pope Paul VI, who excluded Cardinals over 80 from the Vatican conclave and asked bishops to resign at 75, considered stepping down when he turned 80 but was dissuaded from doing so. Benedict's immediate predecessor, John Paul II, had prepared an undated letter of resignation should he have become incapacitated by his long illness.

Benedict was 78 when appointed pope in 2005 in the apparent expectation that he would not serve a long period, after John Paul II's term of almost 27 years made him the second longest-serving pope.

More than six years later, however, Benedict is going still strong. He just completed a vigorous official visit to his native Germany in which he gave 18 speeches in four days, celebrating mass in three cities before tens of thousands of worshipers. Last month in Madrid, he said

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that he hoped to attend the next World Youth Day in Brazil in 2013.

The pope's brother, Monsignor Georg Ratzinger, said last week that he believed Benedict ought to step down if he became incapable of carrying out his duties. "However,

that moment has still not arrived. He's very active," he said.

The chief Vatican spokesman said that he had "no knowledge" of Benedict standing down on his 85th birthday on April 16.

Father Federico Lombardi said, "The strength and robustness he has shown during this trip provide eloquent proof of his capacity to continue bearing very heavy engagements."

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