

The Pope wears Prada? That's cobblers, says the Vatican

Richard Owen in Rome

[Fashion Editor's comment: not Prada, but very now](#)

The Devil may wear Prada — but the Pope does not, according to the Vatican.

The pontiff has been hailed as a "style icon" since his election just over three years ago and speculation has been rife that he enjoys designer clothes. Attention has focused not only on his often elaborate headgear and fashionable sunglasses but also on his dainty red shoes, or moccasins, widely assumed to be made by Prada.

However *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, categorically denied reports today that the shoes were a Prada product, saying this was "of course false".

According to Vatican sources the Pope's shoes are made by a cobbler from Novara called Adriano Stefanelli, who makes them from calf or kid for the winter and nappa leather for the summer. Papal shoe repairs are carried out by Antonio Arellano, a Peruvian shoemaker in the Borgo, the medieval quarter next to St Peter's. The article, on "Ratzinger's Liturgical Vestments", was written by Juan Manuel de Prada, the noted Spanish writer and author of *The Tempest*, who is not related to the fashion company. De Prada said that the image of the German-born Pope as concerned with "frivolity" was at odds with the truth, which was that he was a "simple and sober" man. Suggestions to the contrary were "stupid and banal".

On the day of Benedict's election as pontiff "the whole world" had seen the sleeves of a "modest black sweater" peeping out from beneath the cuffs of his papal robes, De Prada said. It was true that Pope Benedict paid a great deal of attention to his clothing, but only because of its liturgical significance.

"The Pope is not dressed by Prada but by Christ," he said. Rome residents recall that as a cardinal Benedict was austere rather than flamboyant, and used to cross St Peter's Square from his office to his flat wearing a black beret and black overcoat and carrying a battered leather briefcase.

De Prada said that an article in *Esquire* magazine describing Benedict as among the world figures who were the "epitome of elegance" had been greeted with "amused perplexity". The Pope had revived traditional papal headgear, from the fur-trimmed red medieval caumaro he wears at Christmas to the wide-brimmed red saturno, or "Saturn hat" he has been wearing in the current heat wave in Rome. These had been worn by previous Popes, as had the Renaissance fur-trimmed velvet cape or mozzetta.

Vatican watchers nonetheless noted that these hats and outfits have not been used since the days of Pope John XXIII, who died in 1963. Benedict's predecessor, John Paul II, was usually seen in the same pair of well-worn brown shoes, and invariably wore simple outfits such as a basic white cassock and white gold-trimmed sash, although in winter he tended to don a crimson wool cloak trimmed with gold braid.

Pope Benedict has been seen wearing Serengeti sunglasses, and is also known to have been given Geox loafers by Mario Moretti Polegato, the Geox CEO, who is a friend of Joaquin Navarro-Valls, the former papal spokesman. When he retreats to the mountains of northern Italy in the summer he wears a jaunty white baseball cap.

After his election the Vatican denied reports that Pope Benedict was abandoning the Rome ecclesiastical tailors Gammarelli, who have been making papal cassocks since 1792, for a rival firm, Maninelli, which supplied his robes when he was a cardinal. "There are no cassock wars," a spokesman said.



(Filippo Monteforte/EPA)

The Pope's natty appearance has led to speculation that he has a penchant for designer wear

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