

Retirement: From the sacred to the profane (11, 05, 13)

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When it comes to retirement, the spectrum covers the gamut from the sacred to the profane. If not profane, substitute secular or whatever descriptor you think fits for prostitution, but remember, it's legal in many places in the world. And lest you worry unduly, no, I am not interested in taking on a new profession such as prostitution at my age, even though there appears to be a lot of fringe benefits. I'm sure Miriam would enjoy a good laugh as well, but that's another story.



This year, for the first time in almost 600 years, an active Pope announced that he was stepping down (aka retiring) as leader of the Catholic Church. 85-year-old Pope Benedict XVI cited his age and deteriorating health, and advised the world that he would retire on Feb. 28. And he was good to his word, now cavouring wherever it is that retired Popes cavourt.

This should not be a big deal, except that the guy who replaced him is 77, so maybe I do have a case for becoming a prostitute for I have not reached 77. If I did, my role models would be the longest working prostitutes in Amsterdam, twin sisters Louise and Martine Fokkens, who also recently made official their retirement after 50 years of work and over 350,000 clients served. "I was a little bit tired," Louise told CBC's *As It Happens* host Carol Off in an interview that aired March 18.

Okay, let us not get into silly puns or other verbal gymnastics based upon the surname of the two ladies of the night; sorry, ladies of the red light district. They claimed just like the Pope that old age and arthritis were the main reasons for their retirement. And like the Pope who is working on an encyclical, the ladies have also written about their exploits in a new book called *The Ladies of Amsterdam* which I guess is going to be a hot seller and probably attract far more readers than the Pope's encyclical. Long ago, I read encyclicals in high school, and they are uniformly boring particularly because they are written in Latin which we all know is a dead language except in the Vatican.

The twins began their careers in their early twenties, and in their CBC interview, they explained how they enjoyed their time working in Amsterdam's red light district. They described the place as quite safe and far more fun than working on the streets. In contrast, the Pope had to travel in a special bullet-proof vehicle dubbed the "Pope-mobile." Louise reported in broken English, "You had fun, we know a lot of people ... the American boys, the Canadian boys, the German ... every country come there." The pope did not seem to enjoy his job much towards the end. He was grilled by reporters who asked about the darndest topics such as sex abuse, and it is here that the two stories seem to magically merge into a parable about worldly pleasure.

I'm not sure how to produce a fable out of this like Aesop, but the women said they enjoyed spending time with their clients and that they were so successful they have their own house. Priests get a house too at no cost, but unfortunately are not supposed to also get sex, which often results in some great cost.

Will the new Pope legalize marriage for priests? Good luck there my friend. The only skirts that the Sistine Chapel will ever see are those worn by the cardinals.

Miriam and I have been to Amsterdam's red light district – as tourists, not clients. I never thought of it as a healthy and safe work environment until I heard about these twin sisters.



Louise said that working made her feel younger, and Martine said that she misses it because it's sometimes nice to be your own boss.

I wonder if Louise and Martine and Benedict will ever get together in some retired seniors' event. If they did, the conversation would be instructive, don't you think?