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Has the 'real Ratzinger' come out to play?

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Catholic News Service photo

ROME -- When Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected to the papacy in April 2005, the popular forecast called for stormy weather ahead. This was, after all, the Vatican enforcer who had been leading a 'smack-down on heresy since 1981', in the words of T-shirts and coffee mugs marketed by a Ratzinger fan club. His rise elicited dread in some quarters and joy in others, but virtually everyone agreed big things were in the works.

During most of the past seven years, however, that anticipated upheaval has seemed a lot like the dog that didn't bark. Back in February 2006, the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus famously voiced 'palpable unease' among those most elated by Ratzinger's election, and that disappointment endured in a swath of Catholic opinion which had begun to despair that the pope would ever impose order.

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