

Pope Emeritus

Letter from Benedict XVI: the will not to understand

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Reactions to Benedict XVI's August 2014 letter to Monsignor Nicola Bux regarding his resignation from the papacy continue to dominate the headlines. The letter is contained in the book *Realtà e Utopia nella Chiesa* (Reality and Utopia in the Church), published by *La Bussola*

. Alongside serious reflections and well-founded criticism, however, false information and distorted speeches or statements taken out of context are also circulating, creating further confusion.

It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to clarify the context in which the letter was published and its true meaning and, on the other hand, to provide clarification of an interview with Monsignor Bux from 2018 that is currently being circulated to demonstrate an alleged contradiction with what has been stated today.

Firstly, it must be made clear that the validity of Benedict XVI's resignation and Francis' election is not in question. Above all, no cardinal has ever contested either: any criticism of Pope Ratzinger's act or Pope Bergoglio's choices has never questioned the legitimacy of either decision.

From this point of view, the now published letter from the Pope Emeritus, in which he responds to objections and perplexities raised by close associates, definitively clarifies Benedict XVI's intentions regarding his resignation and the freedom with which he made the decision. In other words, it rules out any distinction between '*munus*' and '*ministerium*' on which the various 'benepapist' theses, as defined by the **American writer and apologist Steven O'Reilly**, or sedevacantist theses of any kind were based. However, Benedict XVI had already expressed his views on resignation and freedom in various ways in the past, so it is untrue to claim that publishing this letter years ago would have prevented many of the current deviations; one need only look at the reactions of certain circles today.

Above all, it is important to understand that the publication's aim is not to reopen a dormant chapter of controversy, but to provide a tool for reflecting on an under-explored historical period of the Church. Therefore, it is surprising that **so-called experts** comment on the publication of the letter without taking into account that it is part of a broader correspondence, which they have obviously not read, including the letter to which Benedict XVI responds and the subsequent commentary. The letter delivered to the Pope Emeritus by Monsignor Bux during an audience contains a list of questions and concerns about the manner of the resignation and the institution of the papacy emeritus, and the commentary on Benedict XVI's letter raises critical points to the extent of asserting, 'with sorrow', that 'the resignation of Benedict XVI has caused serious damage to the institution of the papacy'.

This means the correspondence as a whole that must be read and understood.

However, an objection has been raised, citing a 2018 [interview on Aldo Maria Valli's blog](#) in which Monsignor Bux said that 'it would be easier to examine and study [...] the question of the legal validity of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation'. This statement has been repeated in numerous posts to support the claim that, despite having had the letter from the Pope Emeritus in his possession for four years, Monsignor Bux had doubts about the validity of Benedict XVI's resignation. However, this quote has been taken out of context, as the interview dealt with the question of the 'heretical Pope', an issue raised by various parties due to statements made by Pope Francis. Monsignor Bux explained all the difficulties of such a question, both in defining exactly what heresy is and who has the power to judge the Pope, by retracing the history of the Church. He said that the First See cannot be judged by anyone.

Only subsequent popes can judge their predecessors.

Therefore, the reference to Benedict's resignation fits into this discourse and must be related to the uproar caused by a statement made by Pope Benedict's secretary, Monsignor Georg Gänswein. During the presentation of a book, Gänswein spoke of an 'extended pontificate'. For this reason, in his reply to Valli, Bux refers to the idea of a collegial papacy, which he considers to be contrary to the 'Gospel dictate'. It should also be noted that Gänswein himself later retracted the expression in his book *Nothing but the Truth* (2023), explaining that he had intended to 'soften' Benedict XVI's words during his final general audience on 27 February 2013. During this audience, Benedict XVI stated that 'the renunciation of the active exercise of the ministry does not revoke' the acceptance of the pontificate as a commitment 'always and forever with the Lord'. This expression had generated 'an unintended ambiguity', but 'I must admit,' wrote Gänswein, 'that the patch was worse than the hole.' However, Gänswein clarifies that the original meaning was simply that Benedict XVI would no longer be a theologian or professor and would not return to what he loved most.

It is therefore in this context that Monsignor Bux's 'incriminating' statement should be understood. Moreover, in his commentary on Benedict XVI's letter, Bux refers to the preface he wrote for Federico Michielan's book *Non era più lui* (He Was No Longer Himself), published by *Fede e Cultura*, in which he explores these issues in depth.