

PREVIEW

"Life", Pope Francis' autobiography admits problems with Benedict XVI

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It had been announced as Pope Francis' "bombshell book", but judging from the excerpts published yesterday by the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, there is very little that is explosive in the autobiography *Life - my story in History* due out on 19 March.

We will see the full content, but the anticipations filtered out yesterday in order to entice the public to rush to the bookstore propose very little that is unpublished. On the contrary, the reader finds all the issues Bergoglio has already got off his chest.

The Pontiff often talks about himself, but this time, since it is an autobiography, he is more entitled to do so. So, he could not leave out the story of his infatuation as a seminarian for a girl he met at his uncle's wedding (already told to Rabbi Abraham Skorka in the 2010 book *Sobre el cielo y la tierra*), the vow to the Virgin of Mount Carmel after which he has not watched TV since the night of 15 July 1990 (already confided in an interview with *La Voz del Pueblo* in 2015), the praise of the communist teacher Esther Ballestrino (already written in the book-interview by Sergio Rubin and Francesca Ambrogetti *El Jesuita*, published in 2010), the harsh accusation against the Kirchnerist government of having tried to put "the noose around his neck" (already referred to the Hungarian Jesuits during the last apostolic visit to Budapest), the backstory on the conclave of eleven years ago with the reassurance of the truth about the lung operated on in his youth (already recounted in a recent interview with *Vida Nueva* and before that by some cardinals and 'friendly' biographers), the dismissal of the hypothesis of resignation and the announcement that he prefers the title of bishop emeritus of Rome in the event of his resignation (already revealed in 2022 to Televisa Univision).

Even if we want to move on to less personal topics, the defence of *Fiducia Supplicans* on the point of ambiguity when he claims that "the doctrine of the Church is not questioned" has long since ceased to be a novelty, as has the clearing of civil unions already pronounced with great clamour in a cut interview clip that ended up in a 2020 documentary by Evgeny Afineevsky.

Paradoxically, the only note worthy of attention in the anticipations published yesterday is the one concerning the relationship with Benedict XVI. Francis' words, in fact, disprove once and for all the narration of the happy cohabitation with his 'wise grandfather', a formula that Ratzinger had dismissed with his Bavarian irony, underlining how his successor was actually only nine years younger than him. The Argentinean Pope wrote: "Instead, I have been saddened to see, over the years, how his figure as Pope Emeritus has been instrumentalised for ideological and political purposes by unscrupulous people who, not having accepted his renunciation, have thought of their own advantage and their own little garden to cultivate, underestimating the dramatic possibility of a fracture within the Church". In eleven years, Francis has shown that he has no problem pressing on the accelerator to implement his governing agenda, unceremoniously introducing even measures that 'broke the heart' of his more than

ninety-year-old predecessor. With a certain bravado, moreover, the Pope has also said that he does not fear a schism.

In the autobiography, however, he evokes for the first time the drama that a split in the Church could bring about, although he identifies its possible cause, would be found, only in the attitude of those who instrumentalise Benedict XVI. In another passage of the anticipation, Francis definitively debunks the myth of absolute concord between him and the former Pope in the years of the Mater Ecclesiae monastery and recounts: "We decided together that it would have been better for him not to live in hiding, as he had initially assumed, but to see people and participate in the life of the Church. Unfortunately, it was of little use, because in those ten years there has been no lack of controversy and it has hurt us both'. So, as Monsignor Georg Gänswein had already revealed and Peter Seewald confirmed, it is not true that the relationship between Ratzinger and his successor was all sunshine and roses. In the light of Bergoglio's confession, it will be increasingly difficult for the last few resistance fighters to continue upholding this thesis and be taken seriously.