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Pope Benedict XVI is assisted by his assistant personal secretary, then-Msgr. Alfred Xuereb, a

Pope Benedict XVI is assisted by his assistant personal secretary, then-Msgr. Alfred Xuereb, as he prepares to lead the Angelus from a window at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, in August 2012. (CNS photo/Giampiero Sposito, Reuters)

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Retired Pope Benedict XVI's second secretary came out with a new memoir on Feb. 9, a light, photo-filled daily journal that sharply contrasts with the bombshell tell-all book published last month by the late German pope's main assistant.

"My Days With Benedict XVI" by Archbishop Alfred Xuereb is the latest book to hit Italian bookshelves following Benedict's Dec. 31 death. It was launched Feb. 9 at a semi-official Vatican event alongside another book by a longtime Vatican reporter "The Resignation: I Didn't Flee."

The two new publications served to blunt, in some ways, the negative criticism of Francis that erupted in the weeks after the death of the first "emeritus pope" by refocusing attention on Benedict himself.

Pope Francis recently acknowledged that Benedict's death had been "instrumentalized" by conservatives to accentuate the idea of competing papal camps, a reference to the books, interviews and memos published by Benedict's longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, and some conservative cardinals that were highly critical of the reigning pontiff.

Xuereb was the "second secretary" to Benedict during his 2005-2013 pontificate, and remained on as secretary to Francis for the first months of his papcy. Francis then placed Xuereb in his new Economy Ministry before making him ambassador to Korea and Mongolia, where Francis is expected to visit later this year in the first-ever papal visit.

All of which suggests Xuereb remained on excellent terms with both Benedict and Francis, as his memoir "My Days with Benedict XVI" makes clear. The book reads as a daily journal, retracing Benedict's travels, audiences, intimate lunches and jokes, as well as the tear-filled moments surrounding his historic resignation. But it ends when Xuereb bids Benedict farewell a few weeks into his retirement, and makes few comments about the current pontificate.

The same cannot be said for "Nothing but the Truth: My Life Beside Pope Benedict XVI," by Ganswein, which also chronicled Benedict's papacy but dedicated several chapters to his 10-year retirement and Ganswein's not-so-easy relations with Francis.

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The Xuereb book launch Feb. 9 suggested that his is the Benedict memoir the Vatican wants to promote: Held in the press conference room of Vatican Media, the launch was attended by the hierarchy of the Vatican communications office and was covered by Vatican Media. The book features a prologue by a former Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi.

Xuereb, who attended via video conference from Seoul, was asked about Francis' recent comments that Benedict's death head been "instrumentalized" by critics of the current pontificate.

"I agree, unfortunately," Xuereb said, without elaborating.

In one indiscretion, he confirmed that indeed Benedict had suffered from sleep problems though he said he had never heard him complain of insomnia. Recently, Benedict's biographer said that chronic, years-long insomnia was the primary reason behind the 2013 resignation.

"We never heard him talk about that with us, but we knew he had problems sleeping," Xuereb said. He recalled the 2012 papal visit to Mexico, when Benedict fell during the night and hit his head. The episode was later cited as one of the reasons why Benedict resigned, believing that global travel was a pre-requisite for any pope and that he no longer was up to the task.

"I remember that night in Mexico, he couldn't sleep at all," Xuereb said.