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Pope Francis greets retired Pope Benedict XVI during an encounter for the elderly in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 28, 2014. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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Rome — April 16, 2024
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Pope Francis' decision to reveal the secret inner workings of two conclaves was motivated, in part, "to show the unity of the church," according to a Spanish journalist who interviewed the pontiff about his relationship with his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI.

"Pope Francis wanted to speak about Benedict XVI," said Javier Martínez-Brocal, who writes for the Spanish newspaper ABC and just this month published *El Sucesor* ("The Successor"), a book-length interview with Francis about the unparalleled decade in Catholic history where two popes — one reigning and one retired — lived inside the Vatican.

The book has already made global headlines for Francis' decision to reveal that after the death of Pope John Paul II, then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio backed then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in the conclave that elected Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

Bergoglio, the future Francis who was then leading the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, Argentina, has long been reported as the runner-up in the 2005 conclave. But Francis told Martínez-Brocal that he had been "used" by other cardinals attempting to block Ratzinger's election.

In his interview for the podcast, the journalist said "the key to understanding" why Francis was willing to revisit this history was because he had a "profound" relationship with his predecessor, despite occasional efforts by those allied with Benedict to discredit Francis.

Martínez-Brocal spoke as part of an episode of "The Vatican Briefing" that also features a conversation between co-hosts Joshua McElwee and Christopher White about a controversial new doctrinal note from the Vatican's powerful Dicastery for the Doctrinal of the Faith.

The note, titled *Dignitas Infinita* ("Infinite Dignity"), condemns gender-affirming surgery for trans individuals and the growing practice of surrogate motherhood.

In the interview about his new book with Francis, Martínez-Brocal recounts the extraordinary period 2013-22 when Francis was governing the global Catholic Church while his predecessor, Benedict XVI, was retired and living in a convent in the Vatican gardens.

The book recalls Francis' tensions with Benedict XVI's longtime secretary, German Archbishop Georg Gänswein, and revisits an episode in 2020 where the then-head of the Vatican's liturgy office claimed to have co-authored a book with the retired pope that took aim at Francis' consideration of married priests.

According to Martínez-Brocal, some believed that "Benedict XVI [was] a semi-pope, someone who wanted to continue governing the church." Martínez-Brocal says that his book establishes that this was not what the late pope intended, nor how Francis viewed their relationship.

"Until the last moment, Pope Benedict was always loyal to me," Francis tells Martínez-Brocal in the book.

At 87, Francis is now facing several health challenges and there is no shortage of talk about a future conclave in Rome.

Martínez-Brocal said he believes such chatter may be premature.

"Pope Francis has so many surprises still," he said on the podcast.

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