When Benedict XVI abruptly abdicated the papacy under mysterious circumstances, he told the clergy of Rome, two weeks before the effective date of his curiously worded renunciation of the "exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome," that "although I am about to withdraw, I remain close to all of you in prayer, and I am sure that you too will be close to me, even if I am *hidden from the world*."

Having insisted upon retaining his papal name, papal garb, papal insignia, and the honorific "His Holiness," however, Benedict has been anything but "hidden from the world." Quite the contrary, his "hidden" life has been one interview and public appearance after another, at which he declares how happy he is with Francis' tumultuous reign. Benedict expresses his contentment in the midst of alarmed protests and petitions from faithful Catholics and clergy around the world calling for clarifications, corrections and even the withdrawal of Vatican documents, including Francis' catastrophic apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

Indeed, as the world-renowned Vaticanist Sandro Magister has just written, far from being "hidden from the world," Benedict "just won't keep quiet. Neither in the written nor in the spoken word." And now, as this column appears, what Magister calls a "monumental biography" of Benedict is appearing in bookstores all over the world, including a book-length interview of Benedict by the author, the theologian Elio Guerriero, and a preface by none other than Francis. If this is being "hidden from the world," then words have lost their meaning.

During still another interview, this one appearing in the Italian daily *L'espresso* on August 24, Benedict explains the motive for his abdication when asked about it by the interviewer (the same Elio Guerriero). Did Benedict renounce the papacy because his mind was failing? Was he unable to focus mentally in order to write encyclicals and otherwise defend the truths of the Faith as a Pope must? Was he mentally or physically unable to formulate plans, give orders and have them carried out? Was his health about to collapse?

None of the above. Rather, we are asked to believe that the following constitutes a sufficient reason for an unprecedented abandonment of the papal office, throwing the entire Church into a state of confusion by opening the way to the election of Francis — for which the "St. Gallen mafia" had been plotting since 2005:

"In 2013, however, there were numerous commitments I did not think I would be able any longer to carry out."

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## What were those commitments?

"In particular, the date had already been fixed for World Youth Day at which I would have had to appear in the summer of 2014 at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Now, in this regard, I had two very precise convictions. After the experience of the trips to Mexico and Cuba, I did not feel myself capable any longer of accomplishing such a demanding trip. Besides, with the setting given to these days by John Paul II, the physical presence of the Pope was indispensable. A video link or other form of participation made possible by technology was out of the question."

Believe it or not, Benedict offered his interviewer *no other concrete reason* for his stunning and calamitous abdication. Nothing. He was simply too tired to make long and pointless papal trips to greet cheering crowds. A Jumbotron would not do! No, he just had to be there to wave and smile at a crowd of screaming youngsters before they doffed their outer garments following the "Papal Mass" and dove into the sea for a little Sunday swim at the beach in Rio.

But Benedict is not too tired — even today, more than three years later — to make public appearances, and give addresses and numerous interviews, including an interview the length of a book as part of a "monumental biography."

At the same, however, Francis (as Magister notes) contradicts Benedict by declaring in an interview "last July 3 with *La Nación* … that the abdication of Benedict XVI 'had nothing to do with anything personal.'" Really? So Benedict's abdication had nothing to with personal reasons?

Quite simply, we've been had. We are not being told the whole truth about why Benedict XVI is the one and only Pope in Church history to resign while in full possession of his faculties, offering no excuse other than fatigue during long trips. (Pope Celestine at least cited his own incompetence in office.)

Chalk this one up to the whole state of affairs no doubt predicted with pinpoint accuracy in that part of the Third Secret of Fatima we have yet to see — the part in which the Mother of God, not Cardinal Sodano, explains what the published but still enigmatic vision means.

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