Christ is risen! This past Monday, I enjoyed engaging in a friendly debate with Dr. Edmund Mazza on the subject of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation. Many thanks to Mike from Restoring the Faith Media for hosting!

As readers may know, Dr. Mazza has become known in recent years for championing the position the Benedict XVI did not validly resign the Petrine office due to what Canon Law calls "substantial error" (can. 188). Steven O'Reilly, author of *Valid? The Resignation of Pope Benedict XVI* (2022), accurately sums up the position in his book (p. 47):

> "Pope Benedict XVI held erroneous views about the papacy even before he was elected pope, by which he erroneously believed the papacy could be 'bifurcated' into a papal diarchy, comprised of an active and a contemplative component. Benedict attempted to retain either a part or the whole of the papal *munus* when, in the *Declaratio*, he resigned the Petrine 'ministry' (*ministerio*), signaling that he intended to resign only the 'active ministry' (*ministerio*) while retaining the Petrine office (*munus*) in whole or in part. However, given it is impossible to split the papacy, Benedict's attempted partial resignation constituted a 'substantial error' which invalidated his resignation per Canon 188."

For my part, I hold that Pope Benedict's resignation was indeed valid, as was the election of Pope Francis. I base my position on three fundamental facts:

1. In his *Declaratio* (Feb. 11, 2013), Benedict stated that "the See of Rome, the See of Saint Peter, will be vacant" as a result of his act of renunciation, and that "a Conclave to elect the new Supreme Pontiff will have to be convoked by those whose competence it is."
2. Not a single Cardinal-elector challenged the validity of Benedict XVI's resignation. On the contrary, they proceeded to do exactly what he said they would, namely, convoke a conclave and elect a new Supreme Pontiff.
3. Immediately following his election, Pope Francis was peacefully and universally accepted as Benedict's true successor by the Church, beginning with all the Cardinal-electors. In the words of the renowned Jesuit canonists Fr. Francis X. Wernz (1842-1914) and Fr. Peter Vidal (1867-1938), this is "a sign and an infallible effect of a valid election" (*Ius Can.*, II, p. 520, note 171).

Cardinal Louis Billot, S.J. (1846-1931), the renowned French theologian who served in the Holy Office under Pope St. Pius X (r. 1903-1914), expounds upon the nature and authority of

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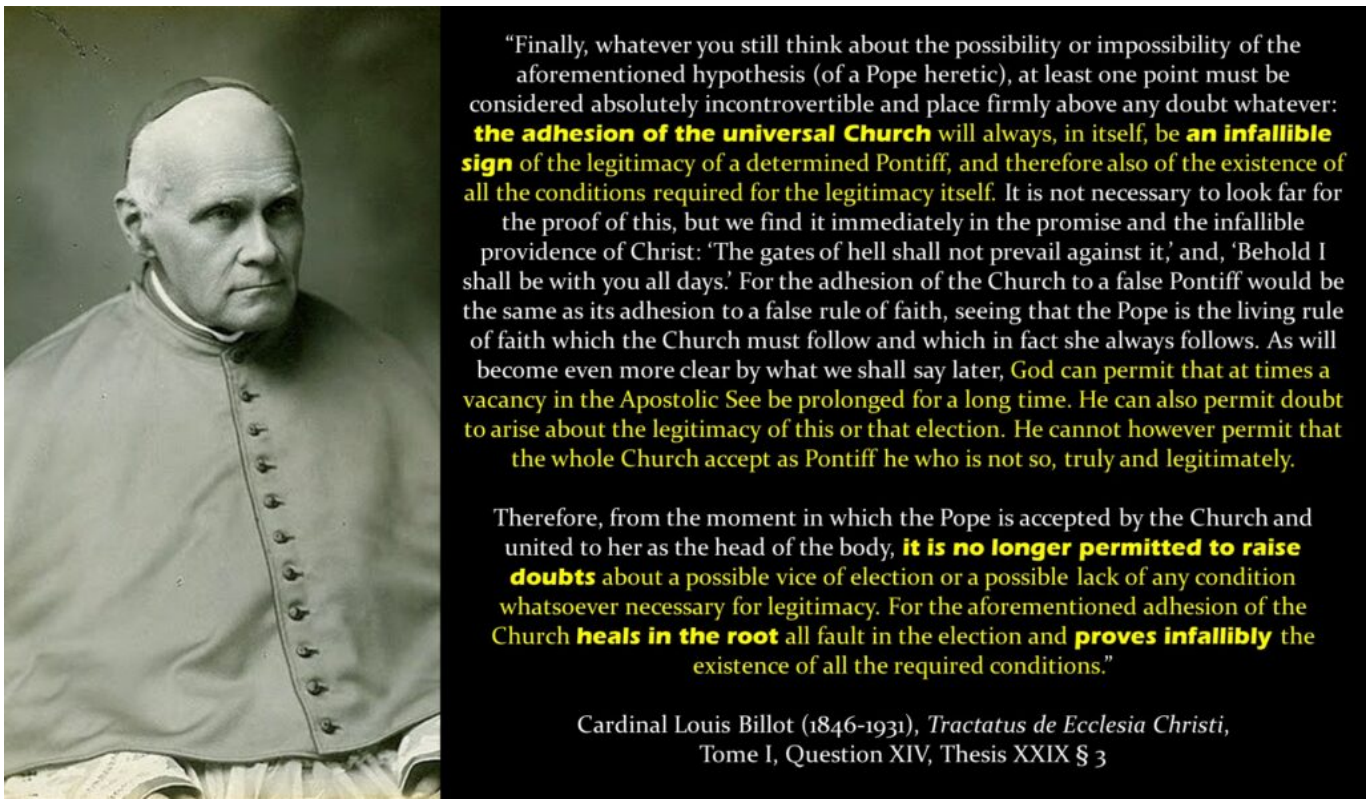
peaceful and universal acceptance in *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi,* his classic work on ecclesiology (Tome I, Question XIV, Thesis XXIX, § 3).



I covered Benedict's resignation and Francis' election in a lengthy two-part series that appeared in the February and March 2024 issues of CFN (subscribe **HERE** and gain instant access to the digital edition of the current paper plus an archive of back issues).

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The Providence of Our Lord's Incarnation — Turn to page 5

Fatima and the Season of Lent — Turn to page 9

The Struggle for the Kyivan Patrimony — Turn to page 15

"The time is accomplished and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

The *Fiducia Supplicans* Fiasco

Approval of Same-Sex Blessings Spurs Major Pushback

By Anthony P. Stine, Ph.D.

Annually it seems that in the days leading to the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, the Vatican sees fit to issue documents that upset traditional Catholics and cause a storm of controversy. In 2021, days before Christmas, Cardinal Arthur Roche issued the infamous *Responsa ad Dubia* regarding "certain provisions" of *Traditionis Custodes*. Dec. 18, 2023 was little different: one week to the day before Christmas, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez unleashed the now-infamous *Fiducia Supplicans*, which instructs priests to give "spontaneous" blessings to same-sex couples.[1] This declaration caused the biggest firestorm of controversy in the Catholic world since at least *Traditionis Custodes*, if not since *Amoris Laetitia*. Interestingly enough, and in no way coincidentally, *Fiducia Supplicans* was issued on the Feast of the Expectation of Mary, which was on the Church's liturgical calendar until the 1954 liturgical reforms. That feast asks the laity to reflect on what Our Lady was considering and feeling in her heart as she approached the birth of Christ. It is a feast associated with the perpetual virginity of Mary.[2] The issuing of this document on this day continues the long tradition of issuing heterodox statements and declarations on Marian Feast days, including *Traditionis Custodes* on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (July 16), as well as numerous Pachamama declarations on various Marian Feast days.[3]

Classic Modernist Method

Fiducia Supplicans follows the classic Modernist method of shrouding heresy in orthodox language. The document begins with a basic reiteration of the Church's perennial teaching on the nature of marriage being a sacramental union between one man and one woman, open to the begetting of children, and assures Catholics that "couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples" can receive a blessing "without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage." These statements have provided defenders of the document with all of the ammunition they need to defend the document as orthodox. The problem is that the text explicitly states that the Church needs to rethink the nature of blessings. After 12 paragraphs of reiterating the Church's teaching on the nature of blessings and repeating that the Church cannot bless that which runs counter to the natural law or the Gospel, Cardinal Fernandez and Pope Francis declare the following:

"One must also avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings to this point of view alone.

Continued on page 23

Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, current Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Is Francis the True Pope?

Revisiting the Debate – Part I

By Matt Gaspers

In December of 2023, Dr. Edmund Mazza hosted an online conference entitled, "Is the Pope Catholic?" A Conference Seeking the Truth about the 'Two Popes,'" the latter being a reference to Benedict XVI and Francis. Dr. Mazza has become known in recent years for promoting the position that Benedict XVI never validly resigned the office of Supreme Pontiff, and hence, that Jorge Mario Bergoglio was never validly elected and is thus an antipope.

Dr. Mazza was joined last December by Fr. Paul Kramer, Ann Barnhardt, and Elizabeth Yore, all of whom likewise maintain that Francis is an antipope for various reasons. Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, who has begun to question the validity of Francis' election more recently,[1] presented a keynote address during the conference.[2]

Several years have passed since this topic has been covered in the pages of *Catholic Family News*. In light of Benedict XVI's death (Dec. 31, 2022), as well as the recent conference and the prospect of another conclave in the not-too-distant future (Francis is now 87 years old and not in the best of health), it seems an appropriate time to revisit the topic, outline some of the main points of contention, and offer readers a refresher on certain key principles that should be kept in mind when it comes to this debate. My hope is that this will help readers better understand the central issues involved and provide greater clarity regarding the most pivotal facts.

Benedict's Resignation

From what I have observed, it appears most people who reject Francis as the Pope do so because they believe Benedict XVI never validly resigned, which would mean that the See of Peter was not vacant when Francis was elected. Such individuals base their beliefs on an alleged convergence of evidence based on several texts – those from Benedict XVI (including some from decades before his pontificate) and others, read in light of two particular canons from the current (1983) Code of Canon Law – all of which proves to them that Benedict's resignation

Continued on page 18

Pope Francis on the evening of his election (March 13, 2013)

Catholic Family NEWS

March 2024 Vol. 31 Issue 3 $3.50US / $3.50CDN / $2.00UK

Irish Monasticism: A Unique Example of Christian Asceticism — Turn to page 7

Our Lady and the End Times — Turn to page 9

Cardinal Newman's View on the Antichrist — Turn to page 15

"... thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead, the third day ..." (Luke 24:46)

False Ecumenism on Display in Rome

Pope Allows "Anglican Eucharist," Meets with Female "Bishop"

By Anthony P. Stine, Ph.D.

During the first week of February, Pope Francis met with his Council of Cardinals (known as "C9") in the Vatican. This group of advisors was originally convened in September of 2013 to assist the Holy Father in matters of Church governance and has met sporadically ever since. Most recently, the Council discussed the role of women in the Church and they were joined by three women, one of whom was an Anglican "bishop" named Jo Bailey Wells.[1] Prior to that meeting, Francis allowed Justin Welby, the Anglican "Archbishop" of Canterbury, to offer an "Anglican Eucharist" inside a Roman basilica in late January.[2] Thereafter, Francis and Welby participated in an ecumenical Vespers service at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome.[3] All of these events caused scandal among Catholics who understand the Church's constant teaching on engaging in common prayer with heretics and schismatics, the invalidity of Anglican orders, and the crimes of the so-called "Church of England" against English Catholics in centuries past.

Welby's visit was part of an ecumenical summit called "Growing Together," which commenced a few days into the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25). The summit began on January 22 in Rome and representatives from over two dozen countries were present. Reporting ahead of the event, the Episcopal News Service explained:

"The bishops will come in pairs – Anglican and Catholic – representing different countries from around the world. More than 50 bishops are participating, from 27 countries.

Visiting holy sites in both Rome and Canterbury, the bishops will pray, reflect and learn from one another. The aim is to discuss ways of growing together in joint witness and mission in the world.

On Jan. 25, near the tomb of the Apostle Paul, Pope Francis and the Most Rev. Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, will commission the bishops, sending them out in pairs, to be witnesses to Christian unity. This will be a significant moment, symbolic for Anglican-Catholic bonds and advancing ecumenical dialogue.

The summit is organized by the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). IARCCUM is an official commission of the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church, established to ecumenical dialogue between the traditions."[4]

Needless to say, this completely ignores how the Church of England was founded, the billions of pounds of property stolen by the Crown and given to that "Church," the blood of the English martyrs, and the

Continued on page 8

Pope Francis and "Archbishop" Justin Welby during an ecumenical Vespers service at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (Jan. 26, 2024).

Is Francis the True Pope?

Revisiting the Debate – Part II

By Matt Gaspers

Last month, we examined the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the primary arguments of those who deny the validity of his resignation. As explained in Part I, it seems that most people who reject Francis as the Pope do so because they believe that Benedict never validly resigned, which would mean that the See of Peter was not vacant when Francis was elected. Such individuals typically hold that Benedict's resignation was invalid for one of two reasons: (1) he only renounced "the ministry [*ministerii*] of Bishop of Rome" (*Declaratio*)[1] and not the office (*munus*) itself (cf. can. 332 § 2)[2] and/or (2) he held an erroneous understanding of the Papacy (i.e., that the office can be bifurcated into "active" and "contemplative" halves and shared) and was thus in "substantial error" when he attempted to resign (can. 188).

Regarding linguistics, we established that there is no radical difference between the Latin terms *munus* and *ministerium*, and further, that Benedict was not obliged to use the term *munus* in order to validly resign. As for the allegation of "substantial error," we saw how Benedict himself stated that "the See of Rome, the See of Saint Peter' would be 'vacant'" (*Declaratio*) as a result of his resignation. We also consulted the *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* for the meaning of "substantial error" (can. 188):

"Substantial error is a mistaken judgment which affects the essential elements of the resignation, in terms of either the cause or motivation for resignation, or the nature of the resignation and its consequences. An example could be a diocesan finance officer who mistakenly thinks one must resign when a new bishop is named even though one's term has not expired."[3]

Pope Benedict XVI announcing his resignation in Latin (Feb. 11, 2013).

Regarding "the cause or motivation," Benedict told us why he chose to resign and it had nothing to do with any errors he supposedly held concerning the Papacy: "After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry"

Continued on page 19

I'm very pleased with the feedback we've received thus far on the debate, for example:

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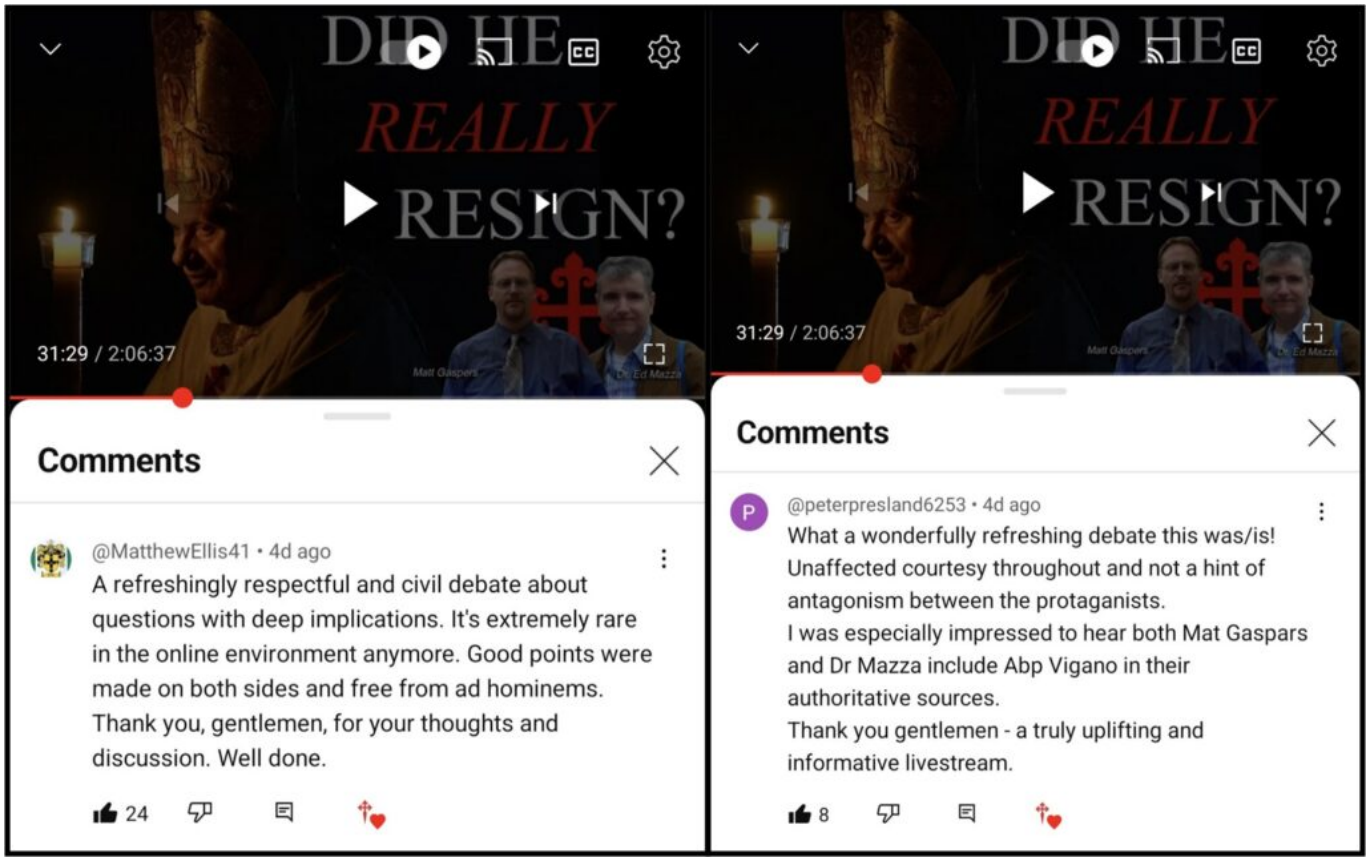

If you enjoy the debate, be sure to leave a comment and let us know.

Christus surréxit! Surréxit vere, alleluia!

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