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“Pope Emeritus” or second Pope?

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THE CAMERLENGO WITH HIS "TEAM" OF CARDINALS

Italian Catholic periodical, *Civiltà Cattolica* would prefer to call Benedict XVI “Bishop Emeritus of Rome”. Canonists contest Ratzinger’s choice

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“Pope Emeritus” or “Emeritus Roman Pontiff”: these are the titles Benedict XVI chose for himself at the end of his pontificate. This is according to Vatican spokesman Fr. Federico Lombardi, who reported Benedict XVI’s decision communicated to him by the former Pope’s personal secretary, Georg Gänswein. But in an article published in *Civiltà Cattolica*, one of Italy’s oldest Catholic periodicals, Canonist Gianfranco Ghirlanda suggested a more suitable title would be “Bishop Emeritus of Rome”. Other Canonists preferred the term “former Pope”, added to the name Joseph Ratzinger, scrapping the papal name Benedict XVI which is linked to the papal acts of his eight years as leader of the Catholic Church.

This issue of *Civiltà Cattolica* never reached news stands so the public was only informed of Ratzinger’s choice. But no one has quite realised the implications of the existence of a Pope and a “Pope Emeritus”. Benedict XVI cleared the field of any potential objections, by pledging complete respect and obedience to his successor, whoever this turned out to be. The fact remains, however, that the outgoing Pope is no longer Pope, regardless of whether he continues to give his whole life in service to the Church, through intercessory prayer, “hidden from the world.”

“He who gives up the papal ministry for any reason other than death, remains a bishop of course, but is no longer pope as he loses all primatial power because he did not gain this through Episcopal consecration but directly from Christ, after his legitimate election,” Fr. Ghirlanda wrote. If we go by this statement, attributing the title of Pope, albeit Emeritus, to Joseph Ratzinger is problematic. Referring to him as “former Pope” or “former Roman Pontiff” is quite different. These definitions clearly indicate that Ratzinger has renounced the papacy definitively as they contain a reference to the past. “Pope Emeritus” on the other hand risks insinuating he is a second Pope.

One gets the impression that little reflection was given to Ratzinger’s current title, from both a canonistic and theological point of view. It is not Ratzinger’s resignation that is being questioned, which is in compliance with the Code of Canon Law, but the need for careful reflection when thinking about how the former pope fits into the Holy See framework now.

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