

WE HAVE ONLY ONE POPE

Reflection on Pope Francis' reform of the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century has to begin with the acceptance of the fact that Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was legitimately and validly elected Pope Francis I on March 13, 2013. On that rainy night in Rome the smoke coming from the Sistine Chapel was white, not black, and not even a little bit gray. It was the definitive voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to the whole Church and the whole world. Upon the election of Francis, the cardinal electors each stepped up to the new pope and, in turn, vowed to obey him. The Catholic Church has only one successor of St. Peter and vicar of Christ on earth and that is Francis.

The former pope Benedict XVI ceased to be pope when he formally resigned on February 13, 2013. In spite of all the titles still attributed to him he is no longer pope. He does have priestly and episcopal orders, but he holds no official office in the Church and, as such, possesses no *de jure* authority in the Church. Based upon his service to the Church, his theological expertise, and his holiness, the former pope does have a right to write and speak out on issues relating to Catholic faith and life today. His views are important, but they do not represent the official announcements of a second pope. Conservative Catholics have often appealed to the former pope as if he were a "parallel magisterium," a term John Paul II applied to theologians. The former pope's words are regularly used as a cudgel by a substantial number of conservative Catholics who make no secret of their desire to hinder the Francis' reforms and pastoral emphasis of his papacy. They have demanded Francis' resignation, labeled him a heretic, and even questioned the legitimacy of his election. These charges against Pope Francis are based upon distortions, misinformation, and false accusations. They are totally unsubstantiated and without any foundation in truth. In their intensity these attacks have been extremely vicious,

unfair, unjust, mean spirited, and hardly Christian. To name these persons and groups and to try to refute them here would give them more credibility than they deserve. My only response at this point is that there is only one successor of Peter, one vicar of Christ on earth, and that is Francis. You are either in the bark of Peter or you are not.

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