

Benedict XVI: A Tough Act To Follow

When **Pope Benedict XVI** announced that he would resign at the end of this month, he not only got the attention of the whole world, but the whole world cared. Even detractors of the Catholic Church have to admit that is impressive.

Reactions in Rome and around the world seemed to come in waves: first shock, then awe, then a nervous excitement about what is to come.

It is difficult to think about losing Benedict without also thinking about losing Pope John Paul II. Both pontiffs were public intellectuals. Pope John Paul II was a philosopher and a mystic. Benedict XVI is also a philosopher and one of the world's leading biblical scholars. These are tough acts to follow.

Both men are beloved around the globe. Benedict's public crowds have been as large as and at times larger than those of **John Paul II**.

Both popes were present at the Second Vatican Council, and the next pope will not have been. John Paul and Benedict together have revealed the true legacy of that Council to be a universal call to holiness and a new Catholic evangelism. Pope Benedict established a Pontifical Council on the New Evangelization and speaks of Christianity as being not only about a set of moral propositions, but above all is about a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is no accident that his first books published during his papacy were the series, Jesus of Nazareth.

Vatican correspondents who follow Pope Benedict around the globe describe him as being like a university professor, and

one of his chief lessons has been that faith and reason are not contradictory but harmonious, as each are truths that come from God and therefore neither can contradict the other.

Like his predecessor, Benedict has spoken out everywhere about the greatest human rights tragedy of our time, abortion, calling it intrinsically evil, an attack on human life and an aggression against society itself.

When Pope John Paul II suffered and died, many believed that he was leaving us one last lesson—teaching us how to die. If there is a final papal lesson in Benedict's resignation, perhaps it is in how to be humble.

On the day he was elected, Benedict called himself “a simple, humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord.” It is a vineyard that has become vast and fast. There are one billion Catholics living in a world with increasing challenges to their faith. To lead such a flock requires youth and energy, something Pope Benedict is telling the world he no longer has. That is humility.

One thing is certain: The next pope will be in the mold of John Paul II and Benedict XVI since every one of the cardinals who will do the choosing was chosen for this role by them. And whoever that is, everyone—Protestant, Catholic, and Jew alike—will care.

Cathy Ruse *is senior fellow for Legal Studies at Family Research Council.*