

POPE BENEDICT XVI, R.I.P.

Pope Benedict XVI was a towering intellectual, something he shared with his predecessor, St. John Paul II. His philosophical and theological writings will be studied for decades. But it was his courage that endeared him to so many Catholics.

As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he served St. John Paul II as enforcer of the Church's doctrinal teachings. He did so with prudence and justice, setting an example for those who would come after him in this post.

In 2006, he sparked much controversy for his comments on Islam. In his address at Regensburg University, he said, "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

Unfortunately, most of the media did not emphasize that he twice said, "I quote." He was referring to a remark made by a 14th century Byzantine emperor. Cardinal Ratzinger's point was that faith and reason must exist together, and just as the universities must be criticized for promoting radical skepticism—reason without faith—there are those who purport to be followers of religion who promote faith without reason. Both are unacceptable.

In 2005, the day before Ratzinger assumed his duties as pontiff, he addressed the cardinals in Rome. He spoke about the "doctrine of relativism," the popular and pernicious notion that there are no moral absolutes, and no moral hierarchy of virtues.

In the same historic Good Friday homily, he unloaded on abusive priests. "How much filth there is in the Church, even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him!"

No one did more to purge the Church of the homosexual subculture than Benedict. He made it clear that men with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” should not become priests.

Benedict’s critics were often as inaccurate as they were unfair. Laurie Goodstein of the *New York Times* wrote in 2013 that Benedict never removed predators from the priesthood. She was wrong. All total, from 2005 to 2013, he defrocked some eight hundred molesting priests.

Benedict’s detractors called him “God’s Rottweiler” for being too draconian in his sanctions against dissidents. They were factually wrong. No one’s license to teach theology was pulled and no one was fired from teaching at a Catholic college or university because of Rome’s intervention.

Bill Donohue is proud of the fact that the *New York Times* called him the “Rottweiler’s Rottweiler,” a backhanded tribute to his strong defense of him.

Pope Benedict XVI was a selfless man, and his contributions to the Church, both in word and in deed, will be heralded for years to come.