

# POPE'S LEGACY IS SECURE; UNSOLICITED ADVICE SURGES

The news of February 11 that Pope Benedict XVI was resigning hit everyone by surprise. Many were shocked, and with good reason: we live in a world of self-absorbed, ego-driven public figures, thus making the Holy Father's decision seemingly incomprehensible.

Pope Benedict's legacy is secure. His encyclicals showed not only his brilliance, they demonstrated his ability to speak convincingly from the heart. His reach was enormous, touching everyone from intellectuals to young people. Though his critics called him the "rottweiler," most came to love him for who he was.

On the central issues of our day, no one rivaled Pope Benedict XVI. Religion, he emphasized, was as much a public issue as it was a private one. In 2008, he warned American bishops against "the subtle influence of secularism," holding that "any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted." Similarly, he made it clear that religious freedom was not only a God-given right, it was "the path to peace."

The pope knew religion could be abused, even leading to violence. His much misunderstood 2006 Regensburg University lecture was really about the uncoupling of religion from reason (reason not united to faith also leads to violence).

No one did more to successfully address the problem of priestly sexual abuse than Joseph Ratzinger. Just weeks before he was chosen to be the new pope, he spoke bluntly about this issue: "How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to Him!" His actions made good on his words.

The pope's many references to what he called "the dictatorship

of relativism” was a reminder that one of the greatest threats to freedom today is the abandonment of the search for truth.

In the wake of this news there has been an explosion of unsolicited advice; it will be ongoing for some time. Paradoxically, most of it is coming from those who are not exactly connected to the Church: we are hearing from ex-Catholics, those with one foot out the door, and non-Catholics. Much of their advice has to do with sex, proving once again that it is not the Church that is obsessed with sex—it is the Church’s critics.

Everyone is entitled to offer advice. But those who are no longer practicing Catholics, or who never were, cannot expect a serious hearing. Indeed, the hubris these people manifest is absolutely astounding.

In the coming months, look for the binge of voyeurism, as well as meddling, to continue. Trust us, we will be there to provide a cogent riposte.