



# The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches

*John F. Thornton, Susan B. Varenne*

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On April 24, 2005, Cardinal Joseph Alois Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI, the twenty-first-century successor of the Apostle Peter and the spiritual leader of more than one billion Roman Catholics. Who is this complex man whose office grants him sole charge of the world's largest religion? How will his tenure influence the future? *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI* answers these questions through carefully chosen selections from his homilies, interviews, theological essays, and articles on the crises facing the church today. This collection lays out Benedict's thinking and relates it to a variety of contemporary issues, including modern culture's abandonment of traditional religious values, social mores regarding conception and the sanctity of life, current challenges to the priesthood, and the Catholic Church's tenuous relations with other world religions.

First a brilliant *peritus*, or "expert advisor," to the Second Vatican Council and then archbishop of Munich, Joseph Ratzinger was appointed head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by Pope John Paul II in 1981. As Cardinal Ratzinger, the *ex officio* defender of church doctrine, he gained a reputation as a heroic guardian of the faith for conservatives and was held in suspicion by church liberals.

We cannot yet know what issues and events will define the reign of Pope Benedict XVI, but by any measure he will be seen as one of the most important theological voices of our time. This one volume is the best source for understanding the heart, soul, and agenda of this twenty-first-century successor to St. Peter.

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