



Rusch, William G., ed.

The Pontificate of Benedict XVI: Its Premises and Promises

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

On February 11, 2012 Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation as Bishop of Rome and leader of the Roman Catholic Church, citing his advanced age and diminishing strength as leading factors in his decision. It has been nearly 600 years since a Pope has resigned so in light of this historic event I thought it time to dust off a volume that has been sitting in my bookcase for the last three years.

The volume under review, *The Pontificate of Benedict XVI: Its Premises and Promises*, is a collection of essays edited by Lutheran scholar and professor, William G. Rusch with a postscript by the late Roman Catholic Editor-in-Chief of *First Things*, Richard John Neuhaus. The contributors span a wide range of Christian traditions and include a Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic. Each contributor examines a different facet of the Pope's current office as well as his former positions as professor, cardinal, and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The contributors draw from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's voluminous body of theological writing as well as Pope Benedict's papal encyclicals, namely *Deus Caritas Est* and *Spe Salvi* (see particularly Geoffrey Wainwright's essay for a focus on these documents). A diverse range of topics from the alleged "dehellenization" of European Christianity (see Dale T. Irvin's essay) to Ratzinger/Benedict's Christology (see Sara Butler's contribution) to his ecclesiology (which is

addressed by most contributors but see Metropolitan Maximos' essay in particular) are covered throughout this volume with attention given to the continuity between the Pope's current positions and those he held before his election as Pope.

A constant theme that runs throughout these essays is Benedict as an ecumenist. While Metropolitan Maximos does not minimize the differences between Benedict's ecclesiology and that of the Orthodox Church, especially with reference to their differing understandings of the local and universal church, he concludes his essay with a vote of confidence that the "unity between Eastern and Western Christianity may soon become a reality" (96). Meyer notes Ratzinger's rejection of "return ecumenism" in favor of "unity in diversity" or "reconciled diversity," while still holding that there is a "deep 'basic difference'" between Catholicism and Protestantism especially with regard to how they understand the Church and the biblical word.

While Benedict's reasons for resignation are understandable, and in some sense commendable, it's still a little disappointing to see him step down. The premises upon which the authors of this volume viewed his pontificate were exciting, and sadly, it seems that that promises of his tenure will go largely unfulfilled. In all, this volume presents a riveting collection of well written essays that those interested in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI's career will do well to read.