

Viewpoints: Pope Benedict XVI

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's election as Pope Benedict XVI has met with different reactions from different religious figures across the world - Catholic and non-Catholic.

We asked eight commentators and theologians for their views.

**Father Hans Kung, dissident
German theologian**

**John Wilkins, former editor of
Catholic newspaper The Tablet**

Tariq Ramadan, Muslim theologian

**Israel Singer, chairman, World
Jewish Congress**

Father Emile Blaser, South Africa

**Lavinia Byrne, ex nun and
supporter of female ordination**

**Dr Sam Gregg, Acton Institute in
Rome**

**Leonardo Boff, Brazilian theologian
and promoter of "liberation
theology"**

Father Hans Kung of Germany, was stripped of his authority to teach at Catholic universities by Cardinal Ratzinger, for questioning church teachings

The election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as pope is an enormous disappointment for all those who hoped for a reformist and pastoral pope.

But we must wait and see, for experience shows that the papacy in the Catholic Church today is such a challenge that it can change anyone: someone who went into the conclave a progressive cardinal can emerge as a conservative pope (Montini - Paul VI). Someone who went into the conclave a conservative cardinal can emerge as a progressive pope (Roncalli - Johannes XXIII).

The name Benedict XVI leaves the possibility open for a more moderate policy. Let us therefore give him a chance: as with a president of the US, we should allow a new pope 100 days to learn.

At all events, he faces tremendous tasks which have been piling up for a long time and which were not tackled by his predecessor: the active advancement of ecumenical relations between the Christian churches; the realisation of the collegiality of the pope with the bishops and the decentralisation of church leadership, which is desired on all sides, in favour of a greater autonomy of the local churches and the guarantee of an equal footing for men and women in the church and the implementation of the full participation of women at all levels of the church.

Tariq Ramadan is a Muslim theologian based in Geneva and Paris. He has been involved in inter-faith dialogue

It is really important to the Muslim community how the Pope deals with the intra community dialogue, how he deals with different views and trends within the Catholic Church, because this will give us an idea of how he will deal with other faiths. The perception is that he is not so interested in diversity, he wants a return to the fundamentals, to what he perceives as the essentials of Catholic teaching.

Another concern is that Pope Benedict XVI has a more narrow approach to the religious content of Western societies, that he wants to return to the centrality of Christianity in Europe.

We Muslims are building our presence in Europe and we are worried that the Pope will reduce what he sees as a struggle against secularism there to a struggle between Christianity and secularism. He may forget that there is a great legacy of spirituality coming from other religions and this could be a very dangerous reduction of our common roots and our common hopes.

Father Emile Blaser, a former general secretary of the Bishops Conference in Africa, is now the director of the Catholic Radio station, Radio Veritas

My initial reaction to the election of Cardinal Ratzinger was one of great surprise and, to some, extent fear because of what he stood for as the President of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. He was always a hardliner.

But, on reflection, he is a very affable sort of person, he's a holy man and he's liked by people. If his election has been a surprise, maybe his pontificate will be a surprise. I am happy with Benedict XVI - he's been the right hand and the left hand of Pope John Paul II and so I think he will continue the late Pope's policies. From what he's uttering so far, he seems to be open and the sort of person we need for the future.

There wasn't any real disappointment that there wasn't an African pope - I don't think either Africa or the Church would be ready.

You don't have to be African to deal with African problems - if there is an openness, African people are open to the Holy Father whoever he might be.

On the subject of a very South African problem, HIV/Aids and the use of condoms, I can't see the church changing its approach under a new pope. There are churches in South Africa that are advocating abstinence and that is really what the Church will want to advocate.

There are priests and bishops who will follow the church's teaching with regard to the use of condoms - but they will use a partial solution in their dioceses. That solution is: if you can't abstain, then use a condom. I think I feel a certain trend in that direction.

Dr Sam Gregg of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty in Rome has made a study of Pope Benedict XVI's theology

Pope Benedict XVI will continue the authentic interpretation of Vatican II that John Paul pioneered. There will be a clear, strong intellectual proposition in defence of Catholic orthodoxy. There will be an attention to the Christian unity that can only be founded upon the truth and there will be a continued critique of moral relativism and the type of secular fundamentalism that we find rearing its head in the EU and the UN.

We only have to look at those churches that have embraced the liberal agenda: they are collapsing because they don't join churches that have anything to say to people. Cafeteria Catholicism, kumbaya Catholicism doesn't attract people and this is part of the very bold statement the college of cardinals has made.

I think there is going to be a particular attention to culture. The name Benedict is very revealing. Many people regard St Benedict as very much the saviour of Western civilization as a consequence of the Barbarian invasions that were happening just as the Roman Empire was collapsing. So, I think culture will be a priority.

John Wilkins is a Catholic writer

One of Pope Benedict XVI's priorities will be Europe, where the congregation is in free-fall.

I think his diagnosis is that European civilisation is in a crisis of decline. I am sure the Pope will deliver, as a man of towering intellect and a towering theologian, very powerful attacks on what he says the "dictatorship of relativism" - in other words his implication is that if you try to talk outside relativism you are simply crushed.

Now, what we have in the West are pluralistic societies, societies that are trying to be built on the acceptance of difference and which do not have one overriding system or ideology or faith. If the Pope were to start saying that pluralistic societies are, by definition, relativistic ones, I think we would be in great trouble. But, I think a man quite as brilliant as him wouldn't make that error.

Israel Singer is the chairman of the World Jewish Congress

We view Pope Benedict XVI as an outstanding intellectual, as an authentic Catholic and as a person who, despite his conservative and authentic views, had the ability to be able to reach out.

He has spent his time over the last 20 years speaking publicly against anti-Semitism and changing Catholic doctrine on that subject. So I have to take him at his word.

He said that the passages in the Christian Bible condemning individual Jews that have been used to justify anti-Semitism should be regretted.

I'm pleased to have a partner in dialogue as the head of a church of 1.2 billion people with that kind of view. And it is our goal to see to it that in the future years under his papacy that there is no slippage from the tremendous successes that we've had during the papacy of John Paul II.

He was, after all, the theologian that gave the underpinning to John Paul II for many of the changes that took place.

Author Dr Lavinia Byrne is a former nun and supporter of the ordination of women

It's extraordinary that somebody who is associated with the most right-wing and conservative view of the church has been appointed to a position where he is expected to be a bridge-builder. The duty of the pope is to hold the middle ground and to ensure that there isn't a split between conservative and liberal elements.

I find it deeply ironical that Joseph Ratzinger has been called to hold this middle ground. There is an old adage that says, "God writes straight with crooked lines," and here we have a possible example.

Whatever the political complexion of the new pope he has to address certain issues: one is about the place of women in the Church. It is no longer good enough to say we are un-ordainable or to dismiss us, as Aristotle did when he said that a woman is a misbegotten male.

Those of us who have been educated - and often in Church or convent schools - have aspirations which are radically different from those of our grandmothers. The Church needs to acknowledge its own place in developing these aspirations and to meet them by offering the full range of ministries to us, including ordination to the priesthood. Otherwise its rhetoric about the dignity of the human person is empty.

There are also issues to do with sexuality: these range from the place of homosexual community within the Church, to the place of a scientific understanding of fertility. The document banning artificial contraception, *Humanae Vitae*, is nearly 40 years old and since then scientific endeavour has created far more refined understanding of the natural infertility of women. So the fact that nature is not always open to fertility has to be taken on board.

Especially ironic is the issue of globalisation. The Church condemns globalisation and widespread influence of corporations such as Shell and Coca Cola, but it is one of the most potent of the globalising agencies in the world. By demanding a uniform response from people, a "one-size fits all" response from people - it's actually doing the anti-globalising lobby a huge disservice.

I think Pope Benedict is highly intelligent and pretty honest, so actually the demands of his office are going to mean he cannot dodge these questions. And if he does dodge them, the Church will hit the buffers.

Brazilian Leonardo Boff is a Brazilian theologian and an advocate of liberation theology

I feel let down because I was expecting someone who would bring hope in the sense of a new chapter in the Catholic Church which would be more open to dialogue.

I really believe that the Church is much more than the pontificate in the Vatican.

The Church is enormous and comes from the dream of Jesus Christ, which extends all over the world.

I personally believe that Cardinal Ratzinger has a profound spirituality, is a man of great virtue, but as well as these virtues, you need to have an ample vision of the world.

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