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The temptation of Pope Benedict

by [Daniel Johnson](#)

On the Pontiff's fight against relativism. (from "The Dictatorship of Relativism.")

The phrase “dictatorship of relativism” is only four years old, yet it has already become part of ordinary discourse. Why? I can think of two main reasons. The first is that the occasion on which it was first uttered was highly significant: the last Mass before the cardinals went into conclave to elect a new pope after the death of John Paul II in 2005. The dean of the College of Cardinals, Joseph Ratzinger, delivered the homily. And as George Weigel observed at the time, it was anything but a “campaign speech.” As the best known and—at least by the media—best hated of the *papabile*, Cardinal Ratzinger’s chances of being elected would have been better served by eschewing controversy and playing down his reputation for unbending orthodoxy. Instead, the phrase was a ready-made sound bite that enabled a hostile press to cast him as the Grand Inquisitor, the ultra-conservative enemy of ...

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