



## **Backgrounder**

Papal Transition 2013

prepared by

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### ***International Concerns of the Catholic Church***

1. Restrictions on religion are growing with 75 percent of the world's population living in countries where governments or societies restrict people's ability to practice their faith, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. While many religious groups face persecution, Christians are harassed in the greatest number of countries (111 out of 193). Aid to the Church in Need estimates 150,000 Christians die each year "either out of hatred for the faith or for hatred of the virtues and works of charity inspired by the faith." The number of Christians forced to leave countries because of war (Iraq, Syria) or rapid political change (Egypt, Palestine, Iran) is high. Bethlehem, a place that was 80 percent Christian, is now 33 percent Christian.
2. Two thirds of Catholics in the world live in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The Church is growing the fastest in Africa and Latin America. In some of these countries, the Church is more traditional than in the North.
3. The pope can continue to place the Catholic Church as a leader in Muslim-Christian dialogue. Engagement with Islam is extremely important to the promotion of understanding, justice and peace in our world. Much of the conflict in the world is in countries where Christianity and Islam meet, where misunderstandings can be fueled by counter-terrorism suspicions. In 2011, Pope Benedict called an interfaith summit on justice and peace in Assisi, inviting 300 religious leaders to discuss challenges facing nations and religions. The hierarchical integrity of the Church is an important asset to address this and other problems.
4. The so called "Arab Spring" has really become an "Islamic Spring," not necessarily anti-Christian, but Islamic groups have risen to positions of power due to their organization and attraction of large numbers of adherents. Pope Benedict has called for peaceful resolution to conflicts in the Middle East.
5. Pope Benedict had a strong commitment to the protection of our environment given concerns over the negative effects of climate change on countries with less resilience to mitigate this harm. While harnessing natural resources can provide employment and improve economies, it can also lead to environmental degradation and worsening health if not managed properly. The Church has promoted global standards for safe and just utilization and mining of natural resources.

6. The pope made strong statements about the world economy and the need for political and economic leaders to develop policies that protect the poor and vulnerable and that advance the common good. The United Nations Development Program estimates that 1.7 billion people live in conditions of deprivation in health, education and standard of living. This is more than the 1.3 billion people who live on less than \$1.25/day, the measure of extreme poverty. Many may look to the next pope to continue advocating for poverty-focused international assistance in order to address the growing gap between “haves” and “have-nots” that fuels much discontent and conflict. For example, although health, education and economic indicators are improving in Africa, the rest of the world has advanced much faster and the gap is widening as Africans are left behind.
7. The Global Food Crisis continues. World food prices are still near the highs reached in 2008. UN agencies say that around 870 million people are chronically malnourished, near the almost 1 billion mark of 2008. U.S. policies on reducing speculation in food by investment banks and on agricultural and biofuel subsidies will help ease the situation.
8. Trade agreements can help nations to grow their domestic economies and markets and reduce poverty, but can also be a source of injustice if small indigenous industries and local agriculture are overlooked. The Church must continue to lead in implementation of adequate labor, human rights and environmental protections.
9. Nuclear non-proliferation and arms control have long been major teachings of the Church. With concerns about the possible nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea and the questions of maintaining security over nuclear fissile material, many may look to the next pope to reiterate the moral arguments against nuclear proliferation and the arms race.