

## POPE BENEDICT CONTINUES PREDECESSOR'S IMPACT

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PINE BLUFFS — For centuries the Holy See, also known as Vatican City, has effectively conducted foreign relations with other countries. Under John Paul II, and now under Benedict XVI, diplomacy has continued.

It's to diplomacy that Vatican City owes its very existence. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when Garibaldi united the Italian city-states — including Rome in 1870 — many Papal holdings were seized. That situation prevailed until disputes between several popes and the Italian government were diplomatically resolved in 1929, by the Lateran Treaties.

Vatican City, a landlocked sovereign city-state consisting of a walled area within the limits of Rome, is only almost as large as The Mall in Washington, D.C. With an annual budget of \$247 million, and a geographical area of 108.7 acres, it's the smallest independent nation on the globe. A token army of approximately 100 men is recruited from Catholic male Swiss citizens, who function as the Pope's personal bodyguards.

Because of its insignificant size, worldwide influence by the Vatican's ecclesiastical government, headed since April 19, 2005 by Chief of State Pope Benedict XVI, is astonishing. Vatican power does not come from armed might — it has no missiles, military aircraft, ships, or tanks — but from its moral influence over the world's approximately 1 billion Roman Catholics.

For almost 2 millennia, the Catholic Church has been a significant force shaping and defining Europe and the West. Under secular attack during all recent major socio-political movements, the Renaissance, Reformation, French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, communism, and fascism, the Church has assumed a counter-cultural stance. Yet it has survived and even prospered.

Lately the world entered another critical historical period precipitated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and international communism, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the reunification of Western and Eastern Europe for the first time since 1945, when Soviet armies entered Berlin and imposed an authoritarian will upon half an exhausted continent.

A keen student of history, John Paul II's foreign policy consisted of initiating worldwide papal contact; 129 trips to 104 different countries in support of world peace, human rights and conservative dogma. In 1991 his papal encyclical, *Centesimus annus*, presented a distinct Catholic concept of a just social order for the new Europe and the new world. Only 58 when elected, this first non-Italian pope since the Dutch Adrian VI (1522-23) diligently pursued Vatican foreign policy objectives.

Will the Holy See's foreign policy change under Benedict XVI? To fully answer, look to Benedict's emphasis and interests, first as a Cardinal, and now as Pope. As Cardinal Ratzinger, his efforts focused on the Church internally – on doctrinal, theological and liturgical issues. After April 2005, his energies continued in those areas, but also expanded to include the future role Catholicism will play on the world scene.

Today, papal policy concerns embrace religious freedom, international

development, the Middle East, South America, terrorism, interreligious dialogue and reconciliation, and the application of Church doctrine in an era of rapid change.

In just two years, Benedict XVI has begun ecumenical efforts toward reunification with Eastern Orthodox Churches. That, due to its huge geopolitical implications throughout Eurasia, will continue. His expressed concern over recent European secularization and a spreading relativism will lead him to confront the “dictatorship of relativism” in the West. Because of his deep respect for Judaism, efforts toward healing the Jewish-Christian rift will likely persist. And because he’s somewhat cooler toward Islam than was John Paul, he has adopted a more cautious attitude toward Muslims.

Benedict, who recently celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, is healthy and vigorous. With trips to Turkey and Germany completed, he recently returned from a visit to Brazil. However, don’t look for him to match his predecessor’s torrid globetrotting pace. Other ways exist to increase papal policy influence on the international scene, such as inviting heads of state to visit him in Rome. Benedict has already confirmed this tack: he has received President Mahinda Rajapaksa, of the Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, requesting that he respect human rights; he hosted the former Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami on May 4<sup>th</sup>, and will see President George W. Bush in early June. Khatami, a strong supporter of the Pope’s recent Turkey visit, seeks to promote a much-needed dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Bush met Cardinal Ratzinger at John Paul II’s funeral in 2005. They’ll discuss the Vatican’s developing relationships with the Peoples Republics of China and Vietnam, worldwide terrorism, and other common interests.

Just so, this ancient pre-modern institution is addressing the post-modern age. But the Roman Catholic Church is not only addressing the new era; guided by the Holy Spirit, it is helping to shape and define it, too.

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