

Focus on conflict in Papal speech to diplomats



Conflicts in the Middle East, gay rights and abortion formed the core of Pope Benedict XVI's Monday address to Vatican-accredited diplomats, with Asia receiving minor attention at the traditional start-of-year meeting.

Benedict strongly appealed for an end to the bloodshed in Syria saying that the conflict will “know no victors but only vanquished if it continues.”

He called on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to “commit themselves to peaceful coexistence within the framework of two sovereign states,” a solution which remained far from reality in 2012 and is expected to become harder still this year with an Israeli election on January 22 expected to result in strong gains for the right-wing HaBayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home) Party.

The Pope weighed in on the fraught situations of many countries in the Middle East and Africa, from Lebanon – which he visited last September – and Egypt to Nigeria and Kenya, where Christians have been the targets of bloody terror attacks in recent months.

“It is precisely man’s forgetfulness of God, and his failure to give him glory, which gives rise to violence,” he told ambassadors.

Benedict criticized steps in Western countries to expand gay marriage, euthanasia and abortion rights.

The Pope made a not-so-veiled reference to traditionally Catholic Ireland, where the government wants to revise a ban on abortion following the death of an Irish-Indian woman after the termination of her gravely ill fetus was refused.

Reflecting on the enduring global economic malaise, Benedict called on world leaders to make sure that austerity measures do not lead to a widening gap between the haves and have-nots.

The only mention of Asia in Benedict's state of the world speech came when he called on the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America to invest in education and the creation of accountable and fair legal systems. Schools, Benedict stressed, are a means of overcoming poverty and disease.

“Building peace means training individuals to fight corruption, criminal activity, the production and trade in narcotics,” he added, as well as avoiding tensions which “threaten to exhaust society, hindering development and peaceful coexistence.”

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