

# POPE VISITS TURKEY

Pope Benedict XVI got a bad rap in September from those who tried to paint his speech in Germany as anti-Islam. That is why his trip to Turkey, a mostly Muslim nation that is nominally secular, is so historic. To be sure, the pope has grave reservations about the readiness of Turkey to join the European Union, but he is not a foe of any world religion.

One of the cardinal precepts of a free and democratic nation is respect for religious freedom, and on this score Turkey fails. The Catholic Church is forbidden by law to operate a seminary or publish religious literature. Worse, many Christians live in fear for their lives.

Conditions are so bad that upwards of 100,000 Christians have left Turkey in the past few years. Of those who remain, most are afraid to go to Mass on Sunday. As reported in the *New York Times* in October, "Over the past three and a half years, Christians have been subjected to a steady stream of church bombings, assassinations, kidnappings and threatening letters slipped under their doors."

What this represents is incredible intolerance for the "infidel," the pernicious name applied to non-Muslims. It's no wonder Christian women wear Muslim head scarves to avoid intimidation at the hands of Muslim zealots trying to impose a rigid Islamic dress code.

The pope's courage makes him a role model for the leaders of all nations.