

Pope ends trip with plea for forgiveness at Western Wall

by Richard Boudreaux and Tracy Wilkinson
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JERUSALEM — Pope John Paul II ended an emotional journey through the Holy Land on Sunday with a dramatic act of contrition at Judaism's most sacred site, the Western Wall, and with tributes to all three faiths that share this troubled region.

Standing in solemn solitude, the pope prayed and touched the wide beige stones of the ancient wall, where he deposited a signed plea for God's forgiveness for centuries of Catholic torment of the Jewish people. It was a searing image that many Israelis said signaled a new era in Jewish-Christian relations.

It came on the final day of the pope's weeklong pilgrimage, which concluded with a Mass at the traditional site where Christians believe Jesus resurrected and a visit to the hilltop mosque where Muslims believe the Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven.

A tired, frail but uplifted pope returned to Rome late Sunday, closing his 91st trip in a two-decade papacy. He had described it as a lifelong dream to follow Jesus' path from his birth to his crucifixion. It was a grueling journey aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation, but often forced the pope to sidestep the political battles of the Middle East.

Israeli officials hailed the visit as a heartfelt endorsement of the Jewish state by one of the world's most important moral authorities. The pope's actions here, including a moving ceremony at Israel's Holocaust memorial last week, were seen as the embodiment of a fundamental transformation in historically tortured Jewish-Chris-

tian relations. Some Palestinians, too, saw affirmation of their national dreams in the pope's presence, especially in the sympathy he voiced for refugees. But in contrast to the Israeli reaction, Muslim leaders complained that their agenda received short shrift.

The pope spent the final day of his pilgrimage inside Jerusalem's walled Old City, saluting the three religions

destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.

In a brief, subdued ceremony, he joined Rabbi Michael Melchior, the Israeli minister for diaspora affairs, in reading Psalm 122, which prays for peace in Jerusalem: "Peace within your wall, serenity within your palaces."

Then the head of the Roman Catholic Church, with the aid of his cane, took 97 slow steps to the wall, where he stood alone in prayer. The pope placed

signed: "you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer and, asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

Signed: "Joannes Paulus II." The message is a repetition of a

death, and bloodshed," is finished, he said.

But as Pope John Paul read the Psalm, a man praying at the public section of the wall, only about 30 yards away, stuck a finger in his left ear as though to block out the distraction. And at the same time, another observant Jew began screaming at the pope and was hauled away by police. In all, seven Jews and three Palestinians were ar-

golden Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third-holiest shrine.

As the pope arrived, a huge Palestinian flag fluttered and hundreds of balloons in Palestinian national colors floated high in the sky. Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as their capital, while Israel claims the entire, undivided city.

The pope met with a contingent of senior imams, and politics was on their minds. Sheikh Mohammad Said Al-Jamal shook his finger at the pontiff and demanded he speak out more forcefully on behalf of displaced and imprisoned Palestinians.

The grand mufti for Jerusalem and the Holy Land, Sheikh Ekrima Said Sabri, asked him to help end "the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem," a city "eternally bonded" to Islam.

As he did throughout delicate moments of the trip, the pope kept his distance from the essential dispute. He told Sabri that Jerusalem, as "the Holy City par excellence," is common patrimony to all three faiths.

The pope later arrived at Christendom's most sacred shrine, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

The church, which many Christians believe is the site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, is an architectural hodgepodge occupied by six Christian denominations, whose battles over territory and status quo on the premises are legendary. The pope, in a Latin Mass, urged the priests to overcome their differences.

He knelt before the Stone of Unction, where Jesus' body is said to have been washed before burial, and climbed deep into the bowels of the church to the purported site of Jesus' tomb. He kissed the stone crypt.

The church, the pope said, was the "most hallowed place on Earth" and site of "the central event of human history."

"God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer and, asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

Signed: Joannes Paulus II

-letter placed in crevice of Western Wall, Jerusalem, by Pope John Paul II



KRT PHOTO

Pope John Paul II places a note in the stones during his visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Sunday was the last day of his six-day trip.

that sprang from Abraham: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. He implored the faithful to "live in harmony and cooperation, and bear witness to the One God in acts of goodness and human solidarity."

Under a resplendent sun that bathed the limestone buildings that give Jerusalem its unique coloring, Pope John Paul came to the Western Wall, all that remains of the Second Jewish Temple de-

signed message in a crevice between the rough-hewn stones. It is a common practice for observant Jews to deposit prayers or pleas to God at the wall, but the pope's gesture was unexpected.

He blessed his offering, making a sign of the cross, and reached out to touch the wall again as he prayed for a few more seconds. Melchior finally stepped up to escort him away.

"God of our fathers," the message

prayer uttered in the pope's sweeping March 12 apology to Jews and other people for centuries of persecution and hatred.

Officials later moved the note to the archives of Yad Vashem.

Melchior was clearly moved. "This is the beginning of a new era," he said. The "relationship of humiliation" between Jews and the Christian church, with religion used to spread "hatred,

rested Sunday in protests related to the pope's visit.

Even as his entourage threaded its way through the labyrinthine Old City, the pope was confronted — again — by politics and competing claims to Jerusalem as capital.

Before appearing at the Western Wall, the pope visited the adjacent hilltop compound known to Muslims as Haram as-Sharif. This is the site of the

No nostalgia for the old Soviet order in upcoming Russian election

by Dave Montgomery
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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This article was written before last Sunday's presidential election, which was won by Vladimir Putin.

MOSCOW — For the first time since the collapse of Communism nearly a decade ago, Russia's presidential election on March 26 will involve voters who have little memory of the Soviet era, other than blurry childhood recollections or stories passed around the dinner table by their parents.

Russians between the ages of 18 and 24 represent about 15 percent of the electorate. And while they cling to imported Western materialism — from Cher CDs to Tommy Hilfinger pullovers — and have no nostalgia for the old order, they see in Acting President Vladimir Putin a "firm hand" that can restore Russia's lost pride.

Among young men, the most pervasive political issue is the Chechen War, but the prospect of fighting and dying has yet to evoke the same impassioned resistance that characterized much of America's youth during the Vietnam era.

Many are like Alexander Kruchkov, a 20-year-old college student who has no taste for combat, but also no desire to challenge the government. "I do not support the war," he said, "but if they tell me they need me, I will go without hesitation."

Either because of youthful indifference or the cynicism instilled by the prolonged economic and social turbulence that has followed the collapse of Communism, young voters display a strong streak of political apathy. During parliamentary elections in December, their group produced the lowest turnout of any age segment, and is likely to do so again in the forthcoming presidential election.

Like the rest of the electorate, however, Russia's young voters overwhelmingly support Putin, who, at 47, is more than 20 years younger than Boris Yeltsin, the ailing, white-haired leader he replaced. For many, the tough, athletic looking president offers the same kind of youthful appeal that drew young Americans to John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s.

Putin's young supporters also think he's a leader who can restore stability and free their country from the corrupt influences of the last decade. While nearly all prefer the trappings

and freedoms of democracy, and don't want a dictatorship or confrontation with the West, many hope Putin will re-establish Russia's influence on the world stage.

"One has to look at what's gone on before," said 24-year-old actor Sergei Glazkov, removing the earplugs from his Sony Walkman to register his opinion. "Mistakes were made — not just in the economy, but in the moral sphere. We've got to get back our spirit as a Russian people."

Nevertheless, support for Putin is far from unanimous.

"I think he's like a puppet," says Kruchkov. "He's like a doll in someone's hands, the hands of someone already in power."

But analysts see a worrisome sign in surveys showing that a number of young Russians — particularly poor, alienated young men in outlying parts of the country — are drawn to ultra-nationalistic or neo-Nazi groups.

As many as five percent of voters in the 18-24 age group support flamboyant, ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirmovskiy, a percentage slightly larger than in the overall electorate. The neo-Nazi group Russian National Unity also successfully recruits much of its membership from young Russians with strong anti-Western leanings.

Many young voters are also increasingly distancing themselves from Communism, despite Communist leaders' efforts to boost their appeal beyond the elderly pensioners who now form the core of their constituency.



KRT PHOTO BY YURI GRIPAS

Russian youth smoke cigarettes at the Manhattan Express nightclub in Pskov, Russia. For the first time since the collapse of Communism nearly a decade ago, Russia's presidential election will involve Russian youth who have little or no connection to the Soviet era.

challenger, Gennady Zyuganov, less half that of the electorate at large.

Free of Communism, young Russians are more independent, better educated, and more enlightened than their parents and grandparents, who waited for hours in food lines and always looked over their shoulders. But, in the eyes of disapproving elders, they also represent Russia's "Me Generation," greedy for the good life with no accompanying sense of responsibility.

"Contemporary youth is very different from what it was before," said Igor Cochen, an expert in sociology and youth psychology. "They realize that neither the state nor their parents will give them everything they need. If they want to do anything, they have to do it themselves."

Like their counterparts in the United States and Europe, young Russians yearn for the comforts that eluded their parents and grandparents during the Soviet days. The democratic era has ushered in a middle class, and those in it pursue college diplomas, well paying jobs, travel, and good times on weekends.

On a recent Saturday night, several hundred flocked to the Manhattan Express in downtown Moscow to await the 1 a.m. performance of the Russian rock-group Agatha Christie.

Smoke hung over the bar like rush-hour smog in Los Angeles. Women far outnumbered men on the dance floor, often dancing with each other or by themselves.

Yet the glitter of Moscow nightlife is hardly illustrative of conditions facing all of Russia's young people. In a country where at least a third of the population lives below the poverty line, millions of Russia's youth struggle to survive and live in broken homes or on the street. By some estimates, as many as one million children are homeless.

Drug addiction and alcoholism are rampant, although accurate statistics are hard to come by.

Many are victims of abuse by drunken parents. In the northwestern town of Luga, Vera Ivanova, 17, casually talked of her turbulent home life, as she played hooky from school. "Life is horrible," she said, describing how her alcoholic father often beats her stepmother. She said he also abuses her and her five brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, she vowed to finish high school, get a sales job, marry, and raise a family.

"I want a husband who will understand me," she said, standing on a street corner in falling snow. "He doesn't have to be good looking. The beauty should be in his soul."

Clinton implores India to stop building nuclear weapons

by Christopher Marquis
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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NEW DELHI, India — President Clinton implored India on Wednesday, March 22, to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons, asserting that a nation's greatness today depends on the strength of its moral example, not on its military might. "Great nations with broad horizons must consider whether actions advance or hinder what Nehru called the larger cause of humanity," Clinton said, invoking the memory of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of an independent India.

India's decision to test nuclear arms in 1998 — an act that was quickly followed by archival Pakistan — jeopardized efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons around the globe, Clinton said in an anti-nuclear appeal to a joint session of parliament that is a focal point of his five-day visit to promote peace.

"But if India's nuclear test shook the world, India's leadership for nonproliferation can certainly move the world," Clinton urged.

Although Indian leaders justify their nuclear program on security grounds — with eyes on Pakistan and China, primarily — they also plainly take pride in having joined an elite club of nuclear powers. It showed as lawmakers who had greeted Clinton with a boisterous standing ovation sat solemnly when the commander of the world's most sophisticated nuclear arsenal urged them to give up their own embryonic cache.

When Clinton said that "only India can determine its own interests," they interrupted him with pointed applause.

The tone had been set the night before when India's president, Koccheril Raman Narayanan, used his state dinner toast to rebuke Clinton.

"The danger is not from us who have declared solemnly that we will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but rather it is from those who refuse to make any such commitment," Narayanan said.

He meant Pakistan, partitioned from India in 1947 and India's foe in two wars and endless skirmishing since then. Pakistan, with its vastly weaker conventional forces, has refused to make a no-first-strikes pledge on nuclear weapons. It supports Islamic militants who are stag-

ing incursions into Indian-held Kashmir, where some 40 Sikhs were massacred Monday night, March 20. India blames Pakistan, despite its denials, for the raid.

The rebuff of Clinton's peace-making was not categorical, however. India has accepted his invitation to discuss a ban on producing fissile material used to make bombs. While declining to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, India has pledged not to test weapons further. That policy is similar to Washington's in the wake of the U.S. Senate's refusal to ratify the test-ban treaty last year.

Despite sharp differences on nuclear weapons, Clinton is prov-

"But if India's nuclear test shook the world, India's leadership for non-proliferation can certainly move the world."

-President Bill Clinton, during visit to India last week

ing an endearing guest. The first U.S. president to visit since Jimmy Carter, he is winsome merely by his presence. On Wednesday, March 22, he toured the Tag Mahal, the most majestic mausoleum in the Moslem world, before arriving in Jailer, the picturesque desert state of the land of the rajahs.

At every turn, he has sought to erase decades of suspicion born of a Cold War estrangement in which India tilted toward the Soviet Union and the United States supported Pakistan as an anti-communist ally.

Further, he has lauded India's democratic tradition, religious and ethnic diversity, economic promise, and tradition of moral leadership.

The highlight of his trip so far, he told parliament, was a visit to the memorial for Mahatma Gandhi, the nonviolent crusader for India's independence from Britain.

Without the teaching of Gandhi, who was emulated by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "the great civil-rights revolution in the United States would never have succeeded on a peaceful plane," Clinton said.