

Pope Urges Greater Freedoms For Catholic Church In Vast Cuban Mass

BY ANNE-MARIE GARCIA AND NICOLE WINFIELD
 Associated Press

HAVANA — Pope Benedict XVI demanded more freedom for the Catholic Church in communist-run Cuba and preached against "fanaticism" in an unusually political sermon Wednesday before hundreds of thousands at Revolution Plaza, with President Raul Castro in the front row.

Before the pope's departure, he met with the president's brother, revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. Castro grilled the pontiff on changes in church liturgy and his role as spiritual leader of the world's Catholics, a Vatican spokesman said.

Benedict's homily was a not-so-subtle jab at the island's leadership before a vast crowd of Cubans, both in the sprawling plaza and watching on television. But he also clearly urged an end to Cuba's isolation, a reference to the 50-year U.S. economic embargo and the inability of 11 American presidents and brothers Fidel and Raul Castro to forge peace.

"Cuba and the world need change, but this will occur only if each one is in a position to seek the truth and chooses the way of love, sowing reconciliation and fraternity," Benedict said. The remark built upon the famed call of his predecessor, John Paul II, who said in his groundbreaking 1998 visit that Cuba should "open itself up to the world, and may the world open itself up to Cuba."

With the country's leadership listening from front-row seats, Benedict referred to the biblical account of how youths persecuted by the Babylonian king "preferred to face death by fire rather than betray their conscience and their faith."

He said all people share a desire for "authentic freedom," without which the truth that Christianity offers cannot be found.

"On the other hand there are those who wrongly interpret this search for the truth, leading them to irrationality and fanaticism; they close themselves up in 'their truth' and try to impose it on others," he said from the altar, backed by an image of Cuba's revolutionary hero Ernesto "Che"



Thousands pour into Revolution Square Jose Marti in Havana, Cuba, for the celebration of Mass with Pope Benedict XVI on Wednesday.

Guevara. Still, it was unclear how much the pope's message resonated with ordinary Cubans.

Many in the crowd had trouble hearing him over the loudspeakers, and others said it was hard to understand the dense biblical message delivered by the pope in a soft voice.

"I don't understand this Mass at all. I don't have an education in these things and I know nothing about religion," said Mario Mendez, a 19-year-old communications student. "On top of that, I can't hear anything."

Benedict's comments were an unmistakable criticism of the Cuban reality even if the pope didn't mention the government by name, said the Rev. Joseph Fessio, a former student of Benedict's. As his U.S. publisher, Fessio knows well the pope's message and how he transmits it, particularly the watchwords of his pontificate: truth and freedom.

"Does anyone in Cuba not know how the words themselves condemn the reality there?" Fessio said in an email.

Benedict's trip was aimed largely at building a greater place for his church in the least Catholic nation in Latin America. In his homily, he urged authorities to let the church more freely preach its message and educate its young in the faith in schools and universities. Religious schools were closed after the Castros came to power a half-century ago.

He praised openings for religion made since the early 1990s, when the government abandoned

official atheism and slowly warmed to the church, a pattern that accelerated with the visit of Pope John Paul II.

"It must be said with joy that in Cuba steps have been taken to enable the church to carry out her essential mission of expressing her faith openly and publicly," Benedict said. "Nonetheless this must continue forward" for the good of Cuban society.

During the 30-minute meeting between the pope and Fidel Castro at the Vatican's Embassy, the retired Cuban leader — a one-time altar boy who was educated by Jesuit priests — essentially interviewed Benedict, asking him about the changes in church teachings since he was a child, what it's like to be a pope and the challenges facing humanity today, said the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi.

Benedict, meanwhile, raised issues such as the role of freedom and liberty, Lombardi said.

The meeting began with some jokes about their ages. Castro is 85, Benedict reaches that milestone next month. "Yes, I'm old, but I can still do my job," Lombardi quoted the pope as saying.

Video released later showed Fidel arriving at the embassy wearing a dark warm-up jacket and a scarf. He seemed animated, if unsure on his feet.

"I have felt very good," Castro could be heard telling the pontiff in the choppy footage.

Castro introduced his companion, Dalia Soto del Valle, and two of his children, and asked the pope to send him some books to elaborate on the topics they dis-

cussed, Lombardi said. He described the meeting as intense, animated and cordial.

After posing for pictures with his family and the pontiff, Castro left the embassy on an aide's arm and was helped into a silver van.

Benedict later rode in the popemobile along rainy streets lined with onlookers toward the airport, where he bade goodbye to Raul Castro, Catholic bishops and the Cuban people, and again called for reconciliation.

"The present hour urgently demands that in personal, national and international co-existence we reject immovable positions and unilateral viewpoints which tend to make understanding more difficult and efforts at cooperation ineffective," he said.

"Goodbye forever. ... May God bless your future," he concluded.

Castro emphasized points in common between Havana and the Vatican, such as support for families and children, but acknowledged that differences were inevitable.

"We have found many and profound areas of agreement, even if, as is natural, we do not think alike on all matters," he said. Still, "the Cuban people ... have listened with profound attention to each word Your Holiness has offered."

A black car took the pontiff onto the tarmac, where he walked up the stairs, waved briefly and went inside the plane. It took off soon after.

At the morning Mass, banners large and small filled the plaza, and many took shade under umbrellas as announcers shouted "Viva Cuba! Viva el Papa!"

"The pope is something big for Cubans," said Carlos Herrera, a tourism worker who came to the plaza with his wife. "I come to hear his words, wise words for the Cuban people. That helps us. It gives us peace, it gives us unity. We do not want war."

But others said they were told to attend by their employers in a country accustomed to organizing mass events, usually meant to show support for Fidel Castro.

The Vatican said the plaza holds 600,000 people and it appeared nearly full, though many Cubans drifted off after registering their presence with teachers and employers.

Romney Edges Into Mop-Up Operations

WASHINGTON (AP) — After a three-month struggle, Mitt Romney edged into the mop-up phase of the race for the Republican presidential nomination on Wednesday, buoyed by Newt Gingrich's decision to scale back his campaign to the vanishing point and Rick Santorum's statement that he would take the No. 2 spot on the party ticket in the fall.

Romney campaigned by phone for support in next week's Wisconsin primary while he shuttled from California to Texas on a fundraising trip, praising Gov. Scott Walker, for "trying to rein in the excesses that have permeated the public services union." The governor faces a recall election in June after winning passage of state legislation vehemently opposed by organized labor.

Romney aides eagerly spread the word that former President George H.W. Bush would bestow a formal endorsement on Thursday, although they declined to say whether former President George W. Bush has been asked for a public show of support.

Seven months before Election Day, there was ample evidence of a preparation gap with the Democrats.

A spokesman at the Republican National Committee said the party had recently opened campaign offices in three states expected to be battlegrounds this fall and would soon do the same in seven more.

U.S. General: New Security Protects Troops

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. military commanders in Afghanistan have assigned "guardian angels" — troops that watch over their comrades even as they sleep — and have ordered a series of other increased security measures to protect troops against possible attacks by rogue Afghans.

The added protections are part of a directive issued in recent weeks by Marine Gen. John Allen, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, to guard against insider threats, according to a senior military official. And they come in the wake of a spike in attacks on U.S. and coalition forces by Afghans, including the point-blank shooting deaths of two U.S. advisers in Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior.

Some of the changes have been subtle, others not so much. In several Afghan ministries, Americans are now allowed to carry weapons. And they have been instructed to rearrange their office desks there to face the door, so they can see who is coming in, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the internal directive.

While Allen did not detail the new measures in a briefing earlier this week, he acknowledged that changes had been made.

Slain Fla. Teen's Case Becomes Big Business

MIAMI (AP) — From the T-shirt and hoodie sales to trademarking slogans like "Justice for Trayvon" to the pass-the-hat rallies that bring in thousands, the case of an unarmed black teenager killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer is quickly turning into an Internet-fueled brand.

Websites are hawked key chains bearing Trayvon Martin's likeness. His parents have bought two trademarks, saying they hope to raise money to help other families struck by tragedy. Trayvon clothes, bumper stickers, buttons and posters are up for grabs on eBay.

Vendors selling Martin T-shirts and hoodies have become fixtures at rallies in Sanford, the central Florida town where Martin was shot last month. At one Sanford rally this week, a man had a variety of T-shirts laid out on the ground as marchers went by, yelling out, "I've got every size!"

The Martin shooting by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who says he shot the 17-year-old Miami teen in self-defense, has inflamed racial tensions across the country, brought out thousands for rallies, prompted a civil rights probe and a personal reference to the case by President Barack Obama.

A phenomenon on that scale is bound to be commercialized, said Donna Hoffman, a marketing professor at the University of California-Riverside.

Documents Show Captain Grew Erratic

RICHMOND HILL, Ga. (AP) — JetBlue Airways captain Clayton Osborn showed up unusually late to fly Flight 191 to Las Vegas. The plane was in midair when he eerily told his co-pilot they wouldn't make it there.

Osborn started rambling about religion. He scolded air traffic controllers to quiet down, then turned off the radios altogether, and dimmed the monitors in the cockpit. He said aloud that "things just don't matter" and encouraged his co-pilot that they take a leap of faith. "We're not going to Vegas," Osborn said.

What unfolded next, according to court documents released Wednesday, was a dramatic chase and struggle in the cabin that ended with passengers tackling Osborn, 49, and holding him down until the co-pilot could make an emergency landing in Amarillo, Texas. He was charged Wednesday with interfering with a flight crew.

A pilot with JetBlue since 2000, Osborn's odd behavior on Tuesday became increasingly erratic after the flight departed New York, worrying his fellow crew members so much that they locked him out after he abruptly left the cockpit, according to an affidavit. Osborn then started yelling about Jesus, al-Qaida and a possible bomb on board, forcing passengers to tie him up with seat belt extenders and zip tie handcuffs for about 20 minutes until the plane landed.

Colo. Gov. Stoops Prescribed Burns After Wildfire

BY DAN ELLIOTT
 Associated Press

CONIFER, Colo. — Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper on Wednesday suspended the use of state prescribed burns like the one that may have caused a deadly wildfire that destroyed dozens of homes near Denver.

The Colorado State Forest Service says the 6-square-mile fire started after a controlled burn last week that was meant to reduce vegetation. Instead, high wind gusts Monday blew embers across a containment line and into unburned forest, sparking the blaze.

"This is heartbreaking, and we are sorry," Deputy State Forester Joe Duda said in a written statement.

Hickenlooper said the ban on prescribed fires on state lands, including state parks, would be in effect until a review of the wildfire is complete.

The ban doesn't affect land controlled by the federal government — which accounts for more than one-third of Colorado. However, Hickenlooper urged counties and federal agencies to also consider suspending such burns for now.

Meanwhile, some 400 firefighters from several states were focusing on building containment lines around the wildfire. Until

now, the fire's erratic pattern has forced firefighters to focus on protecting homes, not stopping the burn. The fire was 15 percent contained Wednesday afternoon, Jefferson County sheriff's spokesman Jacki Kelley said.

Air tankers dropped retardant and two National Guard helicopters dropped water to assist firefighters on the ground. Smoke from the fire created haze around Denver, obscuring views of the Rocky Mountains.

As crews dug lines around the fire's perimeter, a search team was using dogs to look for a woman missing in the fire zone. Her home was among 27 destroyed or damaged in the blaze.

The bodies of Sam Lamar Lucas, 77, and Linda M. Lucas, 76, were found earlier this week at their destroyed home. Their cause of death was pending.

Neighbor Eddie Schneider said he's not sure the couple ever received an automated phone call telling them to leave. Schneider left his home after a firefighter knocked on his door.

Hickenlooper said he doesn't blame some of the 900 evacuated homeowners in the mountains southwest of Denver for being angry.

"Their houses have been destroyed. Their lives have been changed forever. It's not their fault," he told KOA radio.

Later Wednesday, some local sheriff's deputies started taking owners of destroyed homes into the burn area to see what was left. On a tour for reporters, thin white smoke rose from valleys. Charred appliances were all that remained of some homes.

A Forest Service manager who helps plan for prescribed burns, Jane Lopez, said the state usually performs them only in spring and fall. Prescribed burns are planned as far as three years in advance, she said, but they don't go forward unless weather conditions meet requirements. She said everything was done properly.

"You don't burn unless all the parameters are met," Lopez said. She didn't comment on the governor's planned burn order but said, "We're at the end of the prescribed burn season anyway."

Conifer resident Don Heiden, who was displaced by the fire, said he wasn't ready to blame the government.

"Accidents happen. If there was negligence, they'll figure it out," said Heiden, who was watching televised aerial shots to see if his home was still standing. "To me, it's more of an act of God."

For years, fire agencies have

used controlled burns to preempt devastating wildfires by consuming fuel. Officials credited such an operation with helping save hundreds of homes during a 2002 Colorado wildfire that did destroy 133 homes.

A few controlled burns have escaped firefighters' control.

One of the worst cases was in New Mexico in 2000. A prescribed burn set by the National Park Service in Bandelier National Monument, west of Los Alamos, blew out of control, and all of Los Alamos was evacuated. More than 400 families lost their homes and more than 115 Los Alamos National Laboratory buildings were destroyed or damaged. The federal government paid \$455 million in compensation.

The Park Service resumed prescribed burns a year later with new rules, including having outside experts check burn plans.

The fire threat in much of Colorado has grown during an unusually dry and warm March. Several counties, including Jefferson, have implemented fire restrictions affecting campfires, fireworks and smoking in fire-prone areas.

I've been thinking... Now's a good time to get the carpets cleaned.

Carpet Cleaning Special Only \$75.95 for any 2 rooms (up to 300 sq. ft.)

Not good with any other offer. Must present coupon. Expires 4/15/12

665-5700
1-800-529-2450

Steamway CLEANING & RESTORATION
 Since "1968"

Nobody likes to Wait...

Nobody likes to stand in line. Nobody likes to "stop back." That's why we're different...

We fill your prescription promptly. We keep you informed, answer your questions, and get you on your way. No muss... no fuss. Just prompt personal service.

ROGER'S FAMILY PHARMACY
 "A tradition of trust"

218 West 4th Street • Yankton, SD 57078 • (605) 665-8042

SAVE THE DATE

Celebrate Women 2012

NOW is Your Time

Thursday, April 26th

Riverfront Event Center
 Doors Open 4:30pm
 Dinner Served 5:00-7:00pm
 Booths Open 4:30-7:00pm
 Speaker 7:30pm at Dakota Theatre

Advance Tickets: Only \$20

Available at Hy-Vee and the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan until April 20

presented by...

her-voice YANKTON MEDICAL CLINIC, P.C. FIRST DAKOTA NATIONAL BANK Hy-Vee