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THE PEACEMAKER

On January 24, 2003, Pope John Paul II convened a meeting in the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi in Italy. Present were some 250 religious leaders from around the world. They included Muslims, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, and representatives of native African religions. The purpose? To pray for world peace. The meeting was, in part, a united response to the terrorist attacks of September 11.

John Tagliabue of the *New York Times* described the Pope as seated “on a white throne” and flanked by Muslim and Jewish leaders. More than 30 religious leaders from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt joined a dozen Jewish leaders from Israel in making peace gestures. Several of the Muslim leaders could not resist thanking Pope John Paul II and the Vatican for its “honorable support of the Palestinian people.”

Israel Singer, who is president of the governing board of the World Jewish Congress, said, “Only you, John Paul II, could put this together. Only you can make this happen, and we have to help you to do it.” To do what? To bring lasting peace to the Middle East. Mahmoud Hammad Ibrahim Sheweitah, a professor of Islamic studies from Egypt, said, “We have to cooperate.”

Contributing to the success of the meeting was Pope John Paul’s Holy Land

tour of the year 2000. While there, he was the first Pope to enter and pray in a mosque and a synagogue. While there, he was the first to urge the United States and the international community to back the idea of Palestinian statehood. He also drew praise from rabbis and Israeli leaders for his *quiet* apology for the Jewish holocaust.

While Pope John Paul II is not long for this Earth, the ecumenical moves he has made are expected to continue. According to papal biographer Tad Szulc, the role of any future Pope in the Middle East will likely be: “Personal spiritual enrichment; reconciliation among all three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam); and peacemaking, the duty of anyone who would call himself the vicar of Christ.

“The Pope,” Szulc says, “is not just a religious pilgrim. He is one of the world’s great moral authorities, whose support or very presence can lend validity to states, policies and causes. So much so that he heads an entity with its own foreign policy goals.”

Whenever a new Pope and whatever his name, students of Bible prophecy will be intensely interested in his pursuit of goals that commanded the attention of Bible prophets, in particular, Daniel (see 11:40-45) and John the Revelator (see 13:11-15).