



# Bulletin

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*Editor: Athanasius MACORA, ofm*

## **Mideast at heart of Pope's Prayer this month**

*Hoping for Intensified Peace Efforts*

John Paul II is praying this month of January "that all those working in the Middle East may intensify their efforts for peace."

The general intention was announced by the Apostolate of Prayer, an intention the Pope makes his own, to offer his prayers and sacrifices together with thousands of faithful worldwide.

The Holy Father expressed his concern over the strife in Jesus' homeland, in his message for the World Day of Peace, whose theme was "Do Not Be Overcome by Evil but Overcome Evil with Good."

"I think immediately of the beloved continent of Africa, where conflicts which have already claimed millions of victims are still continuing," the Pope wrote. "Or the dangerous situation of Palestine, the Land of Jesus, where the fabric of mutual understanding, torn by a conflict which is fed daily by acts of violence and reprisal, cannot yet be mended in justice and truth."

He added: "To attain the good of peace there must be a clear and conscious acknowledgment that violence is an unacceptable evil and that it never solves problems."

Every month, the Pope also offers his prayer for a missionary intention. In January he is praying "that in mission lands holy and generous apostles may be raised up, eager to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to everyone."

*Zenit - 7 January 2005*

## **Catholic Bishops' Statement from the Holy Land**

*"Peace here is Vital for World Peace"*

Bishops from Europe and North America gathered this week in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Galilee to share in the life of the local Churches in the Holy Land and to strengthen their union with the Church in Jerusalem. Below is a message sent by the bishops to political leaders in the Holy Land.

\* \* \*

A Statement by the Members of the Episcopal Coordination for the Holy Land  
Jerusalem, Jan. 10-13, 2005

In a gesture of fraternal solidarity with the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, and with the express approval and support of the Holy See, bishops from Europe and North America have come once more this year to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Galilee this week to share in the life of the Local Churches in the Holy Land and to strengthen their communion with the Mother Church of Jerusalem. The Episcopal Coordination works to support the Local Church in its mission of justice, peace and reconciliation. During these last few days we have visited the President of Israel and the President of the Palestinian authority and have brought them both the following message.

We come in the footsteps of two pilgrims to the Holy Land, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II.

We are completely united with the Christians of the Holy Land, as they affirm the teaching of Pope Paul VI that peace is brought about through justice for all, and as they stand resolutely with Pope John Paul II in his consistent rejection of any form of violence as a road to peace.

We visit you at a time of great political potential. We know several of our native countries have helped to shape the history of this Land. We are determined that the issues which touch the lives and hopes of all in the Holy Land shall not be neglected. On our return, we will use every opportunity to share with our own communities and governments what we have learned from Palestinian and Israeli authorities and what we have heard and seen in parishes, in Bethlehem's wonderful university - whose story is followed with great interest in many countries - and in schools and hospitals, as well as in Galilee.

At this important moment, we seek to encourage and support all who strive for justice and so pursue peace and those practical steps that will enable the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live in this Land with dignity, in two states, in security and equity.

We affirm and stand with the Church in the Holy Land, with the Patriarch, the pastors, religious men and women and lay people, in their unique witness to the faith we share with them. With the whole Church, we are committed to the survival and vitality of the Christian community in this Land where Jesus was born, died, was buried and rose again.

The importance of the Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Holy See and the Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the Palestinian Liberation Organization are clear to us and we urge their full enactment and implementation without delay.

We will work for a just peace in this Land and seek to engage our local Churches and countries in this task. The entire world has a stake in justice and peace here. Peace here is vital for world peace.

At this hopeful moment our prayers are with all who share this Land; Israelis and Palestinians, Christians, Jews and Muslims, that we will very soon see decisive action and courageous steps to bring an end to violence and injustice and accomplish reconciliation and a just and lasting peace in the Land we all call Holy.

+Patrick Kelly, Archbishop of Liverpool and Vice President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and delegate, Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE)

+Brendan O'Brien, Archbishop of St. John's Newfoundland and president, Canadian bishops' conference

+William S. Skylstad, Bishop of Spokane and President, United States bishops' conference

+Andre Lacrampe, Archbishop of Besançon, French bishops' conference

+Joan Enric Vives, Bishop of Urgell and Co-prince of Andorra, Spanish bishops' conference

- +William Kenney, Auxiliary Bishop of Stockholm, Scandinavian bishops' conference and delegate, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)
- +Pierre Burcher, Auxiliary Bishop of Lausanne, Swiss bishops' conference
- +Andreas Laun, Auxiliary Bishop of Salzburg, Austrian bishops' conference
- +Monsignor Piergiuseppe Vachelli, Undersecretary, Italian bishops' conference

*Jerusalem, Thursday, Jan. 13, 2005*

## **Katsav meets Catholic Bishops**

President Moshe Katsav on Tuesday met with an international delegation of Catholic Bishops led by Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah.

Archbishop William Skylstad from the United States delivered a message on behalf of the members of the Episcopal Co-Ordination for the Holy Land in which he said: "We are completely united with Christians of the Holy Land as they affirm the teaching of Pope Paul VI that peace is brought about through justice for all, and as they stand resolutely with Pope John Paul II in his consistent rejection of any form of violence as a road to peace. We visit you at a time of great political potential."

Skylstad went on to say that the delegation seeks to encourage and support all who strive for justice and "so pursue peace and those practical steps that will enable the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live in this land with dignity, in two states, in security and equity."

He hoped to soon see "decisive action and courageous steps to bring an end to violence and injustice and accomplish reconciliation in the land we all call Holy."

When Mass is celebrated in the United States he said, "we all pray for peace in the Holy Land."

To which Katsav responded: "You have not prayed hard enough."

Maronite Archbishop Paul Sayah asked Katsav if Israel could show a little more sensitivity to theologians who come from Lebanon for humane reasons and to serve Israeli Christians. "We are not terrorists," he said. "Do I look like a terrorist to you?"

*By Greer Fay Cashman  
The Jerusalem Post - 11 January 2005*

## **Dialogue seen as Catholic-Orthodox Priority**

*Says Vatican Aide in L'Osservatore Romano*

To advance on the path toward unity between Catholics and Orthodox, both John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople are trying to relaunch theological dialogue.

Monsignor Eleuterio Fortino, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, mentioned this intention in today's Italian edition of L'Osservatore Romano when assessing relations between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Holy See.

Over the past year, these relations have undergone an "intense change," thanks to two visits of Bartholomew I to Rome -- on June 29, and again on Nov. 27, when he received the relics of Sts. John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen from the Pope.

This last event, Bartholomew I told Vatican Radio, was the most important in his ministry as Patriarch.

Also fostering the climate of good understanding was the Nov. 30 visit to the Patriarchate, on behalf of the Holy Father, of a Vatican delegation headed by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

These contacts have served to calm the tensions that arose with the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow and later that of Constantinople, after the Greek-Catholic Church of Ukraine requested recognition by the Holy See as a new Patriarchate. For the time being, the Pope has not acquiesced to this request, said Monsignor Fortino.

To overcome the millennium-long schism between Catholics and Orthodox, Monsignor Fortino believes that one of the necessary steps is the re-establishment of theological dialogue between the two sides.

This dialogue is carried out through a mixed commission made up of representatives of the Catholic Church and various Orthodox Churches. The commission's work has been blocked since the meeting held in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2000, when clear divisions arose over the topic under consideration: "Theological and Canonical Implications of Uniatism."

The question of "Uniatism" -- the Orthodox derisively call "Uniates" those Christians of the Eastern rite who keep their spirituality and liturgy but are united to the Pope -- has become especially acute with the Moscow Patriarchate, which views with mistrust the resurgence of Greek-Catholic communities that had suffered under the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

During Bartholomew I's visit to John Paul II last June 29, both signed a joint declaration committing themselves to reactivate the commission's work.

In this connection, the Patriarch, who has the right of initiative and coordination for pan-Orthodox issues, now needs to obtain the support of the other Orthodox Churches that have representatives in the commission.

*Zenit - 20 January 2005*

## **The White Fathers**

Located just inside Lions' Gate, within the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, St. Anne's Church is one of the best examples of Crusader architecture in the country. While almost every other vestige of Christianity was smashed to smithereens by

the Mamelukes when they conquered the Holy Land in the 12th century, St. Anne's Church remained intact so that Sultan Saladin could convert it into an Islamic seminary. Indeed, the name Salahiya (of Saladin) appears in an inscription above the church entrance.

The church and the archaeological site next door now belong to the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers. Their presence in Jerusalem is something of an anomaly, for the society was specifically established to disperse the Gospel to, and ease the misery of, the people of Africa. Nevertheless, when Algerian Archbishop Lavigerie took possession of St. Anne's in 1878, he had another goal in mind: he was determined to work towards a reconciliation of Christian churches in the Holy Land. Thus, when asked to start a seminary for training Greek (Orthodox) Melkite candidates for the priesthood, he consented with alacrity.

After the Six Day War, the seminary was relocated to Lebanon. Today, the dormitories house White Fathers on spiritual retreat or interested in refreshing their biblical studies, as well as African clergy of many denominations. The priests living at St. Anne's are engaged in education, dialogue between Christians and Muslims, ecumenical works, and recently began opening channels of communication between Christians and Jews.

Felix Turyatamba, who showed me around the premises, is probably typical of trainees for the missionary priesthood. Born in Uganda and educated in a school run by the White Fathers, he found himself drawn to their way of life. Felix has completed five years of training and has four more years of theology ahead of him before he either goes on a mission to Africa or works in Jerusalem in interfaith dialogue.

**SOCIETY FOUNDER** Charles Martial Lavigerie was born near Bayonne, France, in 1825 and even as a child yearned to become a priest. In 1860, while he was head of an organization dedicated to the reconciliation of Eastern and Western Christianity, hundreds of thousands of Christians were massacred in Lebanon and countless survivors were left homeless and hungry. Lavigerie collected a great deal of money to help alleviate their suffering, and travelled all the way to Lebanon to ensure that the funds were dispersed to those in need.

Seven years later, soon after he had been appointed archbishop of Algeria, a catastrophic famine that devastated the population was followed by a terrible drought and a plague of locusts. Something had to be done, so in 1868 and 1869 the archbishop founded two societies to help curb poverty, ignorance and disease among the African people: the Society of Missionaries of Africa and the Missionary Sisters of our Lady of Africa (White Fathers and White Sisters).

Appointed a cardinal in 1882, Lavigerie spent much of the time before his death a decade later campaigning tirelessly against the African slave trade. He and his missionaries even bought children offered in the marketplace so that they could set them free and make sure they got an education.

The title "White Fathers" refers to the habits worn by the priests, brothers and sisters. When Lavigerie founded the society, he laid down strict guidelines for its followers. They were to speak the language and eat the same food as the people among whom they worked, and wear a habit that resembled African dress.

From the beginning, they were clothed in white cassocks and mantles, like many Algerian Arabs. And while the White Fathers I've met didn't know why they hang a black-and-white rosary around their necks, according to the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia it was intended to resemble the mesbaha beads worn by certain African Muslim holy men.

Under society rules, White Fathers must reside in houses with at least two other priests or brothers so that they can share a rich religious and communal life. Whenever possible, the men come from different backgrounds, giving the communities an international flavor. At present, White Fathers from 37 countries live in 316 African communities, where they have set up hospitals and schools to educate young boys, train novitiates and spread the Gospel.

BUT THE house at St. Anne's Church is unique. In 1856, the Turkish sultan presented the church to Napoleon III in return for French aid during the Crimean War. The lovely sanctuary had been sadly neglected during the Turkish rule of Palestine and it took years to restore the building.

While searching for just the right person to administer the property, the French settled on Charles Lavigerie. He was, indeed, the logical choice, for the Algerian archbishop was extremely interested in and respectful of Islam and had a great affinity for Muslim Arabs.

Adjacent to the church are the double pools called Bethesda, uncovered during restorations in the 19th century. In ancient times, people with a variety of disabilities would linger by the Bethesda pools, for their waters were believed to have magical, restorative powers. According to one legend, an angel flew over the pools once every 24 hours; whoever happened to be inside the water at that time would be miraculously healed.

Christian tradition teaches that while in Jerusalem for a Jewish holiday, Jesus healed a man at Bethesda. The man, who had been paralyzed for 38 years, was lying next to the pool with no one to help him enter its waters. Jesus told the invalid to "'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked" (John 5:2).

In the middle of the fifth century, Jerusalem Patriarch Juvenal built a large basilica over the pools to commemorate Jesus' miracle at Bethesda. It was later destroyed, and the Crusaders built a small monastery atop the ruins. Later they erected the lovely Romanesque church that stands near the pool today. It is dedicated to Mary's mother St. Anne, and beneath the church is a grotto that, according to some traditions, is Mary's birthplace.

Pilgrims who visit St. Anne's Church are inevitably struck by its simplicity, both within the unadorned interior and on the clear clean lines of its facade. Yet there is also a sense of majesty, perhaps lent by the church's stark cross-vaulted ceilings and giant pillars. Amazing acoustics make even a solitary melodic prayer pervade the soul; when a choir sings in the church, the heavens seem to ring with the sound.

*By Aviva Bar-am  
The Jerusalem Post - 9 January 2005*

## **Papal Message conveyed to harassed Christians in Galilee**

### *Nuncio appears at Mass in Wake of Attacks*

MAGHAR, Israel - John Paul II's representative in Israel brought words of encouragement to Maghar, during a Mass celebrated in the wake of recent attacks against Christians by fellow Druze villagers.

Archbishop Pietro Sambì, Apostolic Nuncio in Israel, became the spokesman for John Paul II's prayers and solidarity with Christians of Maghar, during the Mass in the local Greek-Catholic-Melkite Church of St. George.

"I am here, to convey to the Christian community and to each one of its members the solidarity, the prayers, and the apostolic blessing of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II," said Archbishop Sambì.

He was joined in the celebration of the Mass by Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem, and by Maronite and Melkite bishops. Representatives of several Christian denominations also attended, reported AsiaNews.

In his address, Archbishop Sambì said that the Israeli authorities themselves described the violence suffered by the Christians of Maghar as a "pogrom" and new "Kristallnacht," bringing to mind the "abominable events in Jewish history."

The Papal Nuncio urged reconciliation in Maghar, but he also called for compensation for the heavy material and moral losses, and pointed out that the state of Israel did not prevent the attacks.

Maghar is a village of about 18,000 residents, 15 kilometers (10 miles) from the Sea of Galilee. Half of its population is Druze, an offshoot of Islam.

The violence, unleashed Feb. 11-12 by the Druze, was sparked by a false rumor about photos that a Christian schoolboy had posted on the Internet. For two days, Druze youths rioted in the Christian neighborhood under the gaze of Israeli police.

"The Druze attacked us four times," the Catholic parish priest of St. George's Church, Father Abud Maher, told AsiaNews.

"The first two times with the Israeli police looking on, actually withdrawing from the village," the priest said. "I called the Nuncio to tell him about the situation. Archbishop Sambì then called the authorities demanding that they intervene."

In a letter of protest sent to Israeli President Moshe Katzav, Patriarch Sabbah lamented the lack of protection of Christians on the part of the Israeli police.

"While a whole battalion of the army guarded a small [Israeli] settlement in Hebron, a neighborhood of Maghar has been semi-destroyed without any reaction from the Israeli police," said the prelate in the Haaretz newspaper.

On Feb. 13, days after the start of the attack, 300 policemen were sent to the village.

Father Maher said the violence left seven people injured, and 70 Christian shops and homes were sacked and set on fire. St. George's Church was stoned, windows were broken and the facade was damaged, he said. A mixed Christian-Muslim commission confirmed these figures, said AsiaNews.

Of the 4,000 Christians who live in Maghar, 2,000 fled from their homes to neighboring villages, said AsiaNews.

Elias Daw, President of the local court of appeal of the Greek-Catholic-Melkite Church, told the Missionary Service News Agency that last Saturday, in the face of the persistence "of fear of new incidents of violence," "90% of Maghar's Christians have left the village."

*Zenit - 21 February 2005*

## **Maghar children come to terms with their trauma**

Tears, fire and fear were the common denominator among dozens of pictures drawn by Christian children in Maghar. The children, ages 6 to 13, were asked Friday by a team of educational counselors and psychologists to draw what they felt and saw during Druze-Christian clashes in their town two weeks ago.

The team of counselors and therapists came together Friday, mainly at their own initiative, for the first in a series of encounters coordinated by Hiyam Tannous, supervisor of educational counselors in the Education Ministry's northern district. Tannous had no difficulty formulating an opinion about the children's feelings based on their artwork: They will not soon forget the two days of rioting in their town, sparked by rumors that some Christian youths had created photographic images of Druze girls in the nude and had posted them on the Internet.

Neither the children nor their parents have been able to put the events behind them - if the fact that all refused to be identified by name, even by first name is any indication.

"Those whose names appear in the paper are afraid they will come to harm the next day," said D., a teacher in one of Maghar's schools, who came to the meeting with her two daughters. "The meetings might give a feeling of relief, but no one can promise that these things won't happen again. On the way here and around the church there are still dozens of police, which means it's not over yet."

"The parents need counseling no less than the children," Tannous explained, "because the parents are still living with feelings of insecurity. A child who saw his parents helpless to protect him can't express the pain."

V., a seventh-grader, described what she drew: "Everything was burning around me and I was terribly afraid. I didn't know what to do and even my parents were frightened. My mother took us to a room and we closed ourselves inside. A short time later we ran away. It was scary and I thought I would not go back to Maghar at all."

H., V.'s mother, listened, crying. "We never imagined such a thing. It's even hard to talk about," she said, offering a sheaf of papers on which she had written down her feelings. "Do you promise my name will not be in the paper?" she asked. "I'm afraid."

"Our suffering in Maghar did not start with the pogrom two weeks ago," she wrote. "It started long years ago. We are a Christian community constantly living in fear. As a mother, I appeal to the whole world for help."

Samir Hamud, an educational counselor from the nearby village of Dir Hanna and a member of the team conducting the encounters, said that efforts are mainly directed at getting the children to express themselves in art or in conversation, to vent their anger and to talk about what they saw and what they think about it.

Hamud: "We came across children who almost lost their whole world when they saw their house, their car and their family store go up in flames, and they were utterly exposed and defenseless. One girl we met was in denial, claiming that she remembers nothing of what happened. That shows she is deeply distressed and urgently in need of therapy."

"We are only in the early stages of treatment," Tannous explained, "since at the end of the process we have to find a way out of this situation and seek something positive out of everything that happened."

One of the positive things that occurred during the unrest, he added, was the fact that there were Druze families who took Christians into their homes and protected them: "We have to emphasize this positive aspect."

According to Tannous, there are also Druze children in need of intervention by educational experts.

"There is no doubt that there is a need on both sides, for the teachers as well," noted Asad Abu Zaydan, principal of a Maghar elementary school. "They must be given the tools to transmit a message of brotherhood and coexistence, and not alienation."

Jafar Farah, director of the Mossawa Center, the advocacy organization for Arab citizens that initiated the meetings, had harsh words for what he calls the Education Ministry's "blithe response" to the events in Maghar.

"The ministry has to wake up," he stressed, "to what is going on in Maghar's schools and mobilize the necessary resources."

*By Jack Houry  
Haaretz - 28 February 2005*

## **What Christians in Holy Land are armed with**

*Auxiliary Bishop Marcuzzo of Jerusalem surveys Scene*

A bishop of Jerusalem says that Christians, as bearers of values such as justice, peace, dignity and human rights, can make a key contribution to solving the Mideast conflict.

Christians' weapons are those of "negotiation, patience and bridge-building," said Auxiliary Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo, in a statement to ZENIT.

The Italian-born prelate has been in the Holy Land for 44 years. He was ordained bishop 11 years ago and has been Patriarchal Vicar of the Latin Church in Israel for the past decade.

Although designated as such in newspapers, he is not bishop of Nazareth, but a bishop who lives in Nazareth, since most Christians in the region live in that area.

The prelate said that there has always been a Christian community there, "a thread that runs through everything, incarnated in the culture and local society, through the ups and downs of political and ecclesial powers and jurisdictions."

"Today Christians in the Holy Land regard themselves as heirs of the first Christian community, something that cannot be understood if one does not keep in mind this transmission of the teachings of Christ from one generation to the other, from one people to another, between one regime and another," the auxiliary bishop said.

The first Christians in the main were Jews, while the present community is Arab-Palestinian, but this does not mean that the latter "do not consider themselves descendants of the first Christian community, in the thread of faith," he noted.

That the Christian community is surrounded by a Muslim majority, under the political jurisdiction of Israel, is "a new historical, cultural and social experience," for which there is no "model or experience of reference," said Bishop Marcuzzo.

"We must mark out our path," he said. "The Christian community lives a twofold minority condition, in the Arab community and in Israel. Consider a person who is Arab, Christian and a citizen of Israel. To be these three things at the same time is difficult; it is a challenge that we have addressed in our diocesan synod.

"During the synod we said that we should recover the original land of our identity, that is, the Mother Church, the Church of the Apostles, the Church of the Holy Sites, the Church of the Gospel; we have rediscovered there a fertile terrain, not tainted by history."

He added: "By vocation, we chose to be the Church in the Holy Land and to stay here."

The Diocesan Synod of the Catholic Churches in the Holy Land closed in February 2000 with the holding of an assembly that gave origin to the General Pastoral Plan.

The plan was the result of a process of several years involving the Latin, Greek-Catholic (Melkite), Syro-Catholic, Maronite, Armenian-Catholic and Chaldean Churches, and the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.

The plan is entitled "Faithful to Christ, Co-responsible in the Church, Witnesses in Society."

Bishop Marcuzzo said that there are difficulties in relations with Muslims, but the problems are not "insurmountable."

The General Pastoral Plan may be requested from the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem at [media@lpj.org](mailto:media@lpj.org) or from the Vicariate of Nazareth at [latinvic@actcom.com](mailto:latinvic@actcom.com).

*Zenit - 22 February 2005*

## **U.S. urged to press Israel on Pact with Holy See** *Episcopate President sends Letter to Condoleezza Rice*

The President of the U.S. bishops' conference has asked Condoleezza Rice to exert pressure on Israel to comply with the agreements signed with the Holy See.

"We are deeply dismayed by the lack of progress, and we fear a lack of commitment, on the part of the Israeli government in negotiations with the Holy See over economic matters and other vital concerns to the Catholic Church and the wider Christian community in the Holy Land," affirms Bishop William Skylstad in his letter to Secretary of State-designate Rice.

The prelate referred to the application of the Fundamental Agreement of 1993 between the Holy See and the state of Israel.

"Our concerns do not minimize the suffering of Jews and Muslims, but the issues between the government of Israel and the Holy See are also of great importance for religious liberty, not only for the Catholic Church but for the vitality of the all Christian communities within Israel," wrote Bishop Skylstad of Spokane, Washington.

"We urge the administration to address these matters with the government of Israel and to move this process forward expeditiously and effectively," the letter continued.

"In the Fundamental Agreement, the Holy See formally recognized and established diplomatic ties with the state of Israel, an action in accord with the wishes of successive U.S. administrations," recalled the bishop.

"This recognition proceeded even without a full resolution of outstanding major issues of concern to the Church," he added, "but with the promise by the Israeli government that these would be addressed through further negotiations.

"The agreed-upon bases for these negotiations were the rights acquired by the Church prior to the U.N. mandate establishing the state of Israel. These rights were reaffirmed in the U.N. mandate establishing the state of Israel and in the Israeli Declaration of Independence."

Bishop Skylstad continued: "Among the most critical issues facing the Church in Israel is its ability to maintain its rights to Church properties. Maintaining these properties is key to the mission and ministry of the Church in the Holy Land and thus its religious freedom.

"The exercise of arbitrary taxation policies by the government of Israel against Church properties and the government's denial of access to due process through Israeli courts to settle property disputes violates international law and the history of the prior rights of the Church."

"While these negotiations have faltered previously, it was only with strong U.S. encouragement that they were revived in July 2004. Unfortunately, the revival of talks has been hesitant and fitful," the prelate observed.

"In addition, we have been told the Israeli negotiators have not had full empowerment to conduct talks with the degree of seriousness they need," he added. "The failure to enact and implement the Fundamental Agreement, including the lack of progress in negotiations on economic matters, raises serious questions about the basic commitments made by the Israeli government.

"U.S. intervention in this matter is critical. We ask you to urge the government of Israel to renew its negotiations with the Holy See without further delays."

Today, U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to confirm Rice's appointment as the new secretary of state, to replace Colin Powell. The appointment now faces a vote in the full Senate.

*Zenit - 19 January 2005*

## **Pope meets with Jewish leaders and rabbis**

Pope John Paul II called for renewed commitment to stronger dialogue between Jews and Catholics as he warmly received more than 100 Jewish leaders, rabbis, cantors and their family members Tuesday in what was described as the largest such Vatican audience with Jewish representatives.

Most of the participants were from the United States, including a large contingent from the New York metropolitan area, but there were also Jews from Israel, France, India, Canada and Croatia among the group wanting to thank the Pontiff for his dedication in improving relations between Jews and Catholics.

The long-scheduled gathering happened to come amid revived debate among historians, Catholics and Jews over a contentious post war issue - the Vatican's attempt to keep hold of some Jewish children who were baptized to save them from the Nazis. But no echoes of that flap seemed to resound in the marble-lined, frescoed Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace where John Paul, seated in his white, upholstered wheeled chair, enthusiastically received his guests.

The Pontiff has made better relations with Jews a hallmark of a papacy and has met large gatherings of Jews on several occasions, including his groundbreaking 1986 visit to Rome's main synagogue and his 2000 trip to Israel.

"Upon all of you, I invoke the abundant blessings of the Almighty and, in particular, the gift of peace. Shalom aleichem," John Paul said, using the traditional greeting when two Jews meet.

His guests lavished praise on Pope for his defense of the Jews.

"You have defended Jewish people at every opportunity, as a priest in Poland and during your Pontificate," Gary Krupp, from the Pave the Way Foundation, said in opening remarks. John Paul thanked Krupp, from Long Beach, New York, for his "kind words."

Toward the end of the half-hour encounter, as rabbis, other Jewish representatives, spouses and children came up one by one to shake the Pope's hand, cantors broke out in brief song.

John Paul smiled warmly at his guests, most of whom appeared quite at ease in meeting the Pope. At other audiences, many participants often seem stiff or intimidated when their turn arrives before the Pontiff.

Many of Tuesday's participants were from the Pave the Way Foundation, a New York-based group aimed at better relations between the faiths.

During John Paul's Papacy, the Vatican established diplomatic relations with Israel.

*By the Associated Press  
The Jerusalem Post - 18 January 2005*

## **Jewish Representative's Words of Gratitude to John Paul II**

*"Reconciliatory Acts have been a Hallmark of Your Pontificate"*

Here is the greeting addressed to John Paul II today by Gary Krupp, President and Founder of the Pave the Way Foundation, on behalf of some 160 rabbis and Jewish representatives, who were received in audience.

\* \* \*

Your Holiness:

We are a group of people who represent a cross section of Judaism, who have travelled here with the blessings of millions of our faith in order to thank you.

Soon after your ascension to the throne of St. Peter, you made a telling trip to Auschwitz in order to pay homage to victims of the Holocaust. You have defended the Jewish people at every opportunity, as a priest in Poland and during your twenty-six year Pontificate. You have denounced anti-Semitism as a "sin against God and humanity." This tone of reconciliation has been the corner stone of your papacy and its relations with the Jewish people.

On April 13, 1986, you became the first Pope since St. Peter to visit a synagogue. Upon presenting his credentials to you in June 2003, Israeli Ambassador Odded Ben-Hur

expressed this enormous gesture best when he said, "On that day you took upon your shoulders the 2000-year-old Church, back to the first century synagogue of Capernaum, where Jesus used to pray, thus closing an historic circle."

You moved the Holy See to initiate the process of normalizing of diplomatic relations with the State of Israel in 1992, the beloved biblical homeland of the Jewish people, symbolically acknowledging the existence of Eretz Ysrael yesterday, today, and forever.

Your pilgrimage to Israel and the Holy Land on March 21, 2000, was immortalized in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people around the world, when you placed your prayer asking for forgiveness in the Western Wall.

Your solemn remarks during your visit to the Hall of Remembrance, Yad Vashem, profoundly moved us and touched our hearts.

It is impossible to describe the emotional impact these milestones have had on Jews worldwide. Your Holiness, these reconciliatory acts have, in fact, been a hallmark of your Pontificate as you have also tried to repair the ancient rifts in all of the religions in the world.

The Jewish Ethics of the Fathers beautifully captures, in verse, the love you have exhibited for all humanity. Rabbi Hillel says: "Be among the disciples of Aaron, by being a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, a lover of all humanity and bringing them closer to religion."

For your acts of love of all humankind and your implacable pursuit of peace and reconciliation of all faiths, Your Holiness truly is the personification of these ideals and spirit of Aaron, the high priest of ancient Israel.

In closing, you have referred to us, the children of Abraham, as your beloved elder brothers. My prayerful wish is that Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the three children of Abraham, may soon bond together in one common cause and voice to defend all humanity against those who defame God by committing wanton acts of violence in his holy name.

Your Holiness, thank you, thank you, thank you. Shalom, Shalom, Shalom.

*Zenit - 18 January 2005*

## **Jewish groups threaten legal action against Vatican**

WASHINGTON - U.S. Jewish groups threatened legal action against the Vatican on Thursday, saying the Roman Catholic Church has stonewalled their requests for information about Jewish children placed in convents during World War II to protect them from the Nazis.

David Schoen, an Alabama-based attorney, said Thursday that if the church does not agree to open up the records within a week, the Coalition of Jewish Concerns-Amcha would turn to the legal system for help in identifying the missing children.

Speaking to a news conference outside the Vatican's embassy, Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld noted the commemoration ceremony taking place in Poland to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

But, he said, "as long as the children of all those murdered at Auschwitz do not know their true identity, and as long as the murdered at Auschwitz have descendants who do know their true lineage, how can we truly say that Auschwitz has been liberated. We want our children back."

Herzfeld attempted to deliver a personal letter to the papal nuncio, Archbishop Gabriele Montalvo, requesting a meeting. He said his knocks on the embassy door were not answered.

A spokesman for the Nunciature said there was no comment on the Jewish group's demands.

The letter said the Jewish groups were "deeply concerned about recent documents indicating a papal policy of encouraging Jewish children who were hidden by convents during World War II not to be returned to Jewish institutions after the war."

Moreover, the letter said, in cases where the children were baptized, the documents' directive was to forbid the convent from returning the children to their parents.

It referred to a document found in French Roman Catholic archives that was published in the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera last December that apparently instructs French church authorities that Jewish children baptized as Catholics, for safety or other reasons, should remain within the church - even if that meant not returning them to their families once the Nazi occupation ended.

The letter is datelined from Paris and says it summarizes the views of the Vatican's Holy Office, the precursor to the current Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is not clear who wrote the document.

It notes that the contents were approved by Pope Pius XII, the controversial figure accused by some Jewish groups of not enough to prevent the Holocaust.

Last December Rev. Peter Gumpel, a Jesuit investigator promoting Pius' cause for sainthood denied that the letter came from any source in the Vatican. He suggested it might have been a brief, incomplete summary of the church's position by religious officials in France.

Herzfeld said the Jewish groups seek an immediate investigation of all archives related convents in northern Europe under the Vatican's influence in order to determine the blood lines of potentially thousands of missing children.

The groups also want an admission of wrongdoing by church leaders and a repudiation of the alleged policy.

*By The Associated Press  
Haaretz - 28 January 2005*

## **Jewish-Catholic project to fight AIDS in Africa**

NEW YORK - A first of its kind joint Catholic-Jewish project to stop the spread of AIDS in Africa is one of the main issues on the agenda of an international religious conference opening today in New York.

Some 27 bishops and cardinals and a number of Jewish scholars and rabbis from around the world are to attend the conference, sponsored for the third year by the World Jewish Congress (WJC).

Among the speakers at the opening session are Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, who recently retired from the post of archbishop of Paris, and Walter Cardinal Kaspar of Germany, president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Israel Singer, chairman of the WJC governing board, will also speak.

Bishops from China, India, Brazil, Argentina, South Korea and the Ukraine, and four cardinals from Africa are among those attending.

The conference comes on the 40th anniversary of the 1965 declaration by the Catholic Church, *Nostre Aestate*, that signalled a change in its relation to the Jewish people. "The increased Catholic presence at the conference this year is especially important, as senior Catholic clerics can influence the continued sympathetic policies to the Jewish people and Israel designed and implemented by Pope John Paul II," Singer said.

The conference is expected to issue a closing statement that "the two faiths cannot remain passive in the face of the human tragedy taking place in Africa due to the spread of AIDS." A statement condemning the genocide in Darfur is also expected.

The conference expresses "the unavoidable need for close cooperation between the two faiths on social issues," Israel Singer told Haaretz. "No religion can struggle for its rights in a democratic way without the assistance of other religions," he said.

*By Shlomo Shamir  
Haaretz - 28 February 2005*

## **Holocaust a "Stain on History," says Vatican**

*Address at U.N. recalls Liberation of Nazi Camps by the Allies*

The Nazis' systematic extermination of the Jews remains "a shameful stain on the history of humanity," says the Holy See.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations, highlighted this conclusion Monday when addressing the U.N. General Assembly, which commemorated the 60th-anniversary year of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe by the Allied Forces.

"Today we contemplate the consequences of intolerance, as we recall all those who were targeted by the political and social engineering of the Nazis, elaborated on a tremendous scale and employing deliberate and calculated brutality," the Archbishop said.

"Those considered unfit for society -- the Jews, the Slavonic peoples, the Roma people, the disabled, homosexuals, among others -- were marked for extermination," he said. The "Roma people" are commonly known as Gypsies.

"Those who dared oppose the regime by word and deed -- politicians, religious leaders, private citizens -- often paid for their opposition with their lives," the Vatican representative continued.

"Conditions were so designed as to make human beings lose their essential dignity and divest themselves of every human decency and sentiment," he said.

"The death camps," the Archbishop added, "are also witnesses to an unprecedented plan for the deliberate, systematic extermination of a whole people, the Jewish people," in "the crime now known as the Shoah," the Holocaust.

"Taking place during one of the darkest chapters of the 20th century, it stands alone, remaining a shameful stain on the history of humanity and upon the conscience of all," he said.

"During his visit to Auschwitz in 1979, Pope John Paul II stated that we must let the cry of the people martyred there change the world for the better, by drawing the right conclusions from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Archbishop Migliore recalled.

"In a century marked by man-made catastrophes, the Nazi death camps are a particularly sobering reminder of 'man's inhumanity to man' and of his capacity for evil," he noted. "Nevertheless, we should remember that humankind is also capable of great good, of self-sacrifice and altruism.

"When natural or human calamities strike, as we have seen even in recent weeks, people display the best side of human society, with solidarity and brotherhood, and sometimes at personal cost."

Referring to the wartime liberation of the Nazi camps, the Archbishop recalled, "we need only think of those courageous people from all walks of society, many of whom have been recognized as 'Righteous among the Nations,'" Israel's acknowledgement of those people who risked their lives to save Jews.

Archbishop Migliore added: "May all men and women of good will seize this solemn occasion to say 'Never again' to such crimes, no matter their political inspiration, so that all nations, as well as this organization, truly respect the life, liberty, and dignity of every human being."

*Zenit - 25 January 2005*

## **When Rome's Religious houses saved Jews**

*Interview with Historian Sister Grazia Loparco*

Testimonies and documents reflect that Pius XII gave ecclesial institutions instructions to shelter and help Jews in Rome when Nazi persecution broke out during World War II.

No one knows exactly how many Jews were hidden and saved by the Church, but according to "Three Popes and the Jews" by Jewish historian Emilio Pinchas Lapide, then consul general in Milan, "the Holy See, the nuncios, and the Catholic Church saved between 740,000 and 850,000 Jews from certain death."

It is estimated that more than 80% of the Jews in Italy escaped the Nazi genocide. In Rome alone, the Jewish community has certified that the Church saved 4,447 Jews from the Holocaust.

Coordinamento Storici Religiosi, an Italian cultural association that coordinates the documentation of religious history, is carrying out research on Jews sheltered in the religious houses of Rome between the fall of 1943 and June 1944.

In this interview with ZENIT, Salesian Sister Grazia Loparco, professor of Church history at the Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium in Rome and vice president of the association, explained that such research "constitutes a starting point with a view toward a more ample reconstruction that embraces the same phenomenon in north-central Italy, where the emergency took on its own and more prolonged connotations, and at the same time referred to local numbers that were small compared to the great Roman community."

Q: How many Jews were saved by the Catholic Church in Rome? Who, in particular, saved them?

Sister Loparco: In 1943 the Jewish community was made up of 10,000-12,000 Jews. According to scholars, it is difficult to specify the number, as other Jews arrived in the capital from other European states during the conflict hoping to find greater security.

The research begun in 2002-2003 approximates a minimum number of 4,300 Jews lodged in religious houses. It is certainly a figure by default, based on the first study published by De Felice in 1961, and taken up again *Civiltà Cattolica* of the same year in an article signed by Father Robert Leiber.

Given the uncertainty, I have considered the lower number. It will not be possible to arrive at precise figures, both because not all the witnesses knew how to distinguish who was or was not Jewish -- there were many there who were opposed to being recruited or who were politically persecuted -- and because, with rare exceptions, lists of names didn't exist.

One can conclude that sometimes the Jews did not reveal their identity, or that only the superiors of the religious communities knew it.

Another reason for imprecision is due to the fact that our research concerns religious houses and parishes entrusted to religious, not parishes entrusted to diocesan clergy.

There are grounds to suppose that at least half of Roman Jews found shelter in ecclesial institutions. Just over 1,000 were arrested the morning of October 16, 1943, and several hundred more were arrested later as a result of denunciations. For every Jew singled out, one could receive 5,000 lire if they were men, and 3,000 lire if they were women and children.

Beginning October 16, 1943, Jews who were in extreme danger found immediate shelter with acquaintances, friends, and sometimes with Catholic domestic staff or businessmen, men's and women's religious houses, including cloistered monasteries -- which could not have taken them in without a papal dispensation -- parishes and seminaries.

They did not always stay in the same place. It was difficult to remain hidden in private family homes, so in many cases they sought shelter in religious houses.

After immediate concealment in the more central places of the city, several tried to go to more peripheral areas, potentially more peaceful. Often, men and women religious hid Jews a few meters from the Nazis' eyes.

Q: How was the network of help to the persecuted organized and to what degree did Pope Pius XII intervene to support it?

Sister Loparco: Several witnesses recall the instructions coming orally from Vatican ecclesiastics on the opportunity to open convents and institutes because it was "the hour of charity." And the majority did so realizing that they were doing no more than their duty, as the lives of unjustly persecuted people were at stake.

The Delasem existed, an organization that gave financial help to Jews in difficulty; and then there was the famous Father Benoit, a Capuchin who together with others worked near Termini, Rome's main train station, to provide false identity documents and other papers, with the collaboration of men and women religious, in addition to municipal personnel and young people of Catholic Action. Another "knot" of the false documents net was near the catacombs of Priscilla.

Some religious houses recall having received provisions from the Vatican to feed the Jews, who often increased by dozens the number of the communities' members.

But many other times, the testimonies of nuns especially speak of great sacrifices to share the little they had, rationed by cards, and recourse to collections and the black market to acquire the necessary.

In some cases Jews could pay for their pension or provide for their maintenance, but many other times they could not. All these thousands of people were almost never refused because they were unable to pay for their maintenance.

Moreover, hospitality was offered in different ways, according to the case: Sometimes whole families could be lodged, at other times only women and children, or men and boys, or only children without adults. It was important to camouflage these people among the usual guests of the houses.

In several cases, however, Jews were hidden in wine cellars, underground shelters, hidden rooms, attics, storage rooms, hatchways, being able to come out to stretch their legs and breathe fresh air only after school hours. In the case of hospitals and clinics, they were camouflaged among the patients.

In some cities such as Florence, Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa provided a list of religious houses where the Jews could go. In Rome, however, the impression is that the character of emergency, creating a network of collaboration, marked the speed of the operations. For example, the Salesians' Basilica of the Sacred Heart near Termini became a placement center, and it wasn't the only one.

From the documentation and testimonies emerges evidence of the full support and instruction of Pius XII that, although only oral, at the time was interpreted as an authoritative order.

Many concrete events, such as the opening of cloistered monasteries and convents, prove the fact that many Jews were lodged because of the direct concern of the Vatican, which also provided food and assistance.

I can say no more, given that access is not allowed both to the historical archive of the Vicariate of Rome for this period as well as the Vatican Secret Archives, where there certainly must be archives of the religious Institutes.

Q: In recent weeks there have been controversies on the question of Jewish children snatched by the Catholic Church from the Nazi rage and then, in some cases, baptized. Can you explain what the Vatican directives were in this respect and what was the incidence of this phenomenon in Rome?

Sister Loparco: In the city of Rome cases occurred of requests for baptism by adults and sometimes by youths. Very few cases -- only one institute among hundreds -- speak of baptizing children.

An example might give an idea of the mentality of that time: A nun recounts how she carried a bottle of water on her person; when sirens rang and they had to hide in shelters, and, if it had been a case of extreme danger, she would have baptized the little orphans entrusted to her. It was the mentality of "extra Ecclesia nulla salus."

There was no need. Instead, there are testimonies of Jews, who were youths or youngsters then, who felt completely respected in their faith, and who were helped and encouraged to pray according to their own Jewish customs. Sometimes they shared the prayer of a Psalm with the nuns, in cases of danger and fear.

At other times, it has been alleged, there was a certain insistence that guests be interested in the Catholic faith, under pain of not being able to attain salvation, in the hope of a future conversion. However, those who defended their own convictions were respected and, not rarely, admired for their consistency.

There were cases of those who asked for baptism more out of the hope of easing their situation than out of real conviction. And there were guests who remained in religious houses, obviously without being baptized, until they completed their professional formation, including some boys, who did not know where to go when the war ended.

It is true that, in many cases, direct contact eliminated residual, reciprocal prejudices. Men and women religious were willing to acknowledge the human and moral qualities of the Jews they lodged. Long friendships kept over the years prove that esteem and real sharing in the meaning of life were not conditioned by religious membership.

*Zenit - 21 January 2005*

## Getting tight with the Bible Belt

WASHINGTON - MK Benny Elon (National Union) invests more time and effort than perhaps any other Israeli in nurturing the relationship with Evangelical Christians in the U.S. As minister of tourism during the intifada, Elon promoted visits by Evangelical churches to Israel, and he continues to attend their conferences and speak out against diplomatic compromise on the Land of Israel.

In Elon's view, it is a productive relationship; Evangelical churches in the United States, with a combined membership of more than 50 million, are the closest thing to the Yesha Council of settlements on the other side of the Atlantic. Church leaders believe the Land of Israel belongs to Jews, and that only after the Jews settle the land will Jesus be able to return. There is a minor argument, of course, over what will happen in the end of days - the Evangelicals believe Jews will either cease to exist or will convert to Christianity - but this argument is on hold for now.

On Monday, at the major annual conference of evangelistic broadcasters in Anaheim, California, Elon introduced his soon-to-be-released book, "God's Covenant with Israel: Establishing Biblical Boundaries in Today's World." The book, which is being published in English, is a first attempt to formulate in writing the points of agreement and cooperation between Israel and Evangelical Christians in the United States. For Elon, it is also a first attempt to join politics and the Bible in the discourse between the two sides.

"I don't play it objective," says Elon, referring to his book. He says that in his numerous encounters with Christian believers around the U.S., he has felt a breach between the cold discussion of political and diplomatic issues, and the spiritual religious experience, as expressed in outbursts of "Hallelujah" and "Amen" by believers. Elon feels that he is now tying together the loose ends and essentially giving religious-biblical underpinnings to his diplomatic doctrine.

The book appraises four way stations in which, Elon says, a covenant was made between God, the People of Israel and the Land of Israel: Shechem, Beit El, Hebron and Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. It describes his life as a resident of Beit El and depicts for readers the territories as a land of the Bible, the same Bible that his readers read and believe in. Elon sees this approach as part of a chain of values that can link Israel with Americans - "If Sharansky is going for democracy and shared values and Netanyahu is going for the war on terror, then I am going for the Bible," he says.

### **The third side**

Aside from emphasizing the Jewish-Christian partnership in the matter of the Bible and the Land of Israel, Elon's book also devotes extensive discussion to the third side - the Muslims. "I try to strengthen the Jewish-Christian common denominator, which has a scathing dispute with Islam," he says. "I'm not proposing to burn down mosques or make provocations, but neither am I suggesting that the common enemy be disregarded."

As Elon sees it, while Christians and Jews agree on a single historical and chronological outlook, Islam rejects it and proposes an alternative. This is particularly true when it comes to the issue of choice. The Muslims, Elon writes in his book, do not accept the historical story according to which at each stage God chose one and rejected the others, and therefore the People of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, are the chosen people.

The National Religious Broadcasters (NBR) association is one of the fastest growing media umbrella groups in the U.S. Although the 1,700 broadcast organizations that belong to the NBR represent a wide range of trends and attitudes, it is the primary working tool of the Evangelical churches in the U.S. The radio and television stations affiliated with the organization broadcast to tens of millions of believing Christians throughout the U.S. - many in the southern U.S.'s Bible Belt.

Member organizations commit to uphold a "statement of faith and code of ethics" that includes the tenets of Evangelical faith, as well as a sort of journalistic ethical code, the components of which are somewhat similar to like-minded documents found elsewhere in the broadcast industry. Except that every section of the NBR code relates to a verse from the holy writings, from which it is derived.

Israel has viewed the American Evangelical community as a significant source of support for more than two decades. What began as a marginal dalliance between groups in the Israeli right and leaders of the Evangelical Church has become one of the primary channels of contact between the official State of Israel and American Christians. Along the way, this alliance has succeeded in overcoming more than a few hurdles - the established Jewish community in the U.S. at first responded coolly to the closer relations while expressing reservations about the rightist approach of the Evangelicals in American politics - an approach that is alien to most of the Jewish community; nor did the previous (Democratic) administration have much fondness for this church.

However, shifts in the American and Israeli political maps, as well as the intifada, which damaged Israel's standing in the international community, removed most of the hurdles that stood in the way of the closer links between Israel and the Evangelicals. They were the only group to support Israel without reservation in the past few years, and one of the only groups to send delegations of tourists - church members - to Jerusalem at a time when the hotels stood empty. In addition, the fact that the Presbyterian Church took an especially critical line toward Israel in the conflict and that other movements considered taking steps against Israel placed the Evangelicals at the forefront of support for Israel.

Liberal Jews are still uncomfortable with the alliance between Israel and the Evangelicals, who represent all that the traditional political and social values of the Jewish community are not. They also warn that in the long term, this closeness will harm Israel's status and image in the American mainstream and among its ruling elites. But the American Jewish establishment has taken the approach that this is not a time to be picky about the choice of friends and allies.

### **Finding the heartland**

The strength and sentimentality of Evangelical support for Israel was evident this week at the NRB gathering in Anaheim, where Glen Plummer, the outgoing chairman of the organization, spoke about the subject. Palmer summed up in a single forceful sentence his political outlook: "There are a few thick-headed people who are saying that Israel is the repressor, that Israel is Goliath and the Palestinians are David. Listen to me - it's all nonsense."

In Benny Elon's conversations with Evangelicals, he attempts to build a sort of parallel between America and Israel, a parallel that relates to the concept of "heartland." In American politics, the term usually refers to the American south and midwest, the simple

America that believes in God, maintains high conservative values and is light years away from the America of New York and Los Angeles. It is the America that sent George W. Bush to the White House. "The Israeli heartland is Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem, and just as the Americans suddenly discovered their heartland when they saw the results of the recent elections, I believe that they will now discover our heartland, as well," says Elon.

But his objective is not necessarily the enlistment of millions of Christian believers in a struggle against the disengagement plan. Elon wishes to hold these forces in reserve for the big upcoming struggle over the future of the Land of Israel. "We have to exploit this for the long term," he says, "for another year or two, when they will have 100 or 200 Congressmen who can support the annexation of Judea and Samaria. I am not in favor of last-minute action meant to save a single settlement."

It should be noted that this political prediction is controversial. The political might of the Evangelicals in Congress at present is minimal and even if, as Elon claims, they are joined by Jewish legislators and other supporters of the Greater Land of Israel, it is still hard to envision hundreds of Congressmen voting in favor of annexation of the territories to Israel.

The key question that still remains unanswered relates, then, to the ability of the Evangelical Church to supply the goods and aid its friends in the Israeli right. When the administration formulated its new approach to the Middle East two years ago and devised the road map, an attempt was made to enlist Christian believers in the struggle on behalf of the Land of Israel and against the administration's program. Billboards called on believers to phone the White House and tell the president that they do not agree with the division of the Land of Israel. There were some who amused themselves with the notion of President Bush being afraid to lose the votes of his most devoted supporters in the election and therefore withdrawing the road map. Then again, no such thing happened - Bush promoted the road map and the two-state vision and the Evangelical Christians voted for him anyway.

In the second term, will Bush be more attentive to his constituency and become a supporter of the Greater Land of Israel? Elon believes so. He understands the political needs of the president that prevented him from exhibiting such an approach in his first term, but now he feels that Bush, liberated from the political pressures of re-election, "will go back to him," as Elon puts it. "There is a good chance that in his second term he will be with us and will not give a darn. I am betting on it. I believe that the legacy he wants to leave behind him will be one of the leaving a biblical mark on the Land of Israel."

*By Nathan Guttman  
Haaretz - 23 February 2005*

## **World Council of Churches calls for divestment from Israel**

PARIS - The World Council of Churches, the main global body uniting non-Catholic Christians, encouraged members Tuesday to sell off investments in companies profiting from Israeli control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Council's Central Committee, meeting in Geneva, praised the United States Presbyterian Church for examining the possibility of divestment in Israel similar to the financial boycott it used against the apartheid regime in South Africa two decades ago.

The Presbyterian threat, which echoes divestment debates at some U.S. universities, has set off a wave of dissent in the church and angered American Jewish leaders.

But the Central Committee, in a document approved at a week-long meeting at WCC headquarters that ended on Tuesday, highlighted the divestment push and encouraged other member churches to consider doing the same.

"This action is commendable in both method and manner, uses criteria rooted in faith and calls members to do the 'things that make for peace'," it declared, quoting St. Luke's Gospel.

"Economic pressure, appropriately and openly applied, is one such means of action."

It was not clear how many of the WCC's 342 Protestant and Orthodox member churches would heed the call.

#### **No companies targeted yet**

"Multinational corporations have been involved in the demolition of Palestinian homes," the WCC statement said.

They were also involved in "the construction of settlements and settlement infrastructure on occupied territory, in building a dividing wall which is also largely inside occupied territory, and in other violations of international law".

The Presbyterian Church's General Assembly called last July for a "phased, selective divestment" beginning no earlier than July 2006. A dissident group is asking church leaders to place a moratorium on the project as early as next month.

No companies have been singled out but a report naming the most likely targets is due in August.

Human rights groups have urged Caterpillar Inc., the world's largest maker of construction machinery, to stop selling bulldozers to the Israel Defense Forces, saying they are used to wreck innocent Palestinians' homes in Gaza and the West Bank.

"[The occupation] is at the center of the cycle of violence in the region - whether it is suicide bombings or the displacement caused by the occupation... and impedes a peaceful solution to that conflict," the committee now selecting possible divestment targets said recently.

It is unclear how much of the church's \$8 billion portfolio - investments covering pensions and other holdings controlled by its leadership - might be at issue.

Jewish groups are clearly upset. "Instead of talking about peace we're talking about Presbyterians," David Elcott, director of inter-religious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said this month. "They have deflected conversation in a very negative way."

The 2.5 million-strong church, the ninth largest in the U.S., represents most U.S. Presbyterians.

*By Haaretz Service and Reuters - 23 February 2005*

## **Arab birthrate drop tied to benefits cuts**

A report quoting a senior Finance Ministry official as saying the birthrate among Israeli Arabs dropped last year as because of cuts in child allowances sparked an angry reaction in the Arab community.

"This is cheap demagoguery based on racist arguments," Jafar Farah, director of the Mosawa advocacy center for Arab citizens of Israel, told *The Jerusalem Post* on Monday. "The Finance Ministry is using these racist arguments to try to prove incorrect data that is not connected to economic development in the state."

The report in the Hebrew press said the birthrate among Arabs declined by 3.4 percent in 2004, the first drop in years.

According to the report, the Finance Ministry believes this was due to the cut in child allowances over the past two years. The cuts were necessitated by economic, not demographic reasons.

Nevertheless, the report quoted a senior official as saying there was demographic threat to the Jewish majority that is now being reversed.

The same official expressed concern over the likelihood of an upsurge in the birthrate, especially among Beduin in the Negev, if the full child allowances are reinstated.

Officials in the Finance Ministry spokesman's office referred inquiries to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

"Since 1948, some political figures and establishment officials have been warning that the Jewish majority is under demographic threat," Farah said. "In fact the percentage of the Arab population in the country has remained about the same, some 19 percent, virtually since 1948 and certainly over the past 30 years."

He also cast doubt over the conclusion that the reported drop in the birthrate was a direct result of the cutbacks in child support allocations.

"The cutbacks in child allowances were only processed in the second half of 2003, so it is very unlikely there would have been an effect already in 2004," he said.

Farah maintained that data compiled by international agencies, including the World Bank and the UN, clearly shows a correlation between poverty and low education standards and high birthrates.

"If anyone is really worried about a so-called demographic threat to the Jewish majority in Israel, they should invest in education and dealing with poverty in the Arab

community because it has been proved everywhere in the world that this is the best way to reduce high birthrates," he said.

*By David Rudge  
The Jerusalem Post - 25 January 2005*

## **Vatican to host Israeli, PA tourism ministers**

Israel's Tourism Minister Avraham Herschson met Sunday with his Palestinian counterpart Mitri Abu Aita and Vatican representative Archbishop Pietro Sambì.

Sambì announced that Pope John Paul II would be pleased to host both ministers of tourism at his Rome headquarters towards the end of the month.

This is following an official message sent to the Pope jointly by both Herschson and Aita, requesting that he call on pilgrims around the world to come visit Israel.

Sambì, the Pope's representative in Israel, said that the Pope recognizes the spiritual importance of visiting Israel, and he is interested in promoting the Middle East, Army Radio reported.

Last week Pope John Paul II was rushed to hospital in Rome, after his health took a turn for the worse after he suffered from the flu.

Official sources in the Vatican report that his health is improving.

*By The Jerusalem Post Staff - 6 February 2005*

## **Israelis, PA focus on Catholic tourists**

Tourism Ministry Director-General Eli Cohen is set to meet with Palestinian Tourism Minister Mitri Abu Aita and Vatican representatives on Thursday at the annual International Tourism Trade Fair (FITUR) in Madrid, to discuss ways to boost Catholic tourism to Israel.

The meeting follows a sharp increase in Catholic visitors to the country in 2004, which saw twice the number of arrivals in 2003.

Thousands of Catholics passed through Jerusalem and Bethlehem over the Christmas season after pope John Paul II recently called for renewed pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The Tourism Ministry reported that some 30% of the 1.5 million visitors recorded in 2004 were Christian pilgrims. Its most recent figures showed that in the first half of the year 52% of tourists were Jewish. 11% Christian Protestant, 11% Catholic, 10% from other Christian denominations, and 5% were Muslim.

During FITUR, Israeli tourism officials will also meet with representatives from Brazil, a strong Catholic stronghold, in anticipation of planned charter flights between the two countries.

The cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian ministries follows an agreement the two had initiated in December to increase their working relationship on tourism matters.

Also as a result of the agreement, the Defense Ministry issued 500 work permits last week to West Bank Palestinians at the request of the Tourism Ministry, after it received complaints from east Jerusalem hoteliers that they have insufficient manpower to accommodate the increased tourist traffic to the area.

Recently appointed Tourism Minister Avraham Hirschson said that it's his intention to build on the good relationship with the Palestinian Ministry to increase tourism to the region.

*By Avi Krawitz  
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## **Village people**

"It used to be so pastoral here," sighs Shimon Geva, who runs a tourist souvenir store in the center of Ein Kerem.

At first sight, all appears serene as small groups of tourists and pilgrims tread the winding, lushly foliated alleyways of this historic village surrounded by verdant hills that protect it from the discord of Jerusalem's urban busy-ness.

Some 16,000 objections will probably put back implementation of Municipal Development Plan 37 - widely known as the 'Safdie plan' - that envisages the construction of 26,000 housing units on the pine forested ridges west of the city. Some 2,000 housing units and 100,000 square meters of commercial and office space are proposed for the hills surrounding the nearby Hadassah hospital.

If the Safdie plan is enacted, it will irrevocably change the atmosphere in Ein Kerem by encircling the village with mass construction.

"Ein Kerem will continue to develop as a trade-tourism center. This has positive and negative effects on the village, but I foresee more drawbacks than advantages," predicts Geva, who has maintained a sideline business as a neighborhood realtor for about 25 years.

"There are already so many cars [in the area] that local residents get ticketed for parking next to their houses on Shabbat, although an underground parking lot currently under construction will help to alleviate the problem."

Mark Sherman, a Jerusalem lawyer, has lived in Ein Kerem for seven years.

"The village has a lot of charm, although it can be a nightmare on Shabbat with all the traffic. There are good restaurants and pleasant places to go for a walk. I wake to the sound of church bells. We have a beautiful view and it's nice being next to Jerusalem with a forest in your back yard. I have no regrets about moving here," he says.

"But it's not the friendliest of neighborhoods. Anyone who is not from the original tenants is considered a newcomer - even if you've been here for 20 years," Sherman, who was born in Baltimore, Maryland.

"The population is anything but homogenous. It's a wild mish-mash of people attracted to the beauty of the place. There used to be many foreign journalists and their families here before the intifada. There is a sprinkling of Habadniks, but not a religious atmosphere. A few residents who became religious actually left for the city. The people from the Franciscan church near our house are very friendly. They say 'hello' as they carry out their trash out in the morning, which is more than I can say for some neighbors," says Sherman.

Geva says that the village's Jewish and Christian residents have always been good neighbors.

"When I was a child, all the monks and nuns would attend our family seder. They gave us fruit and vegetables from their gardens," says Geva, adding that the two families of Moslem Arabs living in the village maintain good relationships with their neighbors.

Ein Kerem - the spring of vineyard - is an important attraction to Christian pilgrims. According to the New Testament, Mary stayed with her kinswoman Elizabeth for three months in the village during her pregnancy, following the visitation by the angel Gabriel when he announced the pending birth of Jesus. It is also the birthplace of Elizabeth's son St. John the Baptist.

The village boasts two magnificent churches - the Franciscan Church of the Visitation with its basilica designed by the Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi, and the Church of St. John the Baptist belonging to the Franciscan monastery of the same name.

The village, which now has a population of approximately 2,500 residents, has been a residential area since the late Bronze Age, with a long history of intense agriculture and religious worship.

Born a few weeks before Independence in 1948, Geva has lived all his life in Ein Kerem, originally an Arab village that was deserted when its residents fled during the war.

"My family moved from a ma'abarah (immigrant transit camp) in Pardess Hanna soon after I was born. When we arrived, the state told us to take any house we wanted. My father took an enormous house and divided it up. He gave two rooms to an elderly couple, another two to Yehuda Guzman the local kerosene distributor, and the ground floor became the neighborhood synagogue. No money was involved," recalls Geva.

"We were a handful of families at first - Morrocans like us and yekkes from Poland. The Turks and Yemenites came in the early fifties. There were never any tensions. Everyone knew everyone in the village. We kept open houses."

Residents drew their water from the ancient well in the center of the village. Houses were heated by kerosene delivered on the backs of donkeys. The first electricity lines were connected in 1954.

"My father, David Ben-Ayun, sold ice blocks in the summer months - there were no refrigerators back then - and fixed shoes in the winter from a little store. I helped my father distribute ice from age eight. There was a bus to Jerusalem once or twice a day," recalls Geva.

Part of the Ben-Ayun family property was eventually demolished to make space for the main road through the village.

"We had a garden with ducks, chickens and goats, but it was taken away. The authorities turned our garden into a bomb shelter and parking lot. My parents let them do it. They were so naïve. Now everyone keeps to himself. It's not like it used to be in Ein Kerem. Everyone used to help their neighbors build their houses and gardens. None of that is left," he sighs.

Geva blames gentrification. Ein Kerem is now home to several television personalities and leading physicians from the nearby Hadassah hospital.

"The Anglo-Saxons (sic) started moving in after the Six Day War in the late 1960's. Each built a wall around his house. Before that, we didn't lock our houses. We had outside showers and toilets. The Anglo Saxons were clever. They took advantage of our naivety and tempted us by offering apartments in the city with indoor amenities and a water heaters in return for plots in the village," says Geva.

"Now a doctor and a professor argue about a square meter of land, and take each other to court. There are many stories like this," says Geva.

Sherman notes that boundaries between houses are not clearly demarcated.

"Instead of properties with defined borders, here the people define them themselves. This has brought on a situation where immediate neighbors fight, while the tenants three houses away could be your best friends because you have nothing to argue about. Some of the buildings are strange combinations of houses growing out of other houses. Everyone is grabbing. There's still a core of sons and daughters of the originals tenants whose parents passed away but they never paid for the rights to their property," Sherman says.

Geva bemoans the demise of village landmarks such as the agricultural boarding school headed by Rachel Yanait (wife of Israel's second President Yitzhak Ben Zvi) that folded in the early seventies.

"The land should have been given to the residents of Ein Kerem, not to outsiders. The Turkish mosque has been locked for over 40 years - the building has been vandalized and is collapsing," he complains.

The former Carmit boarding school above the village - 25 dunams including seven empty buildings and an overgrown basketball court - has been closed for four years.

"Frank Sinatra donated money for the school. He came to the opening when I was a child - I remember him patting my head. The village's infrastructure is deteriorating. Look at the road surface! This street used to be covered in flagstones, but the municipality dug them up to make way for electricity lines. It's all been destroyed. A plan for a midrachov (pedestrian mall) from the church to the spring has been sitting in drawers for years, but nothing has been done."

Geva talks of a spate of break-ins.

"A friend's house was recently emptied within minutes - the robbers came with a truck."

Real estate in Ein Kerem is now fetching prices way beyond the pocket of its veteran residents. For \$1,100,000, prospective villagers can buy a four-bedroom house on 550 sq meter of private land. The asking price for a large two-level stone villa with domed ceilings and gardens on 1 1/2 dunams of private land nestled among the surrounding hills is \$1,500,000. "It's not cheap," admits Sherman, "but prices haven't kept up with areas like Baka'a."

Geva lives with his girlfriend in a narrow room with arched ceiling adjacent to the family-owned souvenir shop that he has run for 16 years. "Some of the newer houses in the neighborhood are characterless monsters. These villas are not suitable for this area. They are so ugly - nothing like the style of construction I grew up with." The third of eight siblings, he is the last remaining member of his family in the village.

"All my brothers, sisters and children have left. My father died 16 years ago. We had four stores before the intifada ruined tourism four years ago. Until September 2000, everything was fine. It was a serious shock. Now we're starting to feel early signs of a recovery, but the Christian tourists are Poles, Russians, Koreans and black Africans who don't spend much money. They're not the type of tourists from America and Europe that we used to see," says Geva.

It is easy to find disgruntled residents in the neighborhood known as the Yemenite Valley below the village, where dozens of houses haphazardly sprouted among the slender cypress trees.

Rachel Melamed, 42, grew up in the valley.

"My parents came straight from the airport with two goats. We had no water pipes or electricity until 1973. Ein Kerem has since changed from a poor slum to a prestigious neighborhood where only rich people can live," she says.

Some 150 new housing units were envisaged in the northern side of the valley under plans drawn up by architect Ariel Rahamimov in the seventies, but objections from environmentalists led to the area being re-designated as a protected "green" countryside.

"The municipality and Israel Lands Authority (ILA) didn't take into consideration the poor people already living here. They wanted us to leave and our houses were designated for demolition, like in Lifta," complains Melamed.

"Dozens of families live here, but nobody consulted us," complains Bracha Yashon, 45, who has lived in the Yemenite valley all her life.

"They did not allow anyone to expand their houses as their families grew. At least 60 percent of the houses were built without a permit. The authorities picked on the weak. They didn't touch those with money who can afford lawyers. It's all about money. Now the ILA wants to market 20 plots - including my garden. To change a plot's designation [i.e. to receive building permission - D B-T] costs a lot of money. The local community is not sufficiently cohesive to organize a campaign," says Yashon.

Melamed says that all her attempts to receive a building permit were shunned by the authorities.

"They told me that we live in a designated green area, and have no right to build for our children. They turned us into criminals, but we aren't like that at all. I built 20 meters - sanitary toilets and a kitchen - that's all. The judge told me to live in the street,

and fined me NIS 8000. When I asked for a license, they told me to rear goats because it's a public area," says Melamed.

'K', who is scared of being identified by the authorities, is a mother of four whose family home stands next to her in-laws'. She says Rachel is not alone. "A few other residents have received demolition orders that have yet to be enforced.

"The illegal construction has been going on since the fifties. We had no choice, and no-one bothered us about it. The north African immigrants had large families, and as their children grew and married they built houses alongside the parents' homes," K notes.

"Then suddenly the land was worth money and the ILA wanted us out. We've been fighting for decades to become protected tenants. We set up tenants' committees and a non-profit organization to help us buy our own houses - it's ridiculous that [the government-owned national housing company] Amidar is trying to sell us our houses at inflated prices that we cannot afford," she fumes.

K contends that Amidar residents should be able to buy their homes at reduced rates under the public housing law (1998).

"Amidar told us that the law doesn't apply to Ein Kerem. About 70 families could not afford the prices even at the lower rates. The issue has been stuck in various committees for the past few years. It's all so confusing - every time we call the ILA we get a different version," she says.

Yashon lists a litany of complaints about the municipality.

"They demanded that I pay a sewage fee even though we have an open sewer. There is no garbage collection near our houses. We had to surface the approach road with our own money, because the municipality would not help." Two years ago, Yemenite Valley residents served an alternative development plan to the municipality that was largely ignored until former Supreme Court Justice Dalia Dorner ordered the municipality to take the residents' claims into account.

"Nothing has changed since then. They won't work according to our ideas," says Yashon.

Melamed complains that her family pays almost NIS 8000 in municipal taxes a year.

In response to a query from In Jerusalem, the municipal spokesman's office published the following reply: "Ein Kerem has an approved overall development plan (number 2610), and tens of specific plans relating to neighborhoods and individual houses. The Israel Lands Authority initiated the preparation of detailed plans for Ein Kerem several years ago. These plans were not discussed in the local (Planning and Construction) committee, and were deposited with the district committee under certain conditions.

"The plan is presently under review and is being updated according to the decisions of the district committee regarding construction, traffic, parking, infrastructure and design.

"It can be assumed that the revised plans will be deposited (for committee approval) within two months."

*By Daniel Ben-Tal  
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