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The Pope Must Extend Diplomatic Ties To Israel

In what may be the first papal visit ever to a Jewish house of worship, the Vatican announced last week that Pope John Paul II will visit Rome's main synagogue. While some view the visit merely as a symbolic gesture to the Jewish people, others see it clearly contributing substantively to Catholic Jewish relations.

Tullia Zevi, the dynamic president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said the visit could be a "fantastic step forward or it could be a perpetuation of ambiguities." Zevi expressed the view of more than just the Italian Jewish Community -- which has lived in the shadow of the Vatican for more than a millenia -- when she uttered these words.

The Jewish people, and the Vatican is surely aware of this, concerned that the Pope's visit be more than merely a token gesture. In the past years, there have been signals of strains in Catholic-Jewish relations. The sharpest point of contention focuses on the Vatican's adamant refusal to extend formal diplomatic ties to Israel.

Also, the Vatican document, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching the Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church," published in June 1985, was sharply criticized by a Jewish ecumenical group. The group pointed to the Notes' failure to acknowledge the religious significance of Israel to the Jewish people and referred only briefly and superficially to the Holocaust.

These differences between the Vatican and the Jewish people came as many celebrated 20 years of success in relations between Catholics and Jews since Vatican Council II. But as warmly welcomed as the Pope's announced visit is to all concerned Jews, it remains imperative that the Pope be reminded of the centrality of Israel to the Jewish people. Anything but full diplomatic ties between Israel and the Vatican falls short of bridging and finally solidifying relations between these two great religious peoples.

Behind The Scenes

At The United Nations

By David Horowitz

A World-Union Press Feature

UN Human Rights Body Holds Israel Responsible For Sabra-Shatila Massacre

UNITED NATIONS (WUP) — Earlier this month the 43-member Commission on Human Rights, meeting in Geneva, adopted a series of resolutions on violations of human rights in several areas around the globe and, of course, the Soviet-Arab-Third World blocs had to include the Middle East with emphasis on 'crimes' per-

petrated by Israel in the territories against the 'unfortunate' Palestinians who live a better life than any other Arabs elsewhere.

Interestingly, the draft resolution on "the situation in occupied Palestine," because of the unique nature of its composition and because of East-West blocs differences, was voted upon paragraph by paragraph, mainly three, before the draft as a whole was put to a roll-call vote which resulted in 28 in favor, 8 against, with 7 abstentions. We shall soon see who these 8 and 7 were. A small number in a 43-member body.

But let's look at these three paragraphs and check the votes.

One -- The Commission here "would express grave concern at the 1981 agreement between the U.S. and Israel on strategic cooperation, holding the view that this agreement had encouraged and supported Israeli policies of aggression, expansion and continued occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories."

Voting in favor were 17, 14 against with 11 abstentions. The 17 included Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Byelorussia, China, Congo, Cyprus, Ethiopia, East Germany, India, Jordan,

Mauritania, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Syria, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia.

The 14 voting against were Australia, Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, West Germany, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Philippines, Spain, United Kingdom, United States.

Two -- This involved paragraph 5 of the draft which "would have the Commission strongly condemn Israel as bearing the responsibility for the large-scale massacres in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982, and to declare that this constituted a crime of genocide." (What blasphemy! What hutsphah! What fabrication!)

As many as 21 enemies of Israel voted for this Big Lie. Only 9 against, with 13 abstentions. The 21 included the 17 who voted for the previous paragraph in addition to Gambia, Kenya, Mozambique and Senegal.

Three -- The Commission here took up paragraph 13 "which would have the Commission express deep regret at the negative reaction of the U.S. and Israel towards the proposal for an international conference on the Middle East."

The roll-call vote here was 19 in favor to 10
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and Scent Garden.

Service to the Elderly

Providing services to the elderly is another area of special concern for JBI. As medical technology continues to eradicate many causes of blindness in infants and young children, JBI finds that more and more people who rely on its services are visually-handicapped, middle-aged and elderly who wish to participate more fully in the Jewish community. "The need for large-print Judaica, especially prayerbooks is considerable," Kass explains. Right now JBI is working on a set of large-print Torah volumes, in both English and Hebrew, which Kass hopes will enable elderly persons who have failing eyesight to join in synagogue services once again.

But providing special material and resources isn't enough, according to Kass. "The biggest problem for blind people is that of self-image," he explains. "Many blind people still have the feeling that anything they do cannot possibly be as good as that of a sighted person." To build confidence and promote achievement, JBI initiated the International Literary Competition for Blind Writers, held every five or six years.

Another project which also helps blind people reach out to one another is the publication in Israel of the magazine Or Chadash. Through this journal, blind persons can share experiences and discover how other sightless people are coping with their disability.

Overcoming Stereotypes

One area that Kass still feels needs considerable development is the issue of employment. "Employers still do not think blind people are a good work risk," Kass declared. But employers are not the only ones that harbor prejudices. Kass relates incidents of "exclusive" schools in major cities in the U.S. who refuse to accept blind children because they feel it would downgrade their image. "They don't want well-to-do parents seeing children with canes on the school grounds," says Kass with a touch of irritation. "The inference is that you can't be a good school academically if you accept blind children."

Although JBI has contributed enormously to helping the Jewish blind all over the world, the plans for newer and better programs never cease. Kass personally would like to see more scholarships made available for needy blind children, and for escorted trips to Israel, where JBI has a low-vision center for children and adults.

Further information about these programs may be obtained by writing the Jewish Braille Institute of America, Inc., 110 East 30th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016, tel.: (212) 889-2525. (Reprinted from the Jewish Advocate of Boston).

TELL TALES

"One Man Plus The Truth
Constitutes A Majority"

(Continued from page 1)

Heartwarming stories such as these, says Gerald Kass, executive vice president of the Jewish Braille Institute, are not all unusual. "Despite the numerous successes of blind people," says Kass, "the stereotypical image that blindness equals incompetence is still very prevalent in our society."

Kass, who has worked with JBI for the past 20 years, is enthusiastic about the many programs it has initiated since its founding in 1931. He reports: "JBI serves the needs of blind and visually-impaired persons in 43 countries, including remote corners of the world."

In this country alone, there are some 250,000 Jews who are either legally blind or visually-handicapped to the point where they cannot read standard-size print. Thanks to JBI, Kass notes, blind adolescents prepare for Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations with braille Torah-study, guides and prayerbooks; college students receive special study aids and counselling to assist them in exam preparation; an 80-year-old zayde can once again conduct his traditional Passover seder with his large-print Haggadah; and young children learn to identify by texture and fragrance the flora and fauna in JBI's Touch

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One prostitute said to another, "Would you please lend me ten dollars until I get back on my back?"