

throughout two millennia as a longing for the homeland, holy Zion. Appreciation of this link is not to give assent to *any particular religious interpretation* of this bond. Nor is this affirmation meant to deny the legitimate rights of other parties in the region.³²

In short, the *Notes* do not intend to qualify the validity of the "bond" between people and land but, given the wide range of views within Judaism regarding its nature and implications even today, reflect that the Holy See is not quite ready to hazard a final judgment on those complex questions. Further dialogue with Jews and internal theological reflection within the Church on the results of that dialogue are clearly necessary.

Only within the context of this strong affirmation of the continuing validity of the covenant and, therefore, of the continuing validity of the land-promise as an essential element of that living covenant does the document approach the modern State of Israel, which is here distinguished from the land. The existence of the state is unequivocally recognized, *de jure* as well as *de facto*, on the basis of "the common principles of international law." Again, a *caveat* is imposed to warn against biblical fundamentalism. The Holy See recognizes the validity of the Jewish state without question but will relate to it and "its political options" as a state on the basis of the same principles of international law which validate Israel's existence. That is, for example, it will not debate the boundaries of the state (currently in legal dispute) on the basis of "proof texts" from the Bible; rather, it will urge negotiations between the parties involved, as is the normal way with state-to-state relations.

This section needs to be read carefully. It does not preclude the possibility of the Church's developing, in dialogue with the Jewish community, a religious interpretation of the State of Israel. (The often overlooked phrase, "in itself," is of great significance here.) Rather, it urges a perspective that is primarily founded on internationally recognized legal principles, as with all other states. Again, given the range within contemporary Zionist literature itself on the question of the religious significance of the state, one could hardly expect the Holy See to take any other position than that of caution. To try, for example, to choose *which* Jewish religious interpretation is "the" most valid one would be, of course, both precipitate and a serious breach of the essential rubric of dialogue that each partner must be allowed its own self-definition. Here, Catholics can for now only "listen in," sympathetically and affirmatively, on the crucial *internal* discussion now taking place within the Jewish community.

The Church's caution, noted at the end of the first section above regarding theological interpretations of the state, is thus seen once again here. Having cleared away at least some of the misconceptions regarding the theological reaction of the Holy See to Zionism, the return, and the state, we can now turn to the chief questions of this article: What are the central concerns of the Holy See

³²National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Statement on Catholic-Jewish Relations," November, 1975, U.S.C.C. Publications (italics added).

in the area? How have these been articulated since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948? In what way do they shed light on Vatican policy toward Israel, in general, and on the issue of an exchange of ambassadors between the Holy See and the State of Israel, in particular?

III. Catholic Interests in the Holy Land

The history of Christian interest in the Holy Land goes back to the origins of the religion itself. While the theological negatives are gone today, certain of these interests remain.

Jesus, of course, was a Jew and a faithful one. The Holy Land given to the Jewish people is the very land on which Jesus walked and preached, the very land where he lived, died, and was raised to a new life. Geographically, it is thus sacred land—indeed, for the Catholic, the most sacred in the world. While the Holy See could, theoretically, be rebuilt anywhere (given the proper juridical adjustments and decisions), only in Jerusalem can the Church of the Holy Sepulchre be placed; and only in Bethlehem, the Church of the Nativity.

Catholic interest in the holy places is thus twofold. First, there must at all times be access to these holy sites for Christian pilgrimage. Second, since these are the holiest Christian sites on earth, it is fitting that active Christian communities reside there, where Jesus lived and taught and where the sacred mysteries of the Christian faith took place. This twofold need has remained a consistent policy of the church from the earliest days, through the Crusades (which were fought for their sake),³⁹ and to the present. Whatever the issues of political sovereignty, the church claims access to its holy places and feels that it has a crucial stake in the survival of a Christian community in the area. This can clearly be seen in the original charge given by Pope Clement VI in 1304 naming the Franciscan Order as official *custos* of the Holy Land: "To preserve the holy shrines of our religion and to keep alive the faith in these places which were hallowed by the life and death of the Redeemer."⁴⁰

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association was established in the United States in 1926 to collect funds nationally and to care for Catholic communal interests in the Middle East as a whole. By 1977, it had trained some 12,900 native clergy, established 1,000 churches, ninety-one schools, eleven hospitals, and 107 orphanages in the region.⁴¹ Obviously, such institutional interests require political stability to flourish, so that Zionism, which was seen as a potentially

³⁹This, despite the condemnable greed, avarice, and butchery of many of the Crusaders themselves.

⁴⁰*The Crusader's Almanac*, 1896, as cited in Joseph G. Kelly's "American Catholic Interest in the Holy Land: 1880-1980," a paper delivered at the University of Rochester, April 3, 1978.

⁴¹Kelly, "American Catholic," p. 6.

destabilizing factor, was regarded with caution by many Catholics in the early decades of this century.⁴²

It should be noted that neither of these interests on the part of the church, access to the holy places and the survival of Christian communities there, represents a fundamental conflict with the State of Israel. Israel has always guaranteed such access and, as a democracy, has espoused the goal of pluralism and freedom for its minorities.

Furthermore, none of the Catholic agencies have conversion of Jews as their goal. This must be emphasized because of the so-called "anti-missionary law" passed by the Knesset (in dubious circumstances), which went into effect April 1, 1978. This very bad law, which prominent Jewish organizations in the U.S.A., such as the American Jewish Committee and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, among others, publicly opposed, was accompanied by explanations and by a legislative record which cast unfortunate and false aspersions on the Catholic Church. In fact, there are today no religious orders or official Catholic organizations which exist for the purpose of converting Jews. Indeed, the only religious orders which were, in the last century, founded for this purpose have for some time now completely reversed their position and are today in the forefront of honest dialogue.⁴³

Other factors which need to be taken into account in assessing Catholic reactions to Israel are related to the two major interests mentioned above. They range from a sincere and often repeated concern for a peaceful and just resolution for all parties in the conflict to the ever-present fear of provoking Arab reaction against the highly vulnerable Christian minorities throughout the Middle East. Though Catholics and Jews may weigh various factors and solutions differently, I believe that there is no fundamental opposition between the Holy See and Israel on these points.

IV. *Statements of the Holy See on Israel and Jerusalem*

The major statements of the Holy See regarding the State of Israel since 1948 reflect the interests of the Church described above. They also tend to center concern, as we shall see, on the city of Jerusalem.

The basic concerns of the Holy See were staked out in three statements made by Pope Pius XII within the first year following the founding of the state in 1948. In *Auspicia quaedam* (May 10, 1948), Pius XII expressed his initial "keen anxiety" for the safety of the holy places and called for a just resolution

⁴²See Feldblum, *American Catholic Press*, for an excellent treatment of this whole question.

⁴³This refers to the fathers and sisters of the Order of Our Lady of Sion, which, among other things, publishes *SIDIC*.

of the conflict.⁴⁴ Subsequent statements in that period added a call for "international guarantees for the right of free access to the holy places" and "freedom of religion and respect for customs and religious traditions."⁴⁵ These statements also gave Vatican support to the United Nations resolution of December 8, 1949, calling for the "internationalization" of the city of Jerusalem. Pius XII's encyclical *In multiplicibus* (1948) asked that "an international character be given Jerusalem," and *Redemptoris nostri* (1949) called for an "international status for the city."

The concept of an international status for Jerusalem remained a basic plank of Vatican policy until the Six-Day War in 1967. In the year following the Israeli takeover of the old city, however, a subtle but significant shift in policy articulation occurred that may indicate that the Vatican is happier with the Israeli style of governing the city than with the Jordanian, perhaps because of Israel's firm and consistent guarantees of access to the holy places and of religious freedom for all its inhabitants—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim.

Without formally eschewing the option of internationalization, the Holy See in 1968 began to call for more limited goals. Pope Paul VI's allocution of December 23, 1968, for example, expressed hope for "an internationally generated regulation of the question of Jerusalem and the holy places," and, on June 24, 1971, he called for an "internationally legal safeguard" for the city's holy places and religiously diverse population.⁴⁶ The importance of this shift in language from "international status" to "international statute" regarding Jerusalem should be noted.

On March 25, 1974, Paul VI issued the Apostolic Exhortation, *Nobis in animo*, concerning "the increased needs of the Church in the Holy Land." This document describes the ancientness of the Christian tradition of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the needs of the churches and institutions developed over the centuries to care for pilgrims and the holy places they come to visit, and especially the need to ensure the "continued survival" of the "Christian community which originated in Palestine two thousand years ago."⁴⁷ *Nobis in animo* expresses Paul

⁴⁴Cf. Eugene J. Fisher, "The Church's Stance toward Israel and Jerusalem," *Origins* 9 (August 16, 1979): 158-160.

⁴⁵*In multiplicibus* (October 24, 1948) and *Redemptoris nostri* (April 15, 1949).

⁴⁶Cited in Edward H. Flannery, "The Controversy over Jerusalem (October, 1971) and 'A Second Report on Jerusalem' (April, 1972), mimeographed papers for the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC.

⁴⁷Paul VI, *Nobis in animo* (Washington, DC: U.S.C.C. Publications, 1974), p. 6. *Nobis in animo* also illustrates that the question of a "heavenly" and/or "earthly" Jerusalem (cf. note 15, above) is still in need of theological resolution by the Church. Paul VI tried to reconcile the two through application of sacramental terminology: "Sentiments of faith and piety impelled the first Christians to seek almost physical contact with the Holy Places and to hold impressive liturgical ceremonies there. It is of course true that Christianity is a universal religion . . . But it is also a religion based upon an historical revelation. Alongside the 'history of salvation' there exists a 'geography of salvation.' Thus the Holy Places possess the invaluable quality of providing faith with an indisputable support, enabling the Christian to come into direct contact with the setting in which 'the word became flesh and dwelt among

VI's distress at the emigration of Christians from the Holy Land, especially from Jerusalem, emphasizing the local community's "need of our understanding and of our moral and material help."⁴⁸ He also articulated—and he stressed that it is a religious rather than a political hope—that Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the land may come together there as a model of peaceful cooperation: "In this process of coming together, the Christian presence in the Holy Land, together with the Jewish and Muslim presence, can be a factor for concord and peace."⁴⁹

Pope John Paul II reiterated this vision of hope in one of his first statements to representatives of world Jewish organizations:

Following in particular the footsteps of Paul VI, I intend to foster spiritual dialogue and to do everything in my power for the peace of that land which is holy for you as it is for us, with the hope that the city of Jerusalem will be effectively guaranteed as a center of harmony for the followers of the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, to whom the city is a revered place of devotion.⁵⁰

On March 25, 1979, John Paul II strongly endorsed the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty as giving "a decisive impulse to the peace process in the entire region."⁵¹ This was seen as a significant step in acknowledging the existence of Israel, especially in view of the hesitancy of European nations to declare support for the treaty in the face of fierce Arab opposition.

In the June 30-July 1, 1980, edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, an editorial appeared on the status of Jerusalem. This editorial was later submitted by the Holy See to the United Nations in response to a U.N. request for its views on Jerusalem during a General Assembly debate on the issue. Indicating the Holy See's view of the centrality of Jerusalem in its diplomatic policy vis-à-vis the State of Israel, the editorial called the question of Jerusalem "pivotal to a just peace" in the Middle East, and it established the principle that the three religious communities, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim, "should be partners in deciding their own future."⁵²

In an apparent reference to the then-pending Knesset resolution declaring Israeli sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem, the editorial warned that "any unilateral act tending to modify the status of the holy city would be very serious," and it argued that "the Jerusalem question cannot be reduced to a mere 'free access for all the holy places.'" The editorial set forth basic principles that

us." Catholic-Jewish dialogue, especially in Israel today, holds great hope for resolving this ancient theological dilemma. The particularity, one might say "incarnation," of the Jewish people in the land offers deep insight for Catholic theology today. Cf. Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).

⁴⁸*Nobis in animo* 3.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰March 12, 1979. See *Origins* 8 (April 12, 1979): 691.

⁵¹Cited in Fisher, "The Church's Stance," p. 160.

⁵²National Catholic News Service, July 2, 1980, p. 2.

the Holy See feels should be binding on "any power that comes to exercise sovereignty over the holy city." These include religious freedom, equality of treatment, traditional rights over the holy places, and "the continuance and development of religious, educational and social activity by each community." These principles, in turn, are to be achieved and ensured "through an appropriate juridical safeguard that does not derive from the will of only one of the parties" but, rather, constitute a "special statute" under international law that is "guaranteed by a higher international body."

This "international body," or how it is to be constituted, has not, to my knowledge, been precisely defined by the Holy See. However, just as the concept of a "special statute" is clearly distinct from the U.N. notion of Jerusalem as a "*corpus separatum*" or "international city," so the envisioned "international body" may be distinct from the U.N. in the tight wording of this portion of the text. In any event, it would seem clear from the Holy See's concern for Jerusalem over the years that a satisfactory resolution of the Jerusalem question is, in its view, a necessary condition for the exchange of ambassadors between itself and the State of Israel (or the State of Jordan, for that matter, since the Holy See has formal relations on the nuncio level with neither).

In a homily on the hill of Otranto, Italy, on October 3, 1980, John Paul II explicitly linked the foundation of the State of Israel with the tragedy of the Holocaust: "The Jewish people after tragic experiences connected with the extermination of so many sons and daughters, driven by the desire for security, set up the state of Israel."⁵³ The homily also noted that "at the same time" (this latter linkage is clearly temporal rather than causal, as some have attempted to make it) a sad condition of exile developed for many Palestinian Arabs.

As gestures of *de jure* as well as *de facto* recognition of the validity and existence of the State of Israel and its need for security have been dramatically escalated in recent years by the Holy See, so has its expression of humanitarian concern for the plight of Palestinian refugees (for example, in the audience with Yassir Arafat). All these themes come together in John Paul II's 1984 Good Friday apostolic letter, *Redemptiois anno*, which, like so many of the earlier statements, is devoted especially to "the fate of the Holy City," Jerusalem.

V. *Redemptiois Anno*

One can discern in *Redemptiois anno* the development that has taken place within the Roman Catholic Church of an appreciation for the link between the Jewish people and the land of Israel, as well as that between the Jewish people

⁵³Cf. Eugene J. Fisher, "Rome Looks at Jerusalem," *Commonweal* 112 (January 11, 1985): 16.

and Jerusalem. This is especially apparent when it is read in light of the theological statements of the Holy See outlined in Section II, above.

Redemptiois anno should be taken very seriously as an official acknowledgment and affirmation of the existence of the State of Israel. John Paul II wrote:

For the Jewish people who live in the State of Israel, and who preserve in that land such precious testimonies to their history and their faith, we must ask for the desired security and the due tranquility that is the prerogative of every nation and condition of life and of progress for every society.

This, then, is an entirely unambiguous statement of recognition on the part of the Holy See regarding the State of Israel. It puts into proper perspective the separate question of the precise level of diplomatic relations—whether on the highest, nuncio level, or, as now, on the lower level of regular diplomatic contacts.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that diplomatic relations do exist between the two. The popes have numerous times received prime ministers, presidents, and foreign ministers of Israel, and they have always arranged and recorded these specifically as visits of State. So the *de jure* as well as *de facto* status of the Holy See/Israel relationship is clear. Nor should it be forgotten, as a part of the overall context of *Redemptiois anno*, that John Paul II was one of the first (and one of the few) international leaders to voice strong support for the Camp David agreements, stating that the pact “formalizes peace between two countries after decades of war and tension, and gives decisive impulse to the peace process in the entire region of the Middle East.” Note the phrase “two countries.” Again, no ambiguity is allowed.

On this latter occasion, as in the homily at Otranto and, indeed, in *Redemptiois anno*, he spoke supportingly also of “the Palestinian Arabs, who are waiting rightly for a just and adequate solution to their pressing needs.” He added, “No people can be sacrificed to the destiny of others.” The pope neither here nor elsewhere offers a specific political formula for meeting those very real and urgent needs of Palestinian Arabs, urging rather a negotiated settlement acceptable to the relevant groups in the area itself, so long as this does not endanger the security of Israel. A wide range of options, such as put forth by various parties in Israel and elsewhere, is thus left open by Vatican policy. Statements of the Vatican, it is worth noting, consistently use the more general term “homeland” with reference to the Palestinian Arabs, while speaking of Israel as a “nation” or “state.” This does not necessarily preclude the possibility of the creation of a third state out of the original Palestinian Mandate, but it does allow for a wider range of creative options to be negotiated by the affected parties themselves.

Redemptiois anno likewise contains some of the strongest papal language concerning the relationship between the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. John Paul II emphasizes, for example, that “before it was the City of Jesus . . . Jerusalem was the historic site of the biblical revelation of God, the meeting

place, as it were, of heaven and earth, in which more than in any other place the word of God was brought to humanity." This statement, in the context of the Catholic Church's official acknowledgment of the ongoing validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people, is an extremely significant one. It acknowledges both the particularity of the Jewish relationship with Jerusalem and the universal significance of that Jewish particularity—for Christians no less than for Jews.

Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris anno* is not content, as some have been, with the simple statement that all three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—hold Jerusalem to be holy. This is true, but he describes in turn the uniqueness of the relationship each religious tradition has with Jerusalem. Regarding the Jewish attachment, he recognizes both the religious and the historic "peoplehood" dimension of Jewish attachment to Jerusalem:

Jews ardently love her, and in every age venerate her memory, abundant as she is in many remains and monuments from the time of David who chose her as the capital, and of Solomon who built the Temple there. Therefore, they turn their minds to her daily, one may say, and point to her as the sign of their nation.

Consider the powerful phrase "as the capital" and the even stronger declaration "sign of their nation." Given the sacramental orientation of Roman Catholic thought, my understanding of this text and the concept of "sign" enunciated there is that it has deep spiritual significance.

Redemptoris anno, of course, is by no means hesitant to set forth the stake that the Catholic Church itself has in Jerusalem, not only in access to its holy places for pilgrimages, but also in the viability of its character as religiously pluralist, specifying Muslim along with Jewish and Christian reverence for the city. *Redemptoris anno* thus affirms the religious and communal rights of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the city, rights which are already acknowledged and affirmed by the wise administration of Mayor Teddy Kolleck.

VI. Conclusion

Redemptoris anno and the Vatican Notes, I believe, together form the basis for a new assessment on the part of the Holy See of its relationship with the Jewish people in general and with the State of Israel in particular. The present policy is quite consistent with past centuries in holding forth the Catholic Church's basic claims in the area. These claims, it has been noted, are essentially religious and moral, as well as historical. Stripped of the anti-Jewish polemics of the past, these claims today deserve close attention and respect from the world community.

While consistent regarding the necessity of Christian access to and a viable Christian presence in Israel, they are not in essential conflict with Israeli sover-

eignty, even over the city of Jerusalem. The Holy See, as it must, takes the "long view" of the present situation, holding out, if my interpretation is correct, for an international recognition of its claims strong enough and clear enough to survive the vagaries of history. That is, the Holy See insists that Christians are present in *Eretz Israel* as of right, a right dependent on neither Jewish nor Muslim "tolerance," and that this right is such as to perdure no matter who has sovereignty or what political party may happen to preside over the government controlling the area. This issue is especially acute for the Holy See with regard to the city of Jerusalem.

At the present time, both Jewish (for example, Meir Kahane) and Muslim fundamentalists would seek to deny that right. That is one reason why, in my view, the Holy See still hesitates to exchange ambassadors with either Jordan or Israel. The question is not so much "recognition" of either state as it is recognition by all involved of Christian existence within the Holy Land. Whether the Holy See's strategy of *realpolitik* for achieving its goals in the area is the most likely to succeed is another question. Many knowledgeable Catholics today, both in the West and in Israel itself, would see a better chance for Christian claims in the long run in making the move now to exchange ambassadors, thus encouraging negotiations and at the same time providing the Church a stronger diplomatic role in whatever negotiations may ensue in the tortuous peace process in the area. Likewise, they argue, only such an action will really convince the Jewish community of the Church's sincerity in breaking with its anti-Jewish past, thus furthering the interreligious dialogue and giving Vatican concerns increased moral credibility within the State of Israel.

Fr. Thomas F. Stranaky, C.S.P., who was a founding staff member of the Holy See's Secretariat for Christian Unity (1960-70), and in that capacity worked on Vatican II's declaration, *Nostra aetate*, states the argument this way:

Because the Holy See acknowledges the validity and necessity of the Jewish state, and because the Vatican, as a "sovereign state," justifies its active tradition of diplomatic relations with nations now including the United States, many Catholics strongly urge that the Vatican reinforce its recognition of Israel by diplomatic ties. Such a step would be a clear signal in the international arena that the Vatican in no way supports those Arab states that reject even the right of Israel to exist and insist that by political and military means Israel should be forced to disappear from the Middle East.⁵⁴

However one views this, it would be a mistake on the Jewish side, in my opinion, to interpret Vatican hesitation to exchange ambassadors as some sort of remnant of the "teaching of contempt." Anti-Judaism and even Antisemitism, of course, still exist among Catholics at all levels. This is a sad reality which the

⁵⁴Thomas F. Stranaky, "The Catholic-Jewish Dialogue: Twenty Years after *Nostra Aetate*," *America* 154 (February 8, 1986): 96.

Church must continue to confront with all its available resources, but the consistency of the Holy See's concerns over the centuries—and the steps already taken to dismantle the "teaching of contempt"—make it less and less likely that ancient polemics are in fact guiding Catholic Church policy in the Middle East today. To put it another way, Vatican policy can adequately be understood on the basis of its own articulated concerns. One does not need some "darker" motivation to explain its hesitations and doubts with regard to diplomatic relations.

Finally, it would equally be a mistake to view the Holy See's policy in the area solely in terms of Catholic self-interest. The deeper vision of the popes, as illustrated in *Nobis in animo* (Paul VI) and *Redemptionis anno* (John Paul II), projects a spiritual challenge to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Can the children of Abraham, so at odds over the centuries, come to terms with each other today for the sake of the higher duty to which all are called? Jerusalem is the fulcrum of that challenge. Can the three monotheistic traditions, through their encounter in the Holy City, come together to give joint witness to the One God, the God of Israel, whom we all serve? If so, the potential for peace in human history will be immeasurably improved.