



Bulletin

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What the Christian Pope thinks about Islam matters to the Muslim world

Muslims' offended reaction to the Pope's Regensburg speech (or rather to the partial information reported by the media) shows how the Pontiff has become a kind of "arbiter" of universal morality to which even Muslims subscribe. Neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI has ever adhered to the 'Clash of Civilisations' theory.

Jerusalem (AsiaNews) – What—if anything at all useful—can be learned from the storm of controversy that appeared to engulf the world following the partial media reports of the Holy Father's lecture at the university of Regensburg, Bavaria, Germany, on 12 September? A controversy that it is now devoutly to be hoped will abate, thanks to the Pope's "Angelus" address on Sunday, 17 September, following the Cardinal Secretary of State's statement of 16 September, expressing the Roman Pontiff's regret for the pain felt by so many Muslims.

First of all, the episode has emphasised the uniquely universal importance attributed by all to the office and Person of the Vicar of Christ on earth. Thanks especially to the series of exceptionally remarkable Popes since the Second Vatican Council—and before too—the Petrine office is not considered to be simply an internal matter of one religious organisation, but a source of hope and reassurance for all humanity. Muslims, as well as Christians, and many, many others, have been looking up to the Pope as the universal arbiter of moral values, the ultimate defender of impartial justice for all, the depository and interpreter of all that is best in the cumulative moral heritage of humankind. The Pope as the supreme "father figure" for everyone, everywhere. The truth of this was evident, for example, in a very special way, in the world-wide mourning at the death of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II. And it merits emphasising that, to achieve and maintain this position, the Popes have not needed in any way to renounce, or tone down, their explicit and constant witness to the Risen Christ. In fact, the Pope's primary dedication to the preaching of salvation through Christ Crucified and Risen has always appeared to enhance the universal attachment to, and respect for his person and office, as a prime example of courageously coherent faith.

This is why whatever the Pope says matters so much, to Muslims too, among all others.

This is why media perceptions and reports that the "universal father" had unfairly singled out Islam—and its Prophet Muhammad—for the severest possible criticism, had so hurt and pained and outraged so many Muslims in so many places around the world.

This impact was greatly enhanced by the international context today, where some in the supposedly (though only partly) Christian "West" appear determined to demonise Islam and all Muslims, and to hypothesise a "clash of civilisations" to their detriment. Of course, neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI could ever capitulate to this destructive "logic". Of course, no Pope could agree to postulating such an unjust and dangerous division of humanity. Of course, the Pope has - very firmly - denounced violence and terrorism, but always without in any way implying that they were somehow an intrinsic, or an exclusive characteristic of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad. To the contrary — as has now been emphatically re-affirmed — the Pope, whether John Paul II or

Benedict XVI, has used every occasion to assert the contrary, and to renew Vatican II's solemn expressions of deep respect for those who worship the One God according to the precepts of Islam.

It was, therefore, to the Pope especially that so many Muslims looked up as to an impartial arbiter of fairness, as to a beacon of light amidst the gathering dark clouds of prejudice and hostility.

This is why it hurt them so much when they were given the false impression—by careless or manipulative media reports—that this was not so, that the Pope himself might have lent a hand to their detractors.

This is why it is now of such transcendent importance, so necessary and so urgent, that all of us in the Church energetically support the Holy Father himself, right now, in eliminating that terrible impression, and in restoring the image and reality of the Church as the Muslim world's respectful friend and partner in dialogue "about God and about all things in relation to God."

*By David-Maria A. Jaeger, ofm
AsiaNews - 19 September 2006*

Patriarch visits Churches attacked in West Bank

The Latin patriarch of Jerusalem visited four of the churches in the West Bank and Gaza that were attacked following remarks by Benedict XVI that angered many Muslims.

No injuries were reported in the string of fire-bombings and shootings Saturday that caused no major damage to Christian churches of various denominations in Nablus, Tubas, Tulkarem and Gaza City.

Archbishop Michel Sabbah said on Vatican Radio today that in Nablus he was able to meet with the small Christian community, and they reported that "all the churches were attacked by a group of youths."

The patriarch reported that today "the mayor, the governor, and all those in charge met with the Christian religious leaders to avoid any kind of violence."

"All Muslim political and religious leaders are with us and support us. They have placed armed men to stand guard all night in the four churches," he added.

The patriarch explained that the Grand Mufti of Palestine and President Abu Mazen have expressed their solidarity.

Archbishop Sabbah added: "Now we must reflect on what initiative must be taken to reinforce the relationship between Christianity and Islam."

Zenit - 17 September 2006

Churches attacked in Gaza, W. Bank

A hitherto unknown group calling itself the Swords of Islamic Right on Saturday threatened to blow up all churches and Christian institutions in the Gaza Strip to protest remarks made by Pope Benedict XVI about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

The group, which claimed responsibility for a shooting attack on the facade of a Greek Orthodox Church in the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza City on Saturday, said it would not accept an apology from the pope.

On Saturday, four other churches in Nablus were also attacked by Palestinians wielding guns, firebombs and lighter fluid.

No injuries were reported in any of the attacks, which left church doors charred and outer walls pocked by bullet holes and scorched by firebombs.

A policeman at the Gaza church said he saw a car escape with armed men inside. Bombs were set off at the same church on Friday, causing minor damage.

"The people who did this are uneducated and ignorant," said the Gaza church's prelate, the Rev. Artinious Alexious.

On Tuesday in Germany, Benedict quoted verbatim from criticism of the Prophet Muhammad by 14th century Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus: "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

The Pope did not explicitly agree with or repudiate the text.

The attacks on four of Nablus's 10 churches, and on the Greek Orthodox church in Gaza City sparked concern that violence would widen.

"The atmosphere is charged already, and the wise should not accept such acts," Father Yousef Saada, a Greek Catholic priest in Nablus, said Saturday.

Firebombings left black scorch marks on the walls and windows of Nablus's Anglican and Greek Orthodox churches. At least five firebombs hit the Anglican Church, whose door was later set ablaze in a separate attack. Smoke billowed from the church as firefighters put out the flames.

In a phone call to The Associated Press, a group calling itself the Lions of Monotheism claimed responsibility. The caller said the attacks were carried out to protest the pope's remarks about Islam.

Later Saturday, four masked gunmen doused the main doors of Nablus's Roman and Greek Catholic churches with lighter fluid, then set them afire. They also opened fire on the buildings, striking both.

Ayman Daraghmeh, a legislator from the ruling Hamas group, denounced the attacks.

Said Siam, the Palestinian Authority interior minister, ordered extra protection for churches in the West Bank and Gaza.

"What the pope said is unforgivable," the Swords of Islamic Right said in a statement. "We will continue to target churches."

George Awad, a cleric at the Greek Orthodox Church in Nablus, said he and Catholic leaders had apologized for the pope's remarks, but urged restraint.

"There is no reason to burn our churches," he said.

Christians make up less than 10 percent of the population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Most of them are located in Bethlehem and its environs. According to estimates, less than 2,000 Christians live in the Gaza Strip, a stronghold for radical Islamic groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and other authority leaders condemned the pope's statement and called on him to apologize to the Muslim world.

Preachers in several mosques used Friday prayers to launch scathing attacks on the pope and to call on all Arab and Islamic countries to boycott him until he apologizes.

On Friday night, about 2,000 Palestinians took to the streets of Gaza City, chanting slogans against the pope and accusing him of leading a new Crusade against the Muslim world.

Bishop Riah Abo El-Assal, the top Anglican clergyman in the Holy Land, said Saturday he expected his Muslim colleagues would swiftly denounce the attacks on the churches. Abo El-Assal brushed aside the attacks as "childish acts" and said he was not increasing security at the Anglican churches in the area.

In Nablus, merchant Khaled Ramadan, 31, wearing traditional Islamic garb, said the pope's comments were unforgivable, but that Palestinians must not fight amongst themselves.

"We are one people and violent reactions like these should not happen here," he said.

In the West Bank town of Taiba, neither the pope's remarks nor the Islamic Hamas government ruffled the second annual Octoberfest beer festival, held early this year so as not to fall during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins next week.

"No one from Hamas says anything," despite the Islamic prohibition against liquor, said Omar Dhadl, a 36-year-old Christian, a fast food vendor in the predominantly Christian village, which is home to the Taiba brewery.

Rasha Khoury, a 26-year-old resident of the village, speculated that was because Hamas, which plans to soon share power with the secular Fatah Party, doesn't "have a lot of authority." Quaffing his beer, Essi Thalji, a 51-year-old construction worker from Taiba, shrugged off the uproar over the pope's comments.

"I don't understand why they got so upset because he quoted books from 400 years ago," Thalji said.

*By Khaled Abu Toameh and AP
The Jerusalem Post - 15 September 2006*

Papal Address to Muslim Leaders and Diplomats

"Lessons of the Past must help us to seek Paths of Reconciliation"

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy - Here is a Vatican translation of the address Benedict XVI delivered today in the papal summer residence of Castel Gandolfo, to leaders of Muslim communities in Italy and ambassadors of Muslim countries accredited to the Holy See.

* * *

Dear Cardinal Poupard,

Your Excellencies,

Dear Muslim Friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to this gathering that I wanted to arrange in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship and solidarity between the Holy See and Muslim communities throughout the world. I thank Cardinal Poupard, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, for the words that he has just addressed to me, and I thank all of you for responding to my invitation.

The circumstances which have given rise to our gathering are well known. I have already had occasion to dwell upon them in the course of the past week. In this particular context, I should like to reiterate today all the esteem and the profound respect that I have for Muslim believers, calling to mind the words of the Second Vatican Council which for the Catholic Church are the Magna Carta of Muslim-Christian dialogue: "The Church looks upon Muslims with respect. They worship the one God living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity and to whose decrees, even the hidden ones, they seek to submit themselves wholeheartedly, just as Abraham, to whom the Islamic faith readily relates itself, submitted to God" (declaration "Nostra Aetate," No. 3).

Placing myself firmly within this perspective, I have had occasion, since the very beginning of my pontificate, to express my wish to continue establishing bridges of friendship with the adherents of all religions, showing particular appreciation for the growth of dialogue between Muslims and Christians (cf. Address to the Delegates of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of Other Religious Traditions, April 25, 2005).

As I underlined at Cologne last year, "Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends" (Meeting with Representatives of Some Muslim Communities, Cologne, Aug. 20, 2005). In a world marked by relativism and too often excluding the transcendence and universality of reason, we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful cooperation, to overcome all the tensions together.

Continuing, then, the work undertaken by my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, I sincerely pray that the relations of trust which have developed between Christians and Muslims over several years, will not only continue, but will develop further in a spirit of

sincere and respectful dialogue, based on ever more authentic reciprocal knowledge which, with joy, recognizes the religious values that we have in common and, with loyalty, respects the differences.

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue is a necessity for building together this world of peace and fraternity ardently desired by all people of good will. In this area, our contemporaries expect from us an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life. Likewise, faithful to the teachings of their own religious traditions, Christians and Muslims must learn to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose all manifestations of violence; as for us, religious authorities and political leaders, we must guide and encourage them in this direction.

Indeed, "although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, the Council urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves toward sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people" (declaration "Nostra Aetate," No. 3).

The lessons of the past must therefore help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful cooperation in the service of all humanity. As Pope John Paul II said in his memorable speech to young people at Casablanca in Morocco, "Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favor peace and agreement between peoples" (No. 5).

Dear friends, I am profoundly convinced that in the current world situation it is imperative that Christians and Muslims engage with one another in order to address the numerous challenges that present themselves to humanity, especially those concerning the defense and promotion of the dignity of the human person and of the rights ensuing from that dignity. When threats mount up against people and against peace, by recognizing the central character of the human person and by working with perseverance to see that human life is always respected, Christians and Muslims manifest their obedience to the Creator, who wishes all people to live in the dignity that he has bestowed upon them.

Dear friends, I pray with my whole heart that the merciful God will guide our steps along the paths of an ever more authentic mutual understanding. At this time when for Muslims the spiritual journey of the month of Ramadan is beginning, I address to all of them my cordial good wishes, praying that the Almighty may grant them serene and peaceful lives. May the God of peace fill you with the abundance of his blessings, together with the communities that you represent!

Zenit - 25 September 2006

To support the Pope or not

The Western world, and Israel and Diaspora Jewry as part of it, has become so accustomed to terrorism and the threats of Islamic extremists, that it is prepared to view

Pope Benedict XVI as the one most blameworthy for the violent reaction to his quotation of a 14th-century Byzantine emperor. One can argue as to whether Christianity in the Middle Ages was any less violent than Islam in spreading its rule and its religion; but two things are not in doubt. First, it is not normal for a nun to be murdered in Somalia, and churches burned in the Middle East, because of the words of a forgotten ruler of six centuries ago. Second, it is hard to escape the fact that behind the violence are familiar faces of Islamic extremism. They are reminiscent of the old cry of "Hold me back, I'm crazy!" - a cry that has become part of the arsenal of Islamic terror.

For Jews, more than for Christians, the question of whether to take a stand on the present wave of violence is decisive. Is it better to "sit quietly" and "keep one's head down" until it blows over, on the assumption that a culture based on medieval principles and methods cannot sustain itself in the 21st century? On the other hand, if the current situation persists, the danger is imminent and life-threatening - and should Israel not be among the first to sound a warning?

The question is not hypothetical. Jewish circles in Israel distanced themselves from the Pope's statement, and criticized him for being impulsive and imprudent in mentioning Islam's historic tendency to spread its faith by the sword. Certainly Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora have to be in the vanguard of the struggle for tolerance and freedom of speech, but other considerations have to be safeguarded as well.

The clash was not accidental, but the battle is not hopeless. "Lack of diplomatic experience" and "concentration on theological mysteries" cannot be the real reasons for Benedict XVI's "slip of the tongue," as Vatican spokesmen have tried to explain. The emphasis on the Christian component as fundamental to European culture has long engaged the Pope. His well-known reservations about Turkey joining the European Union demonstrate that his views are not merely theological or philosophical, but translate into positions on actual political questions as well.

According to Catholic doctrine, the Pope is infallible, and whatever he declares must be true. The Vatican may have been taken aback by the extreme Muslim reaction, and hence is trying to douse the flames; but it is doubtful whether Benedict has changed his mind on the inevitable clash between Christianity and Islam.

It is difficult to imagine the Pope going from an expression of personal regret (itself unusual) to personal apology, as radical Muslims are demanding. Such a move could have important political ramifications, not only for relations between Islam and the Roman Catholic Church, but also for relations among the different streams of Christianity, and between Christianity and other faiths. It is no coincidence, therefore, that by last weekend, articles were beginning to appear, some by Jewish thinkers, warning the Vatican not to go too far in its concessions to Islam, and calling on it to put an end to the expressions of regret.

The high-level personnel changes the Pope has effected in the Vatican, and particularly the promotion of a man who was born in an Arab country, have been interpreted in the world press as representing the Pope's understanding that he has erred in not familiarizing himself with the Muslim world. No less likely, however, is the possibility that he chose a veteran from the Arab world so that there would be someone at

his side "who knows the Arabs." Perhaps the appointment is not due to an immediate desire "to placate," but quite the opposite.

Christian church leaders have a desire to protect both their co-religionists and their institutions in the Muslim countries of Asia and Africa. Similar considerations among Israel and Jewish organizations have become secondary in recent years - even as Israel's political issues have grabbed the headlines - because so few Jews are left in the Muslim countries of the Middle East, in some cases barely a few thousand, in others only a few hundred or even too few to make up a minyan [a prayer quorum of ten].

It is possible that the Vatican is not interested in an open partnership with Israel in confronting Islamic extremism, since Israel is viewed with distaste even by moderate Muslims. It is best to respect such a wish. Nevertheless, it is not only the Muslims who believe that the Jews have a decisive influence on the Western world (thanks to such works as "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"). Because of - not despite - the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in recent years, Jewish efforts to combat anti-Semitism (and its anti-Israeli variant) in Muslim countries and among Muslim populations in Europe now carry real weight.

By contrast with the monolithic official position of the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant world is divided when it comes to the struggle against extremist Muslim anti-Semitism. The liberal churches have turned their animosity and criticism regarding the Palestinian issue against Israel, resulting in confrontation with local Jewish communities on subjects like cultural and economic boycotts. On the other hand, Israel has allies in most of the fundamentalist Protestant churches, a fact that significantly alters the "Christian balance" in many countries and cities. Sometimes the support is mutual, and the communities help each other on issues like the protection of institutions.

In the Christian world, there is a growing awareness that Islamic violence is not a reaction to anything the local Jewish community may have done, but is something that is created, and perhaps is even instigated, abroad. The logical conclusion for Diaspora Jews is that there is no reason to be afraid of being in the front ranks of demonstrations and political activities against Islamic extremism. It is not what Jews do that that will determine how Muslims react. And, most important, it is premature to eulogize the West and its chances of victory against the "East," in which the Muslims are in any case not a majority. But any help, even Jewish help, is important; and it is better to extend it sooner than later.

*By Eliahu Salpeter
Haaretz - 1 October 2006*

Christian religious leaders release statement on the status of Jerusalem

The heads of local Christian Churches point out that unilateral actions used so far have brought neither peace to the holy city nor a normal life to its residents. They call for a committee to look into the city's future status, which must be guaranteed by the international community.

Jerusalem (AsiaNews) – Political leaders must grant Jerusalem a distinct status guaranteed by the international community that would uphold the rights of the “two peoples in her and the three faith communities” if we want to make the city to be “a true sign of the presence of God and of His peace among all.”

This, in a nutshell, is the thrust of an appeal made and signed by 13 heads and patriarchs of the Christian communities in the Holy Land.

In their September 29 statement the religious leaders note that in light of recent violent events in the region peace requires shared decisions by the two peoples—Israelis and Palestinians—that respect the rights of believers of all faiths. And any agreement would have to include a ‘special status’ for the Holy City.

Titled “The Status of Jerusalem”, the press release demands the city enjoy a special status, which would include:

- “The human right of freedom of worship and of conscience for all, both as individuals and as religious communities [. . .].
- “Equality of all her inhabitants before the law, in coordination with the international resolutions.
- “Free access to Jerusalem for all, citizens, residents or pilgrims, at all times, whether in peace or in war. Therefore Jerusalem should be an open city.
- “The rights of property ownership, custody and worship which the different Churches have acquired throughout history should continue to be retained by the same communities. These rights, which are already protected in the Status Quo of the Holy Places according to historical "firmans" and other documents, should continue to be recognized and respected [. . .].
- “The various Christian Holy Places in the city, wherever they are, must remain united in geography, whatever the solution envisaged.” The religious leaders’ decision to speak out stems from the increasing tendency of the political authorities to unilaterally decide the city’s fate and status. “The access of our faithful and our personnel to Jerusalem is ever-more difficult.”

“With the construction of the wall [. . .] and according to plans published in the local press” many faithful will de facto be excluded. Hence they urge local authorities, the international community and the world’s Churches to make “a concerted effort to search for a common vision on the status of this holy city based on international resolutions and having regard to the rights of two peoples in her and the three faith communities.”

Unilateralism has so far “not brought about the pacification of the city and have not reassured normal life for her inhabitants,” the patriarchs and religious leaders said.

A just and durable solution for the Jerusalem question requires that the “future of the city must be decided by common agreement, through collaboration and consultation and not imposed by power and force. Unilateral decisions or imposed solutions will continue to be very detrimental to peace and security.”

“Different solutions are possible. The city of Jerusalem might remain united but sovereignty in this case must be shared, exercised according to a principle of equality by both Israelis and Palestinians. However, the city might also be divided if this be the desire of the two peoples who live here, with two distinct sovereignties, the aim of which would be to reach a true unity of hearts in the two parts of the city.”

Nevertheless, “[f]ace to face with the inability of the parties involved to find a just and durable solution up until the present time, the assistance of the international community is a necessity. In the future too, this aid needs to continue in the form of guarantees that will ensure the stability of the agreements reached by the two sides.”

Hence “[w]e recommend to create as soon as possible, an ad hoc committee to reflect on the future of the city. In this committee the local Churches of Jerusalem must be a part.”

AsiaNews - 9 October 2006

Papal Address to Group from Anti-Defamation League "Jews, Christians and Muslims share many Common Convictions"

Here is the text of the address Benedict XVI gave today when he received a delegation from the Anti-Defamation League in audience.

* * *

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to welcome to the Vatican the delegation of the Anti-Defamation League. On many occasions you visited my predecessor Pope John Paul II, and I am happy to continue to meet representative groups of the Jewish people.

In our world today, religious, political, academic and economic leaders are being seriously challenged to improve the level of dialogue between peoples and between cultures. To do this effectively requires a deepening of our mutual understanding and a shared dedication to building a society of ever greater justice and peace. We need to know each other better and, on the strength of that mutual discovery, to build relationships not just of tolerance but of authentic respect. Indeed, Jews, Christians and Muslims share many common convictions, and there are numerous areas of humanitarian and social engagement in which we can and must cooperate.

The Second Vatican Council's Declaration "Nostra Aetate" reminds us that the Jewish roots of Christianity oblige us to overcome the conflicts of the past and to create

new bonds of friendship and collaboration. It affirms in particular that the Church deploras all forms of hatred or persecution directed against the Jews and all displays of anti-Semitism at any time and from any source (cf. No. 4). The four decades since the Declaration have brought many positive advances, and they have also witnessed some early steps, perhaps still too tentative, towards a more open conversation on religious themes. It is precisely at this level of frank exchange and dialogue that we will find the basis and the motivation for a solid and fruitful relationship.

May the Eternal One, our Father in heaven, bless every effort to eliminate from our world any misuse of religion as an excuse for hatred or violence. May He bless all of you, your families and your communities.

Zenit - 12 October 2006

Statement of Catholic-Orthodox Commission *"Dialogue has no Alternative"*

BELGRADE, Serbia - Here is the final communiqué of the Catholic-Orthodox Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue, following its ninth meeting held in Belgrade, Serbia, from Sept. 18-25.

* * *

The ninth meeting of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church met in Belgrade, Serbia, from Sept. 18-25, 2006, continuing the work begun in 1980 to seek the restoration of full communion.

The Orthodox Church of Serbia generously provided hospitality for the meeting.

The official opening took place in the patriarchal chapel of the Serbian Patriarchate in the presence of His Holiness Patriarch Pavle who welcomed the members of the commission and offered his prayerful support, saying: "...Welcome all of you, to this house of God of our Church and of our people and my home!

"My humble prayer shall cover your theological dialogue of love and truth, for that is why you have gathered here. Of far greater significance, even of sole importance, is that all of you be strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which rectifies all of our shortcomings and heals all of our weaknesses."

The commission invoked the Holy Spirit on its work.

At the first working session in the Sava International Center, the co-presidents Cardinal Walter Kasper and Metropolitan John of Pergamon introduced the work of the commission, and Metropolitan Jovan of Zagreb welcomed all present on behalf of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The prime minister of Serbia, Vojislav Kostunica, addressed the commission, affirming that: "...The Churches of the East and West are setting an extraordinary example by means of their dialogue, and this theological meeting in Belgrade represents a reference point on the way.

"The greatest gift to contemporary humanity would be to convince people, perhaps first and foremost the political elites, that dialogue has no alternative and that every form of application of force, dictate or imposition of one's own models and solutions -- in service of primarily personal interests -- destroys the last remaining bridges between confronted peoples and communities, instead of building peace, confidence, solidarity and cooperation."

He also hosted a reception and dinner for all the participants.

The Joint Commission is composed of 30 Orthodox and 30 Roman Catholic members, and is chaired by two co-presidents: Cardinal Walter Kasper and Metropolitan John of Pergamon (Ecumenical Patriarchate).

Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Monsignor Eleuterio Fortino from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, serve as the Joint Commission's secretaries.

The entire Roman Catholic delegation was present in the Belgrade meeting except for two members who were unable to attend.

Orthodox members represented the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Patriarchate of Serbia, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Poland, the Church of Albania, the Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia and the Church of Finland.

The Joint Commission discussed a text entitled: "The Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Conciliarity and Authority in the Church," at three levels of the Church's life: local, regional and universal.

That text prepared by the Joint Coordinating Committee in Moscow in 1990 was to have been presented at the plenary meeting of the Joint Commission in Freising, Germany, the same year, but was not discussed then or later because events taking place in Eastern Europe at that time obliged the commission to address the issue of "uniatism" in relation to the ecumenical dialogue.

In the present meeting the document prepared in Moscow was carefully examined in a shared spirit of genuine commitment to the search for unity.

A Joint Drafting Committee was appointed to revise the text in the light of the many observations and comments made during the discussion on the text. A revised text will be the object of discussion at the next meeting of the Joint Commission which will be hosted by the Roman Catholic Church, next year, 2007.

During the weeklong meeting the Roman Catholic delegates were present at the Orthodox Divine Liturgy in St. Mark's Church on the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God, the Theotokos, and the Orthodox members in a Mass at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Ascension of the Holy Virgin of Belgrade at the invitation of Archbishop Stanislav Hocevar.

The members of the commission also had the opportunity to visit the historic Ravanica Monastery. A dinner was offered in the Monastery by Bishop Ignatij of

Branichevo. On Sunday evening the president of Serbia, Boris Tadi , hosted a dinner at his residence in honor of the Commission.

The meeting of the Joint Commission was marked by a spirit of friendship and trustful collaboration. The members of the commission greatly appreciated the generous hospitality of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and they strongly commend the ongoing work of the dialogue to the prayers of the faithful.

Belgrade, Serbia, Sept. 24, 2006

Zenit -1 October 2006

WCC slams Israel's refusal to recognize Greek Patriarch

The World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva has demanded Israel withdraw its backing of Irineos I and acknowledge Theophilos III as the leader of the Greek Orthodox church in Jerusalem.

Israel's continued support for the "duly deposed former Patriarch, now monk, Irineos," was "tantamount to interference by the state in the affairs of the church," WCC General Secretary Samuel Kobia wrote in a September 29 letter to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

The leader of the ecumenical organization called for "remedial action at the long delay by the government in recognizing... Theophilos III as the head of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem."

It is the Greek Orthodox "Holy Synod, not the government of Israel, which determines who is the legitimate leader of that church" Kobia said.

Elected Patriarch in 2001 with the backing of the Greek government and church officials, Irineos fell afoul of the bishops of the Jerusalem church last year after it was revealed the Patriarchate gave a 198 year lease at below market prices on commercial properties near Jaffa Gate to four British Virgin Island holding companies controlled by a Jewish settlement group.

Israel's failure to recognize Theophilos has been "near catastrophic," Patrick Theros, former US ambassador to Qatar and the Patriarchate's representative to the US, told a meeting of the American Hellenic Institute in Washington. Without a letter of recognition from the government, many banks, commercial firms, land registry and other state agencies have refused to deal with Theophilos in his capacity of legal representative of the church.

"It got to a point where the Patriarchate's electricity was shut down." The church could not pay the staff of its 40 schools, nor maintain its 400 churches without emergency assistance from the Greek government Theros said.

The leases were corruptly obtained, he claimed. "Checks in full were written out to cash for each of the four leases, but the Patriarchate never received any of these funds."

A Greek prosecutor last year issued a European arrest warrant against Nikos Papadimas, the Patriarchate's former financial manager who allegedly negotiated the leases, on charges of embezzling some 600,000 euros, the Athens newspaper *Ekathimerini* reported.

After Irineos refused to heed the instructions of a special meeting in Istanbul of the leaders of the Orthodox churches to step down over the scandal, the Jerusalem Patriarchate's Holy Synod deposed him from office - an action Irineos disputes was illegal under church law.

He has refused to recognize his dismissal and still commands the support of the Israeli government, while the Orthodox Christian world recognizes Theophilos as the lawful Patriarch.

On October 26, Theophilos filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. Under the terms of an Ottoman era treaty, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Israel must give a "Berat," or official edict of approval to the Patriarch's election. While Jordan and the Palestinian Authority have given their Berat, Israel has not.

The petition charged the government was seeking to manipulate the church, making recognition of Theophilos' election contingent upon his approval of the land deal. A hearing was scheduled before the Supreme Court on July 19, and a decision is pending.

In an interview with the English-language *Athens News* after his election, Theophilos stated he would not honor the leases and faulted his predecessor for launching the church into perilous political waters.

"Through Irineos' imprudent actions, the Patriarchate appeared to be involved in a political conflict [over land], when it had never been involved in political disputes historically. The church was transformed from a spiritual institution into a vehicle for promoting political agendas. I think my election largely managed to bring the church out of the political conflict, even though the interested powers tried their best to drag us into it," he stated.

The WCC's call for Israel to recognize Theophilos follows last month's release of a US State Department report criticizing Israel's interference in the governance of the 40,000 member Patriarchate. The 2006 International Religious Freedom Report criticized Israel's "unequal treatment of religious minorities" and singled out the dispute as an example of "societal abuses and discrimination" in the Israel country report published in its world-wide survey of religious freedom.

*By George Conger
The Jerusalem Post - 5 October 2006*

Jewish-Anglican pact upsets Arab clerics

The chief rabbis of Israel and the archbishop of Canterbury have endorsed a joint statement that denounces anti-Semitism and creates a formal dialogue between Judaism and the 81 million-member Anglican Communion.

The agreement, modelled upon the current Roman Catholic-Jewish dialogue, has drawn protests, however, from Arab Anglican leaders, who argue that now is not the time to begin talks between the two faith groups.

The September 5 concordat, endorsed by Archbishop Rowan Williams and Rabbis Shlomo Amar and Yona Metzger before 70 British Jewish and Christian leaders at Lambeth Palace in London, condemned the "rise of anti-Semitism in Britain and the rest of Europe, in the Middle East and across the world at the present time. This is a scourge that we are committed to struggle against."

The statement acknowledged that "there have been times when the Church has been complicit in" anti-Semitism, and pledged the parties to oppose it "where it is fostered within communities of faith," governments and political parties.

"This is a potentially fruitful development for relations between Christians and Jews in general and for the peoples of the Holy Land in particular," Dr. Williams said. "What we've agreed today will provide a framework within which both practical and sometimes challenging issues can be discussed on the basis of mutual trust and respect."

Plans for an Anglican-Jewish dialogue were nearly derailed and a May meeting postponed by the February 6 vote by the Church of England's General Synod to "divest from companies profiting" from Israel's "illegal occupation" of the territories. Jewish leaders in Britain had been assured privately by Lambeth Palace before the start of the Synod that divestment would not come up for a vote, and were shocked when it was debated and passed with the endorsement of Dr. Williams.

The former archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, denounced the divestment decision. Telling *The Jerusalem Post* that it made him "ashamed to be an Anglican." The chief rabbi of Britain, Sir Jonathan Sacks, said it was "ill judged" and its "timing could not have been more inappropriate."

Plans for the May meeting were set on January 8 by Rabbi David Rosen, president of the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations; Oded Weiner, director general of the Chief Rabbinate; and Dr. Williams's interfaith adviser, Canon Guy Wilkinson. Archbishop Williams has visited Israel twice since taking office in 2003, last meeting the chief rabbis in January 2004.

Rosen told the *Post* that the meeting would launch a bilateral commission, which he saw as "an important achievement for Jewish and Israeli interests and a testimony to Rowan Williams's genuine goodwill." The dialogue would be a way of building "real bridges of understanding and learning; and to examine what we can say and do together for the betterment of humanity and for the promotion of those values we share," Rosen said.

Dr. Williams's rapprochement with Jewish leaders has not sat well with some leaders of the Anglican Communion. Bishop Riah Abu al-Assal of Jerusalem told the *Post* that neither he nor other Arab Christian leaders had been properly consulted.

"Senior people of the Church of England informed me that the whole event came to appease Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Israel and the Jewish lobby because of what happened at the Synod of the Church of England regarding the issue of divestment," Bishop Riah said. "My personal opinion is that it is not the right time - given the events in Palestine and the Middle East at large."

The "tragic conflicts in the Holy Land" necessitated dialogue, Dr. Williams said on Monday. "Without friendship and mutual confidence, without the ability to speak to one another candidly and lovingly, we shall never be in a position where our relationship can change things and challenge things and move the situation forward," he said.

*By George Conger
The Jerusalem Post - 5 September 2006*

Bethlehem: lock put back in Basilica of the Nativity

Jerusalem (AsiaNews) – The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land yesterday published the following statement: "On Saturday, 2 September, 2006, by prior arrangement, the lock was put back in the Main Door of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem - which had been illegally removed from it in the spring or summer of 2002. Present were the representatives of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, and the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as well as those of the Palestinian Authority.

"The Custody expresses its appreciation for the decision of the present Greek Orthodox Patriarch, His Beatitude Theophilos, of letting the lock be re-installed, as well as for the firm and principled role of the Palestinian Authority, which carried out in this matter the obligation assumed in Article 4 of the 'Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the P.L.O.'

"It is the fervent hope of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land that henceforth the internationally recognised legal regime of Status Quo, in those Christian Holy Places to which it applies, will be respected and observed by all, and that the conduct of all who have part in governing these Shrines will thus be worthy of their uniquely sacred character. Bethlehem is, after all, precisely the birthplace of the Prince of Peace.

Thus has come to a satisfactory end one of the most serious challenges to the Holy Places in recent times.

It all started when some Greek Orthodox monks stole the lock on the main door of the Basilica of the Nativity, and replaced it with a lock of their own, thus rendering useless the keys held, respectively, by the Catholic and the Armenian Churches. The theft was discovered on 20 August 2002, and both the Catholic and the Armenian Churches protested to then Greek Orthodox Patriarch, to no effect. It was pointed out to the Patriarch that the theft and clandestine substitution of the lock was a grave violation of the legal regime of Status Quo, threatening the entire arrangement, by which the three communities (Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian) share the use of the Shrine. To no avail.

The Churches then addressed a solemn appeal to the Palestinian Authority, which administers the Bethlehem area, and which has an obligation under international law, and also specifically under the Holy See's "Basic Agreement" with the Palestinians (15 February 2000) to enforce the legal regime at the Shrine.

The commission appointed by the late Palestinian President Arafat to see to this, decided already in December 2003 that the stolen lock should be restored. However, until last Saturday, that decision was waiting to be carried out.

The well known vicissitudes of the Palestinian territories in the meantime must have had an important part in delaying by so much the actual implementation of the decision. However, the passage of time has also meant that the violently anti-Catholic Greek Orthodox Patriarch Irineos was meanwhile deposed by his own Synod, for other misconduct, and Theophilos elected in his place. This made it easier for the Palestinian Authority to ensure observance of its treaty with the Catholic Church without resorting to coercive means (which, at a certain point, if matters were still unresolved, it would have had both the right and the duty to do).

Indeed, in the end, Patriarch Theophilos himself appears to have taken the initiative to return the lock, although no doubt thanks, at least in part, to the constant encouragement from the Palestinian Authority.

The happy resolution of this affair, after more than four years, is significant for a number of reasons: It will encourage Catholics (and Armenians) everywhere to support even more emphatically the right of the Greek Orthodox to religious freedom in electing their own leaders; in fact, the Government of Israel is still refusing to "recognise" the canonical election of Theophilos.

There can be little doubt that Theophilos himself has been counting on such increased support in reversing his predecessor's anti-Catholic policy, and finally agreeing to the demand - by the Churches and the Palestinian government - to return the lock peacefully.

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, has gained merit by recognising in this case its obligations concerning the Holy Places, under the 'Basic Agreement' with the Holy See, and has thereby given a positive signal concerning the prospects of the Catholic Church in reference to the future Palestinian republic.

A "fervent hope" is indeed appropriate that both the more eirenic approach of Patriarch Theophilos (so unlike the conduct of his ironically named discredited predecessor Irineos...) to the Catholic Church, and the "firm and principled role" of the Palestinian Authority in relation to its treaty with the Catholic Church, will be consistent characteristics of times to come.

*By Arieh Cohen
AsiaNews - 7 September 2006*

Silent response

A monastery closes its gates following an assault on its Father Superior

One of the most serene Holy Places in the vicinity of Jerusalem was recently compelled to restrict visits as a result of vandalism, bigotry and theft.

The Franciscan-run St. John in the Desert Monastery, which includes a convent, now only permits Christian pilgrims and secular groups led by a licensed tour guide. Reservations are required to visit the six-hectare Judean Hills shrine, which enjoys a spectacular location amid heavily forested ancient agricultural terraces. The change in policy follows an altercation there last month involving a group of some 30 Jews described as "settlers" who assaulted the monastery's Father Superior Sergio Olmedo and then trashed the pilgrimage destination.

The monastery, located near Moshav Even Sapir on Road 386, is dedicated to the life of John the Baptist. The shrine is built around the grotto where Christian tradition holds John and his mother lived, and the still-bubbling spring from which they drank. The Arabic name, Ein Al-Habis, (spring of the Hermit) preserves the ancient tradition tying the place to John.

Elisabeth is buried on the grounds in a tomb that shows Byzantine, Crusader and 20th century construction. A group of nuns led by Sister Maatje, originally from Neuchatel, Switzerland, live beside the tomb.

St. John in the Desert has long been a favorite hiking destination for Jerusalemites, some of whom combine a visit there with a swim at the nearby Sataf Nature Preserve. Some of those Israeli visitors also came to use the Ein al-Habis spring - which serves as a baptismal pool - as a mikve. In the spirit of ecumenism, Father Sergio permitted the parallel usage.

Unfortunately, he said, over his five years living there "the quality of the visitors has changed." Many of today's Israeli hikers are disrespectful of the site's holiness. "It's a place for meditation and prayer," said the Santiago, Chile-born monk, who has resided in Israel for 14 years.

Some visitors would hop the fence and trespass, armed with guns, he said, reciting a litany of abuse, boorishness and desecration. Women would immodestly wear bikinis at the baptismal pool while men would parade naked. Some would swim in the carp pond, notwithstanding the brackish water, and then wash off in the baptismal pool. Visitors would litter, and not clean up after their pet dogs defecated. Money would be pilfered from the alms collections box.

Not least of the disrespectful behavior was simply talking loudly, and preventing the monks from carrying out their daily routine of prayer.

St. John in the Desert is not just a monastery, explained Father Sergio, but a "hermitage, a place of silence and spiritual rejuvenation." The straw that broke the proverbial camel's back came in the afternoon of Friday, August 17. A group of about 30 men, some carrying machine guns, forced their way past the gate, demanded to use the pool as a mikve and refused to leave, Father Sergio recounted. "They started to say 'Eretz Israel is our land, and you have to go.' They were very aggressive. They spat at me. They said 'You killed my family.'"

In the ensuing scuffle Father Sergio managed to photograph some of his assailants with his cell phone camera. They were wearing kippot and tzitzit, he noted. Some were dressed in orange in the fashion of activists protesting last summer's withdrawal from Gush Katif. Some were speaking English, and others Hebrew.

Father Sergio, still badly shaken, characterized the group as "fanatics."

"I've seen these [kind of] people in Hebron," he said.

Before finally leaving, the enraged crowd went on a mini-pogrom, breaking water pipes, smashing potted plants, and destroying property. Father Sergio and the other monks subsequently found direction signs leading to the property had been vandalized so that the word "Franciscan" read "racist."

Father Sergio lodged a complaint with Israel Police and provided them with his digital photos. No arrests have been made at the time of this writing. The pool remains padlocked.

*By Gil Zohar
The Jerusalem Post - "In Jerusalem" - 29 September 2006*

Where was he [John the Baptist] buried?

John the Baptist was born in 5 BCE in Ein Kerem three kilometers to the east of the monastery that bears his name. Known in Hebrew as Yohanan and in Arabic as Yahya, he was the son of Zacharia - a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem - and Elizabeth, a relative of Jesus' mother Mary. John spent most of his life in the Judean Desert, either as a hermit or as part of a Jewish monastic community such as the Essenes.

He is revered as a prophet by Christianity - also Islam, Mandaeanism and the Baha'i faith - for his role as harbinger to Jesus, whom he recognized as messiah, and baptized on the banks of the Jordan River.

Around 33 CE, some half a year after performing that baptism, John was imprisoned, perhaps at the fortress of Machaerus east of the Dead Sea, for reproaching as adulterous Herod Antipas's marriage to Herodias, the former wife of his brother Herod Philip (Luke 3:19). John was decapitated after Herod Antipas's stepdaughter, Salome, demanded his head on a platter as a reward for performing her Dance of the Seven Veils for the king's guests at his birthday feast.

Those events have inspired artistic expression as diverse as Titian painting, Oscar Wilde's play *Salome* and Tom Robbins's 1990 bestseller *Skinny Legs and All*.

Traditionally John's remains were carried to Sebaste near Nablus. That shrine was desecrated under Julian the Apostate (c. 362 CE), and the bones were partially burned.

Another possible site is Mount Nebo - where Moses gazed out over the Promised Land, and the Franciscans maintain a shrine. If John was executed at Machaerus - a point mentioned by Josephus but not the Gospels - the Burial in today's Jordan would seem more sensible than interment in distant Samaria.

More controversial was the discovery in 2002 of a highly unusual grave just outside the perimeter of Qumran's ancient cemetery, called "T (Tomb 1,000)." An archaeological survey using Ground Penetrating Radar revealed that the seemingly ordinary clump of dirt marked the final resting place of an important first-century figure. But that just raises the question of whether John the Baptist was an Essene.

*By Gil Zohar
The Jerusalem Post - "In Jerusalem" - 29 September 2006*

Christian Zionists angry over slur

The leaders of three Jerusalem-based Christian Evangelical organizations on Monday voiced distress over a recent proclamation by the Latin Patriarch and the heads of three other churches in Jerusalem issuing a stinging and virtually unprecedented public criticism of Christian Zionism and their unflinching support for the State of Israel.

The bitter inter-Christian tiff followed an August 22 "Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism" signed by the outgoing Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal of the Episcopal Church and Bishop Munib Younan of the Lutheran Church, was indicative of the deep discord and resentment within the Christian Church over the Evangelicals' support for Israel.

The declaration lambasted Christian Zionism as a "false teaching" that "condemn[s] the world to the doom of Armageddon."

"It is with concern that we note the negative opinions about Christian Zionism voiced by certain church clerics in Jerusalem... using inflammatory language they have expressed views that are far from the truth," read a joint response by the heads of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, Bridges for Peace and Christian Friends of Israel.

"We find the paper unbalanced and notably one-sided. It totally ignores the jihadist goals of the Hamas Government and turns a blind eye to terrorism perpetrated by this regime," the statement read.

The unusually-harsh statement by the Latin Patriarch, who is a Palestinian, comes at a time of burgeoning ties between Israel and the Christian Evangelical community around the world.

"Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel," the Jerusalem declaration claimed, calling Christian Zionism "a false doctrine that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation."

"A Christian Zionist believes in a literal interpretation of the Bible, and rejects replacement theology which played a pivotal role in the persecution of Jews through the centuries and under-girded the Holocaust," the Evangelical leaders wrote in their six-point response. "Christian Zionism is not heretical; in fact, Christians from all traditional backgrounds have held such a view for two thousand years.

"We pray for peace but we note with sadness that the present Palestinian government is totally dedicated to the destruction of Israel."

The assault on Christian Zionism, which also included an attack on their alliance with Israeli groups, were the clearest signs to date that the ever-growing friendship between the two sides is increasingly worrying to non-Evangelical Christian groups.

"We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with elements in the governments of Israel and the US that are presently imposing pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine," the proclamation reads, in what appears to be an indirect reference to the Knesset's increasingly-influential "Christian

Allies Caucus," the cross-party parliamentary lobby that works with Christian supporters of Israel around the world.

The acerbic and open attack on Christian Zionists also served as an indication of the immense chasm that exists between the various Church leaders living in Jerusalem.

The three Christian Evangelical leaders who wrote the response, Malcolm Hedding, Rebecca Brimmer and Ray Sanders, noted that there has been no dialogue whatsoever between the Jerusalem clerics and themselves, calling such meetings a "Biblical prerequisite."

"We feel that we have been treated with disrespect and disdain, and attacked by the issuing of this public declaration," they wrote. "They present themselves as lovers of justice, mercy, truth and peace. This public attack seems lacking in those qualities."

*By Etgar Lefkovits
The Jerusalem Post - 5 September 2006*

Defacement in Jerusalem monastery threatens diplomatic crisis

The delegation of scientists from the Republic of Georgia that came to Jerusalem in June to visit the Monastery of the Cross had a strong sense of déjà vu. As has happened several times over the last few decades, an unknown hand has attempted to erase the Georgian presence at the monastery, which currently belongs to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. This time, the name of Saint Serapion in the Georgian language that appeared above the fresco depicting him was painted over, leaving only the Greek.

Two years ago, the only extant painting of Georgia's national poet, Shota Rustaveli, the author of the national epic, "The Knight in the Panther's Skin," was defaced in the same monastery. The Georgians viewed the act, which occurred shortly before the visit to Israel by President Mikhail Saakashvili, as a deliberate provocation. The defacement drew a sharp diplomatic response. After much effort, the Greek Patriarchate denounced the "act of vandalism." Israel saw to the painting's restoration but did not keep its promise to Georgia that experts from that country would be permitted to participate in the restoration. The Israel Police investigation of the incident ended without result.

The more recent defacement has also turned into a international diplomatic incident involving Israel, Georgia and Greece. The Georgian scientists once again appealed to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem in an effort to find a solution. After months of inaction, the affair has recently received wide coverage in the Georgian media.

Israel's Ambassador to Tbilisi, Shabtai Tzur, was even summoned to Georgia's Foreign Ministry to receive an official letter of protest expressing Georgia's concern for the preservation of its history in Israel. Georgia has also requested that Israel investigate the incident and repair the damage to the wall text with the aid of Georgian experts.

The monastery in the Valley of the Cross belonged to the Georgian Church until the 19th century, when the church essentially went bankrupt and was forced to sell all of its assets in the region to Greeks. Israeli experts believe the Greek Church, and perhaps the Israeli government as well, fear that Georgia could demand the return of its properties

in the country. In light of the fact that many plots in strategic locations in Jerusalem and other cities are leased by Israel from the Greeks (including the land on which the Knesset stands), Israel behaves with great caution in its dealings with the Greek Church.

"After the defacement of Rustaveli's portrait the Georgian people expected Israel to protect Georgian history in Jerusalem and the rest of Israel," Georgia's ambassador to Israel, Lasha Zhvania, said in response to the June incident. "Unfortunately no real investigation of that incident was carried out and no one was punished for it. We suspended our appeal to UNESCO two years ago, on the assumption that Israel was protecting Georgian culture. And now, in 2006, the story repeats itself. This time the Greek Patriarchate has not even denounced the incident."

Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantine, Secretary-General of the Greek Orthodox Synod of Jerusalem, stated that the Patriarchate rejects the claim that the vandalism was a recent event or that it was intentional. He said the Patriarchate in Jerusalem seeks to deal with the incident and reach conciliation among all the parties involved.

The entire affair is further complicated by the fact that the Greek Orthodox Church is in effect ruled by two Patriarchs: Irineos, who is recognized by Israel only, and Theophilus, who is recognized by the Greek Orthodox world.

The vandalism incidents are not the only ones surrounding the Monastery of the Cross. Two years ago the main road leading to the monastery was dedicated in Rustaveli's name. Since then the street sign has been stolen three times. Zhvania recently learned that the Jerusalem municipality received a letter from a group calling itself the Israel-Georgia Friendship Association asking that a different street in Jerusalem be named after Rustaveli instead, ostensibly to avoid the recurring thefts. The ambassador said it is important to the Georgian people and the local community that the street name remains as it is. He called the letter a major provocation "that harms relations between Israel and Georgia."

The Georgian President is scheduled to visit Israel later this month, but no connection has been drawn between the visit and the latest incident.

*By Lily Galili
Haaretz - 8 October 2006*

5,000 evangelical Christians march for Israel in Jerusalem

More than 5,000 evangelical Christians, including believers from as far afield as Congo and New Zealand, marched through Jerusalem Tuesday to voice their support for Zionism and the state of Israel.

The event was organized by the International Christian Embassy of Israel.

"I am here to show my love and support for the people of Israel," explained Mpyo Muambi, a pastor from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Earlier this year, the Vatican's envoy [sic] in the Holy Land and bishops from three other churches launched a rare attack on the Christian Zionist movement, accusing it of promoting "racial exclusivity and perpetual war."

"The Christian Zionist program provides a world view where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism," a declaration read.

Those joining Tuesday's march, the 27th pilgrimage of its kind, dismissed these accusations, adding that Israel needs their help all the more following its recent war in Lebanon.

"After the war, we wanted even more for the people of Israel to know that we are not afraid. God wanted us to come to show them we love them," said Jan Christianson, 61, who came from New Zealand with her husband.

The pilgrims, many of them wearing t-shirts bearing the slogan "Israel, you are in our hearts," were welcomed on Sunday with a message from Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"This is the city God has chosen to be the capital of the Jewish people and it will remain the capital of the Jewish people," the recorded message said. In response, the crowd applauded and shouted in Hebrew: "The nation of Israel lives!"

*By Reuters
Haaretz - 11 October 2006*

Israel unopposed to building of 5th Temple Mount Minaret

Israel has not objected to Jordanian plans to construct a fifth minaret on the Temple Mount, and the Hashemite Kingdom is pressing ahead with plans to do so early next year, a senior Jordanian official said Wednesday.

The minaret, which will be constructed on the eastern wall of the Temple Mount near the Golden Gate, will at 42 meters be the highest of the minarets on the Mount and the first to be built in more than 600 years, Dr. Raief Najim, vice chairman of the committee running the project, told *The Jerusalem Post* in a telephone interview from Amman.

Rabbis split on Temple Mount synagogue plan

He said he spoke with Israeli authorities about the plan last year and did not hear any objections to the proposed construction. He revealed that he toured the intended site

with a top Jerusalem police commander, a senior government official and the head of the Antiquities Authority and none of them voiced any opposition.

"Even though the political situation has changed, I do not think they will refuse to construct such a thing," he said.

The Prime Minister's Office said Wednesday that no decision was taken to approve the construction of the minaret. The Antiquities Authority declined comment.

Earlier this week, King Abdullah II issued an international tender for the design of the minaret, which is expected to cost 400,000 to 500,000 Jordanian Dinars (NIS 2.4 million to NIS 3m.).

The winner of the tender will be chosen in three months, Najim said, adding that construction work could begin early next year.

Najim, who met with Abdullah on Monday to finalize the plans, said that the minaret will be constructed in Hashemite style to differentiate it from the previous four minarets, which were built in the Mameluke style, and will include seven sides representing the star on the Jordanian flag.

According to a decades-old regulation in place at the Temple Mount, Israel maintains overall security control, while the Wakf, or Islamic trust, is charged with day-to-day administration.

A leading Israeli archaeologist lambasted the plan. "I am against any change in the status quo on the Temple Mount," said Bar-Ilan University's Dr. Gabi Barkai, a member of the Committee Against the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount. "If the status quo is being changed, then it should not just be the addition of Muslim structures at the site."

In contravention of the law, Antiquities Authority archaeologists have not been carrying out full-time supervision of the site for much of the last decade due to their concern about renewed Palestinian violence, despite the reopening of the compound to non-Muslims two years ago.

During this period, Israel has been keen to involve the Jordanians in the ongoing repair work on the Temple Mount, as they are considered more moderate than the Palestinian heads of the Wakf appointed by Yasser Arafat on his return to the West Bank 10 years ago.

The other minarets include three near the Western Wall and one near the northern wall. The first minaret was constructed on the southwest corner of the Temple Mount in 1278. The second was built in 1297 by order of a Mameluke king, the third by a governor of Jerusalem in 1329, and the last in 1367.

"For the past century all Hashemite intervention [here] was restoration and maintenance, and now for the first time there will be a new monument on the site," Najim said.

*By Etgar Lefkovits
The Jerusalem Post - 11 October 2006*

Silver found in 2,000-year-old Jerusalem pottery hints at city's wealth during late Second Temple period

Unusually high concentrations of silver have been found during excavations in Jerusalem's Old City by Bar-Ilan University researchers in samples of different types of pottery from late Second Temple period some two millennia ago.

It was the first study ever conducted on the silver content of archaeological ceramics, said the BIU team, which worked with the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. They published their results in the latest issue of the University of Oxford journal *Archaeometry*.

The research team, consisting of Prof. David Adan-Bayewitz of the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at BIU in Ramat Gan and guest at the Berkeley lab, and Dr. Frank Asaro and Robert Giauque of the Environmental Energy Technologies Division at the California lab studied silver concentrations in 1,200 pottery vessels from 38 sites in Roman Judea, which is present-day Israel, dating from between the late first century BCE and 70 CE.

The major finding is that samples of pottery from late Second Temple period Jerusalem had anomalously higher concentrations of silver, as compared to samples from all other non-urban sites dated to the same period of time.

Many of the samples from Jerusalem and other rural and urban sites were otherwise indistinguishable in date, shape and chemical composition.

Anomalously high silver abundances were also detected in pottery found at other urban sites (Sepphoris, Dor and Beit She'an). But many of the Jerusalem samples had higher silver values (above 5.5 parts per million) than any of the samples from the other cities.

The geographical distribution of the samples with high silver cannot be explained by natural causes, said the researchers, who deduced that the origin of the silver is related to human activity. The team also concluded that silver was washed into the pottery by the action of groundwater - but it is possible that in some cases the high silver may have been related to the use of the pottery in antiquity.

The researchers suggest that the anomalously high silver concentrations they found in the Jerusalem pottery samples may be analytical evidence of the wealth of the city during the period. The findings from this study also suggest that the measurement of silver in pottery may be a useful tool for evaluating archaeological remains and patterns of urban contamination in antiquity.

The research team notes that Jerusalem and its Temple was the religious and national focus of Jews throughout the Roman Empire during the period, leading to substantial growth and accumulation of wealth by the city's inhabitants.

The Roman scholar Pliny the Elder, who lived during this time, called Jerusalem "by far the most famous city of the East." Jewish pilgrims to Jerusalem contributed to the city's wealth, and continual donations to the Temple made it a target for plunder. The

archaeological remains unearthed in the Upper City, today's Jewish Quarter, also attest to the wealth of the inhabitants in this period.

"Our findings," says Adan-Bayewitz, "showed that the silver concentrations in many of the late Second Temple-period Jerusalem samples are distinctly higher than those from all other sites, as well as Jerusalem samples of a later date."

The team developed a new analytical method for measuring silver concentrations in archaeological pottery that they found is more reliable than available techniques.

This new method was used to check the results obtained with two other techniques employed by the team for silver measurements. The research was funded in largely by the US National Science Foundation and the US-Israel Binational Science Foundation.

*By Judy Siegel-Itzkovich
The Jerusalem Post - 28 September 2006*

And that's how they lived in Zippori

Two deep canals, discovered this summer at the Zippori National Park by a Hebrew University expedition, will probably help solve the riddle occupying researchers: how water reached the town, which was the capital of the Galilee during the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.

In July 2003 Dr. Zvika Zuk, a National Parks Authority archaeologist, discovered a large water reservoir at Zippori's eastern entrance. Zuk, who was digging at the site in cooperation with the Israel Antiquities Authority, discovered a reservoir covered with two layers of mortar along with the remains of five cut stone arches that once supported a roof over the reservoir.

The dimensions and style of the reservoir led researchers to believe it served as one of Zippori's primary water sources during the first century C.E., in the Roman period. During the second century C.E., a larger reservoir was built to the southeast. The head of the excavation, Professor Zeev Weiss of the Hebrew University, thinks the canals helped supply water to the reservoirs.

Discovered nearby were smaller canals, and pipes from clay and lead. The two large canals were covered in gray mortar. Researchers believe they were connected to the two aqueducts that brought water to the reservoirs from the Mashhad and Al-Reina fountains, east of Zippori. One canal is connected to the northern aqueduct, and the other to the southern one.

Larger than thought

The waterworks discovered this summer gave researchers a better understanding of the structure and dimensions of ancient Zippori. One of the large canals stretches along the Decumanos - the city's colonnaded east-west road, which Weiss says welcomed travellers arriving from the large neighboring city to the east, Tiberius.

As with all Roman cities, Zippori's roads were laid out like a grid. At the center were two colonnaded roads, the Decumanos and the Cardo, which ran from north to south. The two streets were paved with diagonally-placed rectangular stone slates. This season, another section of the Decumanos was discovered.

The new segment is 27 meters long. There are two stone steps along it on the northern side, which Weiss said were used to reach the paved section above the road and the houses facing it. Structures built in the Roman and early Byzantine periods were found at excavations both north and south of the road, but the work was interrupted by the war and did not resume. Students at the Archaeological Institute, youth and local workers took part in this memorial excavation for the late Dr. Noam Shudofsky. It was funded by the Hebrew University and foreign donors with the assistance of the National Parks Authority.

Near the water structures and canals another street segment was discovered, crossing the Decumanos from north to south. This street was previously unknown, and according to Weiss it testifies to the city's dimensions during the Roman period. Beforehand, the grid of streets had been revealed mostly in the western part of the city, west of the Cardo. This newly discovered street shows Zippori was larger than researchers previously estimated, but more work is still required to excavate the streets and structures between the main roads.

When in Rome

The previously unknown road, along with the waterworks and canals, provide a much clearer picture of ancient Roman Zippori. It was a Jewish city built in Roman style. The city's structure, says Weiss, shows its inhabitants adopted the Roman ways they had previously opposed.

Zippori was the capital of the Galilee during Herod's time, the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. After Herod died, the people of Zippori rebelled against Roman rule. In response the city was torched and its people were sold into slavery.

The city was rebuilt, but Tiberius, founded during the time of Herod's son, became the new regional capital. Zippori's residents included some of the wealthiest and most distinguished Jews of their era. When the great rebellion broke out in 66 C.E., the people of Zippori chose to draw on past experience and did not join it. Because of this, the city was not destroyed and was rebuilt in Roman style after the rebellion, Weiss says.

As a result, many structures remain today, but more importantly, Zippori later become a center of Jewish revival after the great rebellion. Survivors found shelter there, and Jewish thought and tradition resumed in the city.

Decades later, halfway through the second century C.E., Zippori became the center of Jewish life in Israel. In the days of Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, the Sanhedrin resided there, where it sealed the Mishna. In fact, says Weiss, Zippori should have become a symbol, rather than Masada.

*By Ran Shapira
Haaretz - 11 October 2006*

Endangered tourism

Earlier this week, the Jerusalem Hotel Association and the Association of Tour Guides sponsored a press conference at the Olive Tree Hotel to deliver a very alarming message.

According to their figures, the second war in Lebanon and the lack of ministerial support for tourism has already caused considerable damage, and that damage is likely to get worse.

Should the government continue to refuse to provide support for the tourist industry, officials warned, tourism in 2007 and 2008 will drop from the predicted 2.9 million and 3.3 million tourists to 1.5 million and 1.9 million, respectively.

"If the government does respond to these figures and does decide to launch a serious marketing campaign, we might see a slight improvement," says Rafi Praver, deputy manager of the Hotel Association. "The numbers could rise to 2.1 million in 2007 and to 2.6 million in 2008. This is not enough, but it could save us from a total loss."

But the participants complained about more than the lack of government support. "There is a conspiracy of silence around this crisis in tourism," accuses Praver, who is the owner of a hotel in Jerusalem and was once the Tourism Ministry's representative in the United States. "It will soon lead to firing employees. In Jerusalem, we might have to fire as many as 4,000 to 5,000 people."

"During the recent period of Jewish holidays, we saw lots of tourists on the streets of Jerusalem," says Yonatan Harpaz, head of the Jerusalem Hotel Association. "But it was much less than expected. And we can't measure the achievements in one or two weeks, we have to see the whole year, the whole picture."

The participants all agreed that the government, and more precisely, the Tourism and Finance ministries, hold the keys to the solution to the problem.

"They act as if the war in Lebanon had no effect," Praver says. "All over the world, people saw pictures of the war on their televisions - the rockets, the bombs, the people in shelters. Of course we know that the war was in the North and not in Jerusalem, and that it was miles and miles away from here. But people miles and miles away truly believe that's what was happening throughout the country."

He continues, "In Egypt, after the terrorist bombings in Sinai, the Egyptian government understood immediately what was at stake. They understood that without decisive action - public relations, marketing, investment in advertising - they could say good-bye to the huge profits that tourism was bringing their country. So can someone tell me why the Israeli government cannot understand and do what the Egyptian government can understand and do?"

Danny Biran, head of the Association of Tour Guides, spoke even more harshly. "We can do arts and crafts with all the detailed plans and proposals we sent to the Tourism Ministry suggesting save the situation and what should be done. They didn't even bother to look at them. We don't want charity, we just want them to treat us as what we are - an important economic industry. All we ask is that they invest in this incoming

tourism, in order to make the best of it. We can create jobs and also, as a by-product, tourism is a very good way to improve Israel's image in the world.

"Just image," he continues, "if CNN and the other big media organizations showed, instead of pictures of war or terror, beautiful advertising of tourist sites."

Adds Ariela Shmida, owner and manager of a hotel in Jerusalem, "Israel is not very well-loved in the world, but the government could sell Jerusalem alone, separately, as a city that is important for millions of Christians in the world."

The vulnerability of employment in the tourist industry is one of the most problematic aspects of the current crisis. In 2000, some 6,500 were employed in the hotel industry. Nearly 4,000 were fired during the Intifada, but by the eve of this summer's war, the numbers of employees had climbed back to approximately 3,000.

"Our figures indicate that at least 40 percent of these people will lose their jobs in the coming days or weeks," Harpaz and Shmida warn.

Says Haim Rogatka, manager of Mini Israel and head of the association of tourist site operators, "We have about 200 tourist sites in the country. We employ about 8,000 people. In the coming days we will have to fire approximately 2,500 of them, because we don't expect enough tourists in the coming months."

A participant who requested not to be identified says, "All of this is true. But perhaps this could be a good occasion to rethink the outrageous prices at those sites - besides the tickets, which are not cheap unless you come in a group, everything you get there is unbelievably expensive, for no reason. An average family - and some of these sites are especially geared to families with children - could easily end the day paying NIS 400 to NIS 500. This is insane."

The participant continued to note that while the government's responsibility "is clear," the lack of "cheap and decent hotels," such as the kind you can easily find in Europe and the USA, is also part of the problem. "When you only invest in four or five star hotels, you shouldn't be surprised to find out that you only get the rich tourists. The others will go only to the cheaper places in east Jerusalem or they won't come at all, preferring to stay in Jordan or Egypt."

Deputy Mayor Yigal Amedi, who holds the culture and tourism portfolio in the Jerusalem Municipality, contends that his presence at the press conference was "living proof of the deep concern with which the mayor and the entire municipal administration regard the situation. We believe that tourism is important for the city and thus we have already invested large budgets in promoting various events throughout the year, together with the municipality's auxiliary company, Ariel. But nothing can replace the government and its budgets.

MK Yoram Marciano (Labor), head of the tourism lobby in the Knesset, announced that he has "managed to convince" the head of the Knesset committee, Ruhama Avraham, to convene a special emergency meeting.

Neither the Tourism Ministry nor the Finance Ministry responded to *In Jerusalem's* queries.

*By Peggy Cidor
The Jerusalem Post - 19 October 2006*

SELECTIONS OF ITEMS FROM VATICAN INFORMATION SERVICE

Declaration concerning Pope's Regensburg Address

Yesterday evening, Holy See Press Office Director Fr. Federico Lombardi S.J. released the following declaration to journalists concerning the interpretation of certain passages of the address delivered by the Holy Father at the University of Regensburg on September 12.

"Concerning the reaction of Muslim leaders to certain passages of the Holy Father's address at the University of Regensburg, it should be noted that what the Holy Father has to heart - and which emerges from an attentive reading of the text - is a clear and radical rejection of the religious motivation for violence.

"It was certainly not the intention of the Holy Father to undertake a comprehensive study of the jihad and of Muslim ideas on the subject, still less to offend the sensibilities of Muslim faithful.

"Quite the contrary, what emerges clearly from the Holy Father's discourses is a warning, addressed to Western culture, to avoid 'the contempt for God and the cynicism that considers mockery of the sacred to be an exercise of freedom.' A just consideration of the religious dimension is, in fact, an essential premise for fruitful dialogue with the great cultures and religions of the world. And indeed, in concluding his address in Regensburg, Benedict XVI affirmed how 'the world's profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures.'

"What is clear then, is the Holy Father's desire to cultivate an attitude of respect and dialogue towards other religions and cultures, including, of course, Islam."

VIS - 15 September 2006

Declaration by Cardinal Bertone

At midday today, Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. released the following declaration:

"Given the reaction in Muslim quarters to certain passages of the Holy Father's address at the University of Regensburg, and the clarifications and explanations already presented through the Director of the Holy See Press Office, I would like to add the following:

"The position of the Pope concerning Islam is unequivocally that expressed by the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*: 'The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, Who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.'

"The Pope's option in favor of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is equally unequivocal. In his meeting with representatives of Muslim communities in Cologne, Germany, on 20 August 2005, he said that such dialogue between Christians and Muslims 'cannot be reduced to an optional extra,' adding: 'The lessons of the past must help us to avoid repeating the same mistakes. We must seek paths of reconciliation and learn to live with respect for each other's identity.'

"As for the opinion of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus which he quoted during his Regensburg talk, the Holy Father did not mean, nor does he mean, to make that opinion his own in any way. He simply used it as a means to undertake - in an academic context, and as is evident from a complete and attentive reading of the text - certain reflections on the theme of the relationship between religion and violence in general, and to conclude with a clear and radical rejection of the religious motivation for violence, from whatever side it may come. On this point, it is worth recalling what Benedict XVI himself recently affirmed in his commemorative Message for the 20th anniversary of the Inter-religious Meeting of Prayer for Peace, initiated by his predecessor John Paul II at Assisi in October 1986: '... demonstrations of violence cannot be attributed to religion as such but to the cultural limitations with which it is lived and develops in time. ... In fact, attestations of the close bond that exists between the relationship with God and the ethics of love are recorded in all great religious traditions.'

"The Holy Father thus sincerely regrets that certain passages of his address could have sounded offensive to the sensitivities of the Muslim faithful, and should have been interpreted in a manner that in no way corresponds to his intentions. Indeed it was he who, before the religious fervor of Muslim believers, warned secularized Western culture to guard against 'the contempt for God and the cynicism that considers mockery of the sacred to be an exercise of freedom.'

"In reiterating his respect and esteem for those who profess Islam, he hopes they will be helped to understand the correct meaning of his words so that, quickly surmounting this present uneasy moment, witness to the 'Creator of heaven and earth, Who has spoken to men' may be reinforced, and collaboration may intensify 'to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom'."

VIS - 16 September 2006

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