



Expose: The Vatican Wants to Lay its Hands on Jerusalem

The Vatican is now reiterating demands for control of religious sites in Jerusalem. Jordan's occupation 1948-1967 didn't bother them.

Giulio Meotti, Italy

“Peace negotiations in the Middle East must tackle the issue of the status of the holy sites of Jerusalem”, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, head of the Vatican’s Council for Interreligious Dialogue, declared several days ago in Rome.

The Vatican’s former foreign minister asked to place some Israeli holy places under Vatican authority, alluding to the Cenacle on Mount Zion and the garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

The first site also houses what is referred to as King David’s tomb.

“There will not be peace if the question of the holy sites is not adequately resolved”, Tauran said. “The part of Jerusalem within the walls – with the holy sites of the three religions – is humanity’s heritage. The sacred and unique character of the area must be safeguarded and it can only be done with a special, internationally-guaranteed statute”.

The Israeli government and the Vatican are deadlocked in discussions over the status of the religious sites. Vatican officials are now reiterating their demand for control over the religious sites in the ancient and holy city founded by King David as the capital of ancient Israel and now the capital of the reestablished Jewish state.

Danny Ayalon, Israel’s deputy foreign minister, declared that Israel might consider giving the Vatican “a greater role” in operating the sites. In the last weeks, the Roman Catholic Church’s authorities increased their political initiatives for Catholic control over some sites in Jerusalem.

The Vatican’s former archbishop in Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, just promoted an appeal to the European Union and United States to “stop the Hebraization of Jerusalem”.

Two weeks ago Msgr. David-Maria Jaeger, who was recently appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to the Vatican’s highest court, talked in Washington about a current U.S. Supreme Court case over whether an American boy born in Jerusalem should add Israel after the name of the historic city on his U.S. passport. Jaeger said that the question about Jerusalem is not “whether it is the capital of Israel, it is a question of whether it is a part of a national territory”.

A few days earlier, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Fouad Twal, gave a speech to greet the bishops of Europe and North America during their annual pilgrimage in Israel, in which Twal denounced “the Israeli right wing invading more and more of Jerusalem and trying to transform it into an only Hebrew-Jewish city, excluding the other faiths”.

Claudette Habesch, the Caritas general-secretary in Jerusalem, a Vatican NGO that works in social activities, just released an interview to *Zenit* news agency, in which he “christianized” the Palestinian Intifada against

“what we call the Checkpoint of Humiliation”.

In September, Patriarch of Jerusalem Tawal was at the White House for a meeting with the American administration as well as to support the PA statehood bid at the UN. Tawal repeated Benedict XVI's speech of May 13, 2009 in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, one of the most political speeches ever pronounced by Ratzinger during his pontificate. It was given in front of the most eloquent symbol of the conflict: the security wall between Israel and the PA areas.

On that day the Pope spoke specifically of an “independent Palestinian state”.

The Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, the Vatican's powerful agency for worldwide pilgrimages, just organized a “marathon for peace” in Jerusalem to protest against the security fence near Bethlehem and to support "Palestinian political rights". The march began on the Mount of Olives, “where the Last Supper took place”.

On December 1st, several Christian and Muslim dignitaries met in Beit Sahour for a conference on “How to live together in a future Palestinian state?”. Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah and Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, also attended the event organized by Al-Liqa, a Vatican ecumenical center based in Bethlehem.

Sabbah said that “recourse to the UN for a Palestinian state is a step toward peace”. Last summer, Latin Patriarch Tawal took part in a meeting in London with Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury, in which the Vatican envoy denounced the “more than 550,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank” and “the demography of Jerusalem changing rapidly with the sacred space being threatened”.

In 2006, then Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, negotiated to give away the “holy basin” to the Vatican.

At the time, President Moshe Katzav, in the face of increasing public pressure, was forced to deny any plans to sign away the King David's complex in Jerusalem.

It now appears that this option has once again surfaced. A major voice for the Vatican's plan is Hanna Siniora, the elder statesman of Palestinian 'peace' activists, whose office is in the Vatican's Tantur Institute for Ecumenical Studies in Jerusalem.

The site known as King David's Tomb is the major target in the Vatican's plan. It's a complex of buildings of some 100,000 square feet where David and Solomon, and kings of Judea, are said to be buried, although this is disputed by historians.

The Upper Room, or Cenacle, as it is known, is on the second floor of the Crusader-era building. During his visit to Israel in 2000, Pope John Paul II held Mass there. The Roman Catholic Church has been fighting for more than 450 years to win back control over the sanctuary, which was seized from Franciscan monks during the Ottoman Empire's rule around 1551.

The building was granted to the Diaspora Yeshiva over 40 years ago, and yeshiva heads fear that the Vatican wishes to turn it into a pilgrimage site for hundreds of thousands of Catholics and hold religious services there.

The Vatican wants Israel relinquishing sovereignty at the Western Wall and the Temple Mount. The Holy See uses the expression “Holy Basin”, which refers to the area of the Temple Mount, the Mount of Olives, Mount Zion and a variety of Christian holy sites which the administration of former U.S. President Bill Clinton began recommending be administered under a “special regime”.

The Obama plan also calls for resolving the two thorniest issues in the conflict by sharing Jerusalem and settling Arab refugees in Arab countries or a future Palestinian state, but not in Israel. According to Obama, the Old City of Jerusalem would be designated an “international zone”.

Israel's President Shimon Peres, who has no authority, also agreed to hand over to the Vatican the sovereignty of the holy sites.

Any Vatican claim to a seat at the negotiating table is undermined by the complicity of the Vatican between 1948 and 1967. During the Jordanian occupation, Judaism's holiest sites were desecrated and Jews were barred from visiting these shrines. The Jordanians built a hotel and a road through the Jewish cemetery on Mount of Olives and they used the broken headstones to build the latrines in the construction of the Intercontinental Hotel, which likely rests on burial grounds.

As was its practice during the Holocaust under Pius XII, the Vatican then turned a deaf ear to these gross violations of Jewish human rights.

If Israel would cede Jewish sovereignty on the holy sites, it would mean returning to a time when Jerusalem was separated by a seven-kilometer wall, barbed wire, minefields and bunkers. A tourist visiting the holy city would have found signs warning "Danger - Frontier ahead!", "Snipers nearby" and "shetah hahefker", which in Hebrew means: No-Man's Land.

It would be Sarajevo, not the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The writer, an Italian journalist with Il Foglio, writes a weekly column for Arutz Sheva. He is the author of the book "A New Shoah", that researched the personal stories of Israel's terror victims, published by Encounter. His writing has appeared in publications, such as the Wall Street Journal, YNet, Frontpage and Commentary.

www.israelnationalnews.com