

# Vatican To Stop Missionizing Jews

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After meeting the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, and praying at the Western Wall, Pope Benedict XVI held an historic meeting with the chief rabbis at Heichal Shlomo, next to the capital's Great Synagogue, and agreed that the Catholic Church will cease all missionary activity among Jews.

In his welcoming address, Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Yona Metzger thanked the pope for his announcement, calling it an "historic agreement" and, "for us, an immensely important message."

Metzger also welcomed the pope on to "our holy land—the land to which we prayed to return during 2,000 years of exile... And, with G-d's help, our meeting today is taking place in the Land of Israel, in our city of Jerusalem—the eternal capital of the Jewish people."

In a hint of criticism over Benedict's speech at Yad Vashem which was received with disappointment for its failure to apologize on behalf of the Catholic Church while paying tribute to the memory of the six million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust, Metzger hailed Benedict's predecessor, "Pope John Paul II, who visited us nine years ago, placed a note between the stones of the Western Wall, and in it a request for forgiveness from the Jewish people for the suffering caused to them throughout history, and of the Christian commitment toward true fraternity between our peoples."

Metzger also thanked Benedict for preventing the full reinstatement of Holocaust-denying Bishop Richard Williamson. (The Vatican lifted Williamson's excommunication in January, but after his views attracted widespread media coverage, the Vatican declared that "in order to be admitted to episcopal functions within the Church, [he] will have to take his distance, in an absolutely unequivocal and public fashion, from his position on the Shoah.")

"Had you not done so," Metzger explained, "a message may have been understood by another Holocaust denier—the president of Iran, granting legitimacy to his sinful declarations of his will and intention to destroy our country. I commend with appreciation your clear proclamation that anti-Semitism is not only a sin against the Jews, but also a sin against G-d," the chief rabbi continued.

Metzger then asked the pope to act on the issue of lost Jewish refugees; children saved by Christians during the Holocaust who were never told by their adoptive parents that they were Jews.

"Your Holiness, as you know, during the Holocaust many parents deposited their children in trust with the various churches throughout Europe," he said. "To our sorrow, six million Jews did not return."

Metzger also mentioned the pope's visit to the Western Wall, which is a "house of prayer for all nations," but lamented that "unfortunately there are those who have transformed their houses of prayer into warehouses of weapons and terror.

"One thing alone still threatens us all," he said, "the use of religion as a means for the killing of innocent people."

Metzger concluded by saying "It is my heartfelt blessing that together we will merit to add love, mutual respect, and peace in our world. For each people will walk in the name of their G-d; And we will walk in the name of the Lord our G-d..."

Chief Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar also took the podium, telling Benedict, "You represent a great and enormous nation, that knows and reads from the Bible and the Prophets."

Amar also focused on the fulfillment of G-d's promise to restore the Jewish People to their land, even in the face of despair.

"Who would have imagined, in the wake of the Holocaust, that our nation would not only return to its land, but also begin to fulfill the mitzvot given to them from G-d," Amar said.

"We, those who merit living here today," he continued, "see this happening to us. Our nation is standing on its feet, like the dry bones, taking on 'skin and sinews,' with the banner of Torah and Judaism waving above it."

Speaking after Amar, the pope vowed to continue the dialogue between Christianity and Judaism in an effort to advance the process of reconciliation.

"I am grateful for the invitation to visit Heichal Shlomo and to meet with you during this trip of mine to the Holy Land as bishop of Rome," he said. "I thank Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar and Ashkenazi Rabbi Yona Metzger for their warm words of welcome and the desire they have expressed to continue strengthening the bonds of friendship which the Catholic Church and the Chief Rabbinate have labored so diligently to forge over the past decades. Your visits to the Vatican in 2003 and 2005 are a sign of the

goodwill which characterizes our developing relations.

"Distinguished rabbis, Benedict continued, "I reciprocate by expressing my own respect and esteem for you and your communities. I assure you of my desire to deepen mutual understanding and cooperation between the Holy See, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and Jewish people throughout the world."

"A great source of satisfaction for me since the beginning of my pontificate has been the fruit yielded by the ongoing dialogue between the Delegation of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation for Relations with the Catholic Church. I wish to thank the members of both delegations for their dedication and hard work in implementing this initiative, so earnestly desired by my esteemed predecessor Pope John Paul II, as he said during the Great Jubilee Year of 2000."

The pope also spoke of the need for a "shared concern in the face of moral relativism and the offences it spawns against the dignity of the human person."

"In approaching the most urgent ethical questions of our day, our two communities are challenged to engage people of goodwill at the level of reason, while simultaneously pointing to the religious foundations which best sustain lasting moral values," he said. "May the dialogue that has begun continue to generate ideas on how Christians and Jews can work together to heighten society's appreciation of the distinctive contribution of our religious and ethical traditions."

Then the pope reiterated points the Catholic Church has made in recent years.

"Today, I have the opportunity to repeat that the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the path chosen at the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965] for a genuine and lasting reconciliation between Christians and Jews. As the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* makes clear, the Church continues to value the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews and desires an ever deeper mutual understanding and respect through biblical and theological studies as well as fraternal dialogues."

The pontiff then concluded with a prayer, quoting the Book of Psalms.

"I pray that G-d, who searches our hearts and knows our thoughts, will continue to enlighten us with his wisdom, so that we may follow his commandments to love him with all our heart, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Thank you." (JPost.com)

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