

Vatican and Israel sign historic pact

The Vatican and Israel have signed an accord establishing formal diplomatic relations. The two nations will shortly exchange diplomats and a Papal visit to Israel is in the planning stages.

The 15-point agreement, signed on December 30, concluded 17 months of negotiations. It includes a clause committing both sides to combating anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance.

Baltimore Archbishop William H. Keeler who has been involved in Catholic-Jewish dialog since the end of Vatican II praised the efforts of Pope John Paul II and said that many people, "particularly some in the Jewish community, are unaware of the tremendous developments within the Catholic Church in implementing *Nostra Aetate*. Now we have supporting efforts, including doctoral dissertations, showing how the Catholic Church teaches about Jews and Judaism."

New York *Daily News* Religion editor Charles W. Bell credited New York's Cardinal O'Connor with playing a "fundamental" but unpublicized behind the scenes role in the process.

Critics, including a *New York Times* editorial writer, couldn't resist the temptation to turn the occasion into a platform for anti-Catholic posturing. The *Times* editorial criticized the Church for planning to locate its embassy in an Arab suburb of Tel Aviv. The purported failure of the Church to denounce the Nazi Holocaust – surely as rankling to Catholics as the Holocaust deniers are to Jews – was once again paraded out as fact.

Given the history of Vatican – Israeli relations, most observers expect that it will take some time for the relationship to mature. Vatican press spokesman Joaquin

Navarro-Valls expressed the hope that the accord would open the way for the Vatican to have a greater impact on the Middle East peace process.