

JEWS WELCOME VATICAN BODY'S STAND AGAINST BEATIFICATION OF ISABELLA

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, March 21 (JTA) -- A potentially serious rift in Catholic-Jewish relations has been averted as a result of a Vatican panel's decision to recommend against beatifying Queen Isabella I of Spain.

The 40 bishops on the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity unanimously passed a resolution which reportedly states that the proposed beatification of Isabella contradicts current church positions on the freedom of conscience.

The resolution, which was not made public, also reportedly concludes there is no evidence that Isabella fulfills the requirements for sainthood, which include proof that the candidate performed at least two miracles during her lifetime.

It also suggests her beatification would work against the Vatican's interest in promoting 1992 as the 500th anniversary of the advent of Christianity in the "new world," rather than as the dark close to the golden age of Spanish Jewry.

Isabella is viewed as a despot by both Jews and Moslems, who were subjected to torture, forced conversion and expulsion during her reign from 1474-1504.

Under her leadership, the Inquisition was established in all of Spain. In 1492, Jews were required to convert to Christianity or leave Castile and Aragon. In 1502, Moslems were forced to make the same choice.

The resolution recommending against beatification was presented to Pope John Paul II.

Though the Pontifical Council has no formal jurisdiction over the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which oversees the actual process of making saints, several bishops participate in both groups.

The resolution carries great "moral weight," according to one Catholic theologian.

"Though it doesn't officially kill the effort, most people consider it a dead case now," said the Rev. John Pawlikowski of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

'Postponed Indefinitely'

Several senior American Catholic officials agreed that the beatification of Isabella is now a dead issue. They said a statement may be issued by the Vatican confirming that her cause has been "postponed indefinitely," which, in the language of the church, would mean that her case is no longer being considered.

A significant factor in the Pontifical Council's decision was said to be the outcry from Catholic, Jewish and Moslem groups around the world once news of Isabella's proposed beatification spread.

Jewish and Catholic leaders from Chicago sent a joint letter to Cardinal Angelo Felici of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, urging him to "put this proposal to rest in light of the significant damage it would do to contemporary interreligious relations."

Nineteen religious and community leaders signed the letter, including Rev. Daniel Montalbano, director of Catholic-Jewish relations for the Archdiocese of Chicago; Pawlikowski of the

Catholic Theological Union; Michael Kotzin, director of the Chicago Jewish Community Relations Council; and Maynard Wishner, chair of the Chicago JCRC.

According to Wishner, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, a member of the Pontifical Council, introduced the resolution at the Vatican.

News of its adoption was revealed to the American Jewish community at a March 5 meeting between Bernardin and Jewish leaders in Chicago.

The Pontifical Council was formed in 1969 to implement the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which transformed the historical attitudes of the Catholic Church toward Judaism. The pope appoints each of the 40 bishops on the body.

The Pontifical Council has under its domain the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews, the group that has regular contact with world Jewry through IJCIC, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

'Our Relationship Is Really Working'

To many of the Jewish leaders who were vocal in their opposition to Isabella's candidacy, the concern demonstrated by the Pontifical Council marks a maturation of the relationship between Catholics and Jews.

"This is a remarkable victory and evidence that our relationship is really working," declared Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, a member of the Synagogue Council of America's interreligious affairs commission and a former IJCIC chairman.

"Without any big public demonstrations, through diplomatic channels, we communicated what a disaster Queen Isabella was to human rights," he said.

Rabbi A. James Rudin, national director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, agreed.

"This shows the vitality of our communication, and that they are very sensitive to the teachings of Vatican II," he said. "In the past, this would have been done without anyone hearing about it. Not only did we hear about it, we had many Catholic allies on this."

"The whole issue of reconciliation is being helped by this move," said Andre Sassoon, vice president of the International Jewish Committee for Sepharad '92, the yearlong commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the dispersion of Spanish Jews to other lands.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, agreed. "It removes a potentially dangerous obstacle and is a tribute to the new dialogue we have entered into within the last year or two."

But Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of interreligious affairs for the Synagogue Council, said the Pontifical Council's resolution has less to do with Jewish objections than with Isabella's own inappropriateness as a model of sanctity.

"The church is clear what the criteria for beatification are, and she doesn't fill them," he said. "Jews and Moslems were a consideration, but not a central consideration. If they felt a person deserved beatification, they would do it."

Tanenbaum urged the Vatican to make a public statement about the decision on Queen Isabella, and to follow it up with education about her role in Jewish and Moslem history.

PALESTINIAN VIOLENCE ESCALATES WITH STABBING DEATH OF ISRAELI

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) -- The resurgence of random violence by Palestinians against individual Israelis, including brutal murder, has the security authorities seriously concerned.

A tougher crackdown on Palestinians from the administered territories appears likely after one more Israeli was stabbed to death Thursday and others were attacked in separate incidents.

At the same time, an Israeli human rights group charging "routine ill-treatment and torture" of Palestinian detainees has demanded an investigation.

Thursday's events, however, underlined the gravity of the situation facing Israeli citizens close to home.

Mordechai (Motke) Reuchman, a 70-year-old furniture dealer in Hadera, was stabbed to death in the storage room of his shop by an unidentified assailant who escaped with an accomplice.

Karen Beinhammer, 11, suffered a fractured skull when a rock was thrown at her parents' car north of Jerusalem.

In Hod Hasharon, near Hadera, two Israeli soldiers were stabbed by an Arab laborer Thursday morning.

Neither was seriously hurt. Their attacker was shot in the leg and beaten by passersby. He required hospitalization.

One soldier was released from the hospital after treatment. The other was expected to be discharged Friday.

The Hadera murder was clearly the most brutal crime and enraged residents of the town, where the victim was a lifelong resident and a prominent elder of the community. But his funeral Thursday was without incident.

4 Other Fatal Stabbings This Month

Reuchman was the fifth Israeli civilian knifed to death since a Gaza Arab fatally stabbed four Israeli women in rapid succession at a Jerusalem bus stop in broad daylight on March 10.

On the very next day, an Arab woman stabbed and wounded a Jewish settler in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

In Reuchman's case, according to witnesses, the victim was sitting in his store with his wife when an Arab entered and asked to see furniture. The dealer invited the supposed customer into the storage room, where the Arab stabbed him twice in the heart. Reuchman was discovered 10 minutes later lying in a pool of blood.

Ironically, he was murdered only 200 yards from the place where his father, Zvi Reuchman, had been murdered 50 years ago.

The wave of killings has been attributed to Palestinian anger and frustration over the swift defeat of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces by the U.S.-led coalition in the Persian Gulf war.

Palestinians were almost alone in the Arab world in their support of Hussein, who they believed was interested in advancing their cause.

The killings are also attributed to pent-up rage after living for seven weeks during the Gulf war under tight curfews imposed by the Israeli authorities throughout the administered territories.

But authorities are concentrating at the moment less on the causes of the murderous outbursts than on finding ways to protect an increasingly fearful and vengeful citizenry.

Police Inspector General Ya'acov Terner said

there is not much the police could do, since it is impossible to assign a police officer to every citizen.

He urged the public to exercise greater caution. He promised that security forces would do a better job of screening Arab residents of the territories who enter Israel to work each day.

But Terner conceded that a number of potential killers slip through the net.

Rights Group Alleges 'Torture'

Police Minister Ronni Milo summoned Terner and other senior officers for a discussion Thursday about how to reduce the number of attacks. One idea was to impose further limits on the number of Arabs allowed into Israel proper from the territories. That would require the cooperation of the Israel Defense Force, which is sovereign in the territories.

Police stationed at the many checkpoints have been ordered to conduct body searches of all Arab workers entering Israel and carefully inspect their belongings.

Such searches have been sources of friction between the Palestinians and Israeli security forces. But no more effective way of deterring potential assailants has been found.

Meanwhile, B'tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, called Thursday for an "independent commission of inquiry" to investigate the interrogation and "torture" methods Palestinian prisoners are allegedly subjected to in the territories.

The report said the General Security Services, known as Shin Bet, enjoys special status and no supervision. It cited a report on the Shin Bet several years ago by a judicial committee, headed by Moshe Landau of the High Court of Justice, which condoned "moderate physical pressure" on prisoners under interrogation.

Military sources promptly countered that the report is based on the testimony of individuals suspected of security violations and therefore is suspect.

The Justice Ministry said it was impossible to react to blanket charges. If there are specific complaints, they should be filed before the authorities open an investigation, the ministry said.

ISRAELIS KILL 2 IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 21 (JTA) -- Israel Defense Force soldiers killed two alleged terrorists and wounded a third outside the southern Lebanon security zone Thursday morning.

According to a military spokesman, an IDF unit was patrolling north of the security zone when it encountered a white Mercedes sedan thought to be acting in a suspicious manner.

The driver failed to halt when challenged, at which point the soldiers opened fire, killing two passengers and wounding the third, the IDF said.

The occupants of the car were reported to be members of Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian extremist Moslem militia.

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Yossi Peled, commander of the northern region, repeated that Israel will not withdraw from the security zone as long as there is no strong central authority in Beirut capable of keeping peace in the area.

The security zone, six miles deep and 50 miles long, was set up by the IDF in 1985 as a buffer against the infiltration of Israeli territory from Lebanon.

BLEARY-EYED KNESSET APPROVES BUDGET WITH MORE FUNDS FOR OLIM THAN DEFENSE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 21 (JTA) -- A half-empty plenum of bleary-eyed Knesset members voted Thursday afternoon to approve a \$30.6 billion state budget, which, for the first time in Israel's history, allocates more for immigration than defense spending.

The budget is for nine months only, covering April 1 through Dec. 31.

Many Knesset members went home to sleep after a late-night session Wednesday. Many of those who remained dozed through the droning recitation of clauses and sub-clauses and had to be nudged awake by colleagues when the time came to press the button to record their vote.

The 23-14 result was a less-than-impressive victory for Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's government, because only 31 percent of the 120-member parliament bothered to register votes.

Military spending in the new budget accounts for \$4.8 billion, compared with \$5.5 billion to help settle Soviet immigrants this year, triple last year's allocation for aliyah, Finance Ministry officials said.

But the lethargy was in response to a relatively minor item. It was an expression of shame with the manner in which a mini-crisis over the allocation of funds to the institutions of the various religious parties was resolved Wednesday.

A clear majority in both major parties and in the smaller secular factions would like to do away with the unseemly haggling and political blackmail that has long governed the process.

David Magen of Likud, the minister of economics and planning, went so far as to invite the opposition Labor Party to introduce a bill to dissolve the 12th Knesset and call for early elections. He said he would try to persuade Shamir to agree, "because I am sickened to my stomach at this recurrent phenomenon."

Extra Money For The NRP

The budget vote was held up Wednesday when two of the smaller coalition parties joined the opposition to rebel against the allocation of \$41 million in state funds to the yeshivot and other religious institutions associated with the Orthodox Shas and Agudat Yisrael parties.

A motion was passed killing the allocations that the Knesset Finance Committee had approved only hours before.

Shamir was furious over the breach of coalition discipline. The dissenters were Tsomet, a two-seat faction headed by Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan, and the National Religious Party, which, though Orthodox, thought the allocations were excessive and unfairly made.

Under the present system, each religious party, some little more than one-seat factions, is given state monies for religious institutions they are "close" to.

In the case of Agudat Yisrael, each of its five Knesset members has a favorite institution he "takes care of" during the annual handout.

NRP leaders Ze'evulun Hammer and Hanan Porat agreed with that approach Wednesday. But they changed their votes Thursday after their party was awarded an additional \$3.2 million for its religious institutions.

The five-member NRP Knesset faction came under scathing criticism from the opposition for "selling out."

Hammer and Porat insisted they still favor change. But as long as the present system prevails, they have to ensure their party is not discriminated against to the benefit of the other two more traditionalist Orthodox parties.

Eitan, however, stood fast on principle and defied Shamir to fire him from the government. He said he would not resign.

SHOWING INDEPENDENCE FROM MOSCOW, LATVIA LAUNCHES FLIGHTS TO ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 21 (JTA) -- Latvia, struggling for independence from the Soviet Union, has taken at least a symbolic step in that direction by inaugurating direct flights between Riga and Tel Aviv.

Moscow has not yet sanctioned regular commercial service between the Soviet Union and Israel.

But a jet belonging to Aeroflot, the Soviet national airline, landed Wednesday at Ben-Gurion Airport with 130 tourists and officials from the Baltic republic, including the mayor of Riga, Andreas Rikamis.

He said the flight was another sign of Latvia's move toward independent democracy.

It was the first of a planned series of seven weekly charter flights operated by the Latvian Civil Aviation Authority. The authority's director, Anatoli Bleichik, who was one of the passengers, said Riga hoped to become Latvia's "window to the West."

Travel agencies in Riga and Tel Aviv are planning package tours to Latvia and the other Baltic states for \$750, including a \$399 return flight.

The Soviet authorities still have not ratified an interline agreement reached two years ago between Aeroflot and El Al, Israel's national airline.

But El Al is already operating 20 direct charter flights between Tel Aviv and Moscow. They are not, however, permitted to carry immigrants.

LAWMAKERS FETE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 21 (JTA) -- Scores of senators and members of the House of Representatives attended a Capitol Hill ceremony Thursday honoring Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher rebbe, on his 89th birthday and praising him for his "vision and leadership."

This is the 14th year the ceremony has been held on Capitol Hill as part of "Education Day-USA," which is made to coincide with the rebbe's birthday, on the 11th of Nissan, according to Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, national director of the American Friends of Lubavitch. This year the rebbe's birthday falls on Tuesday.

The lawmakers, accompanied by Lubavitcher representatives from their states or districts, also signed a proclamation praising the rebbe.

Perhaps the biggest applause at Thursday's ceremony came when Sen. Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) called for the enactment of a tax credit for parents of children attending parochial schools.

Sens. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), wearing a white yarmulka, and Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.) urged the Soviets to return to the Lubavitch movement a 15,000-book library confiscated after the Bolshevik Revolution. The library is now in Moscow.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: WHEN THE PASSOVER SHELVES GO UP IN THE STORES, SO DO THE PRICES

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, March 21 (JTA) -- Passover price-gouging is nearly as old as the holiday itself.

The Talmud (Pesachim 30a) tells that it had been customary for Jews to break their pottery dishes and buy or make new ones for Passover. But the price of pottery and clay would rise so steeply just before the annual celebration of the Exodus that it became a hardship for many Jews to buy a new set each year.

So the rabbis decreed that Jews no longer needed to destroy and replace a set of dishes, but just keep one set solely for Passover use and reuse it every year.

More recently, around the turn of the century, kosher beef prices rose so steeply before Passover that only the threat of a boycott convinced producers to lower their prices.

Prices go up, say the manufacturers of packaged goods, because more rabbinic supervision is needed to ensure that products are kosher for Passover than is needed the rest of the year.

Distributors of kosher food say they are just passing along the higher costs they are charged by manufacturers.

Retailers proffer the same explanation, though some small grocers open up separate stores near their main outlets to sell Passover food rather than go through the process of ensuring that no chametz remains in their main stores. This could add to the price of the Passover foods they carry.

Some of the steepest price hikes occur on fresh products, like meat, poultry and dairy.

"Chicken goes up 25 percent during Passover. Eggs go up 25 to 30 cents, so do carp and whitefish," observed David Pollock, associate director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council.

'They Just Want To Make More Money'

Max Wilson, a retired butcher from Brooklyn, was in the business for 30 years and learned the trade from his father. Each of those years "the price of meat went up before Jewish holidays without fail."

Manufacturers "say it costs them more for Passover, but that's a lot of baloney," he said. "From the big guy all the way down to the little guy, they just want to make more money."

After all, he pointed out, "meat and poultry is kosher for Passover all year round."

This is the first year Wilson has ever seen prices for kosher poultry and meat stay stable just before Passover, he said, because of a new program initiated by New York City Consumer Affairs Commissioner Mark Green.

With the backing of 22 Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Jewish community organizations, Green convinced 34 manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers not to raise their prices above mid-February levels.

The second part of the effort is the distribution to consumers of cards that list mid-February's average price of 27 products, from Michigan pike to boneless veal shoulder roast, in independent grocers and supermarkets in the city.

While many participants in this community effort are hopeful about its impact, not everyone agrees that it will be a complete success.

And a campaign of this type would probably not work outside major cities with large Jewish populations, which account for enough of the customer base in cities like New York to encourage retailer cooperation.

According to Rabbi Ephraim Sturm, executive vice president of the National Council of Young Israel, manufacturers are jacking up their prices earlier in order to adhere to the mid-February price baseline. He would like to convince kosher consumers to buy Passover food well in advance of the holiday.

A Need For More Competition

"Everybody gets hysterical and overbuys," he said, noting that "60 percent of the products he or she buys for Passover can be bought months before."

Others think the solution to keeping prices reasonable is greater free-market competition among manufacturers.

"The more companies which go kosher and produce kosher-for-Passover goods, the more competition there will be in the market, which keeps prices low and really stabilizes the market," said Rabbi Menachem Genack, rabbinic administrator for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, whose O.U. certification is familiar to many kosher shoppers.

"If the profit motive is there, price-gouging will be there, and pledges won't alleviate it."

The range of Passover products available today is greater than ever: from traditional staples, like matzah ball mix and gefilte fish, to chocolate-nut macaroons, blueberry muffin mix and even a Cheerios cereal imitation made with matzah meal.

But the extensive range of Passover goodies itself has little impact on prices, according to another O.U. kashrut expert, Rabbi Shmuel Singer.

"It hasn't changed anything for the companies that charge unfair prices," he said.

The food most central to the observance of Passover, matzah, is a product category long beset by allegations of price-fixing, and one where there are too few competitors for natural market forces to bring the price down.

Last year the New York City Consumer Affairs Department found that a five-pound box of Manischewitz matzah cost anything from \$3.99 to \$9.99.

The Matzah Market Monopoly

Manischewitz, which also produces cakes, cookies, fish and soup, generates 43 percent of its \$34.6 million in annual sales from matzah and is the largest matzah maker in the nation, according to a recent article in The Wall Street Journal.

This year, the company has taken New York's "Passover Pledge" not to raise prices before the holiday.

But Manischewitz was indicted last year for allegedly fixing the price of matzah with Streit's and Horowitz Margareten, two other major brands, from 1981 to 1986.

The matzah maker could be fined up to \$1 million.

Manischewitz purchased Horowitz Bros. in 1986 and the rights to the A. Goodman & Sons label in 1983.

That gives Manischewitz three of the four major matzah brands and a 90 percent share in the \$20 million Passover matzah market. With such a monopoly, matzah prices are unlikely to fall from the pressure of competition.