

# Italy and the Vatican

## *National Affairs*

**A**FTER A BITTERLY FOUGHT election campaign, the center-right coalition headed by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi narrowly lost to a center-left bloc headed by Romano Prodi in general elections held April 9–10. Berlusconi refused to concede defeat for several days, but Prodi managed to form a government and was sworn in the following month. While many Italian Jews distrusted some of the leftist parties allied with Prodi because of their pro-Palestinian stance, others countered that Berlusconi's "House of Freedoms" coalition had included small far-right parties directly linked to fascism.

Italian president Carlo D'Azeglio Ciampi completed his seven-year term in May and was replaced by Giorgio Napolitano, a longtime leftist leader.

## *Israel and the Middle East*

### ITALY

Middle East issues had a powerful impact on Italian politics and foreign policy throughout the year.

In January, Prime Minister Berlusconi called Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's illness and incapacitation "very painful on the human level and absolutely negative on the political level." In February, the government's minister for reforms, Roberto Calderoli, was forced to resign after being seen on television wearing a T-shirt bearing copies of the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed that had triggered bloody riots in several countries. Calderoli, a member of the far-right Northern League, said he wore the shirt to express "solidarity with all those who have been struck by the blind violence of religious fanaticism." His television appearance triggered anti-Italian protests in Libya, where thousands stormed the Italian consulate in Benghazi.

Israel regarded the government of Prime Minister Berlusconi as one of its best friends in Europe, and its fall gave cause for concern. When

the new government was announced after the April elections, some Jewish and Israeli observers questioned Prime Minister Prodi's choice for foreign minister, longtime leftist leader and former prime minister Massimo D'Alema. Subsequent events appeared to substantiate their misgivings. D'Alema failed to condemn Hezbollah for triggering the war in Lebanon. Then in August, he met in Lebanon with Hezbollah leaders, and the Italian media published photos of D'Alema walking arm-in-arm with a Hezbollah member of the Lebanese parliament. In November, following an Israeli air strike on Beit Hanoun that killed 19 Palestinians, D'Alema complained that the Jewish world backed Israeli policy indiscriminately. The spokesman for Rome's Jewish community, Riccardo Pacifici, said Jews viewed D'Alema's behavior "not only with apprehension but with indignation . . . ."

Jewish concerns somewhat abated toward the end of the year. D'Alema visited Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority in December. In a meeting with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and in subsequent televised remarks, D'Alema appealed to "all Palestinian groups" to rally around Abbas, stop launching missiles at Israel, free the Israeli soldier kidnapped in June, and work to put an end to violence.

Israeli leaders sought good relations with the new government. During an official visit to Italy in December, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert praised the ruling coalition and declared Prime Minister Prodi a long-standing friend of Israel, despite certain policy differences. A picture of a beaming Olmert and an equally happy Prodi warmly embracing made the front pages of the national newspapers.

Other leftist politicians, meanwhile, drew sharp criticism for their anti-Israel stance. The one whose activities came under closest scrutiny was Oliviero Diliberto, leader of Italy's small Communist Party, who was avowedly pro-Palestinian. At one point, Diliberto threatened to sue the Milan Jewish community spokesman, Yasha Reibman, for slander, based on an interview Reibman gave in which he accused Diliberto of maintaining ties with Palestinian extremists linked to terrorism and denying Israel's right to exist. In February, Diliberto publicly rejected "every accusation" of anti-Semitism and said that his party "is against the policy of the government of Israel. It is not against the Israeli state." He said he would "continue to demonstrate in favor of the Palestinian state," which actually "means to help in the saving and security of Israel."

In May, before Prodi was sworn in, *Liberazione*, the newspaper of the leftist party Communist Refoundation, a partner in the new coalition, published an anti-Israel cartoon that many critics said crossed the line

into anti-Semitism. It showed Israel's separation fence with a gate bearing a sign saying, "Hunger Makes You Free," similar to the sign over the gate to Auschwitz that read, "Work Makes You Free." Jewish leaders, the Israeli embassy, and many political figures condemned the cartoon.

Left-wingers made their presence known at a number of demonstrations. In one flagrant case, participants at a pro-Palestinian rally in February chanted anti-Israel slogans and carried banners equating Israel's security wall with apartheid; some went further, burning Israeli and American flags and chanting calls for insurgent attacks against Italian armed forces in Iraq. Authorities launched a criminal investigation. Jewish leaders and politicians from across the political spectrum called for the resignation of the mayor of the small town of Marano, who took part in the demonstration, and who later, in an interview, suggested that the world would be a better place without Israel. Pierfernando Casini, president of the Chamber of Deputies, called the remarks "shameful and irresponsible," and apologized to Israel.

On April 25, a march in Milan marking National Liberation Day was marred by extreme leftist anti-Israel protesters who trampled and burned two Israeli flags and shouted pro-Palestinian slogans. What seemed to have triggered these actions was the carrying of Israeli flags in honor of the Jewish Brigade, an infantry unit that helped liberate Italy during World War II. Romano Prodi, not yet inaugurated as prime minister, and other political leaders condemned the incident, as did the Vatican and Jewish leaders. Israeli ambassador Ehud Gol, noting that the day was also Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, said that the "barbaric fascist behavior of left-wing extremists" had "profaned" the Liberation Day anniversary. "These people," he went on, "along with those who deny the Holocaust and call for the destruction of the State of Israel are a danger for Western democracy."

A week later, on the evening of May 2, Milan's main synagogue was the site of an impressive pro-Israel rally immediately following the celebration of Israel Independence Day. Hundreds of local citizens attended, and the speakers, including political leaders, strongly condemned anti-Semitism and the delegitimation of the State of Israel.

A group that called itself Left-Wing for Israel was active during the year. Among its leaders were prominent politicians and public intellectuals, including Piero Fassino, leader of the Democratic Party of the Left, the main left-wing party. In the general elections, Emanuele Fiano—son of an Auschwitz survivor, former president of the Milan Jewish community, and high-profile member of Left-Wing for Israel—won a seat in

the Chamber of Deputies as part of Prodi's coalition. He told the Milan Jewish monthly *Il Bollettino* that the overwhelming majority of the coalition "was on Israel's side, in a stable way, defending its rights, conscious of the risks to its survival." As for the blatant anti-Zionism of the far-left fringe, it had to be analyzed, he said, condemned, and put into perspective. Fiano called the new president, Napolitano, "a great friend of Israel and the Jews."

Israel's summer war with Hezbollah had important repercussions in Italy. The government hosted an international conference in late July in an unsuccessful effort to broker a peace deal, and Italy eventually pledged to send as many as 3,000 troops to serve in the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon.

A delegation of Italian Jews went on a solidarity trip to Israel, August 4–7, and about 150 Israeli youngsters from northern Israeli areas subject to Hezbollah attack were brought to Italy for vacation, some of them as part of a program run by the city of Rome to host both Israeli and Palestinian children. At the end of the summer, former Italian president Francesco Cossiga joined Alessandro Ruben, president of the Anti-Defamation League's Italian branch, and businessman Elia Valori, a longtime supporter of Israel, on a solidarity mission to the Jewish state. They met with political figures and also expressed personal condolences to Israeli author David Grossman, whose soldier son was killed during the war.

On the night of July 17, thousands of people, Jews and non-Jews, staged a candlelit rally for Israel in the old Rome ghetto, near the main synagogue. Cultural figures and dozens of senior politicians from across the political spectrum took part, including Mayor Walter Veltroni, right-wing leader Gianfranco Fini, and left-wing leader Piero Fassino. Jewish leaders called the demonstration of bipartisan support for Israel a watershed in Italy's political life.

The rally also constituted something of a send-off for Israeli ambassador Ehud Gol, who was completing his term and would return to Israel not long afterward. In an interview, Gol said that great changes had occurred in how Israel was perceived in Italy since his tenure began. "Today the perception of Israel is positive, maybe better," he told the Rome Jewish monthly *Shalom*. Gol, sometimes criticized for being too close to right-wing elements in Italy, said that even far-left members of the newly elected government had asked to meet with him, "something that would have been impossible even a few years ago." The new ambassador was Gideon Meir, who had previously served as deputy director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

In August, the Union of Italian Islamic Communities (UCOII) ran a virulently anti-Israel paid advertisement in several newspapers. Many considered the ad anti-Semitic. Titled "Nazi Massacres Yesterday, Israeli Massacres Today," it compared Israeli killings of Arab civilians to the Nazi's mass executions of Italians during the German occupation of the country in World War II. Jewish leaders and Italian political leaders condemned the ad, as did some local Muslim organizations.

An Italian cartoonist, Alessandro Gatto, won a prize in the Holocaust cartoon "competition" organized by Iranian president Ahmadinejad. Gatto's drawing showed an Arab looking out of a prison window whose bars were formed from the blue and white stripes on the shirt of a concentration-camp uniform. The stripes recalled the Israeli flag.

Throughout the year there were numerous conferences, lectures, roundtables, and discussions about the Middle East and about the role of Islam in Europe. In March, for example, Left-Wing for Israel sponsored a conference on "The Middle East Seen from Italy." In September, a daylong session on "The Future of Israel—Politics in the Middle East," initiated by a Jewish academic, David Meghnagi, featured leading journalists and political figures. Also in September, a group called the Islamic Anti-Defamation League held a conference in Rome. Advertised as marking the anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks in the U.S., it was actually an anti-Israel event under the title "Peace is an Imperative: Victims of a Victim People."

There were many official visits and cultural exchanges between Italy and Israel both before and after the Italian elections. Francesco Rutelli, president of Italy's Daisy party, visited Israel and the Palestinian territories in March. That same month Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni met with Berlusconi, Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini, and other senior Italian government figures during an official visit to Rome. Berlusconi told her Italy was willing to host a conference aimed at reactivating the "road map" peace process in the Middle East. Livni returned to Rome in August and met with senior government officials and Jewish leaders.

In June, an Italian delegation of more than 100 people, including about 70 high school students, spent three days in Israel on a trip organized and led by Piero Marrazzo, president of Italy's Lazio region (around Rome). Accompanying the students were representatives of the regional government as well as Riccardo Di Segni, chief rabbi of Rome, the president of the Rome Jewish community, and two Italian survivors of Auschwitz. The participating Italian schools had "twinning" arrangements with Israeli high schools. The group visited Jewish and Christian sites and met with Israeli authorities. During the visit, the Lazio officials signed an agree-

ment with Israel for cooperation in medicine and biotechnology. Also in June, a ceremony at the residence of the Italian ambassador to Israel celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Israel-Italy Chamber of Commerce.

Some Italian politicians suggested that NATO consider Israel for membership. Defense Minister Antonio Martino raised the issue in a radio interview in February, and was seconded by Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Gianni Vernetti, who had worked for two months on a kibbutz as a teenager. In November, Marco Panella, head of the Radicals, reiterated an idea he had previously proposed, Israeli membership in the European Union.

#### THE VATICAN

Starting with his New Year's Day address, which stated that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a key to world peace, Pope Benedict XVI issued frequent calls over the course of the year for a Middle East settlement.

In January, the Vatican urged prayers for the health of the stroke-ridden Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon. The Vatican foreign minister, Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, phoned Israel's ambassador to the Holy See to express "deep concern" over Sharon's health and solidarity with the Israeli people. He termed Sharon "a central figure for the peace process."

Speaking before the UN General Assembly in November, the Vatican UN representative said a two-state solution was needed "as the basis for the resolution of the crisis." Benedict made several appeals for an end to bloodshed in Gaza. "I am following with vivid concern the news of the serious deterioration of the situation regarding the Gaza Strip and I wish to express my closeness to the civilian populations that suffer the consequences of acts of violence," he said in November, and prayed that God would "illuminate the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, as well as those of nations that have a particular responsibility in the region, so that they work to end the bloodshed, to multiply the initiatives of humanitarian aid and to favor the immediate resumption of direct, serious and concrete negotiations."

In July, the Vatican issued a statement calling Israeli strikes against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon unjustified. The Anti-Defamation League criticized the Vatican's response as "one-sided and short-sighted," adding that "the Vatican continues to be mired in a false paradigm that equates, on the one side, terrorist actions by Islamist extremists who view

both Jews and Christians as infidels and seek Israel's destruction, with, on the other side, Israel's right to defend itself and eliminate the ongoing and growing threats to its citizens."

Two outstanding bilateral issues between the Holy See and Israel were the subject of talks during the year—the juridical status of Catholic institutions in Israel and the access of Palestinian Christians to holy sites. During her visit to Italy in March, Foreign Minister Livni discussed these matters in a "very cordial and friendly" meeting with Vatican foreign minister Monsignor Lajolo. Both sides termed bilateral relations "good," but Lajolo said they "could still improve." The same issues were raised again the next month when Shimon Peres, Israel's deputy prime minister, was in Rome, and yet again in December during an audience Prime Minister Olmert had with the pope. At each of these sessions the Israelis expressed great interest in a visit by the pontiff to Israel, and Olmert presented an official invitation. Vatican officials said the pope would go only if there were peace in the region, or at least a stable truce.

It was reported in January that the Vatican had selected an Israeli company, RAD Data Communications, for its Ethernet Internet network. In November, the Vatican sharply criticized the planned gay pride parade in Jerusalem, calling it a "serious affront" to Jews, Muslims, and Christians who believed the city had a "special sacred character."

### *Anti-Semitism and Racism*

Racist hooliganism at soccer matches remained a serious problem. In January, fans of the Roma team displayed neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic banners during a match against Livorno. In July, swastikas were scrawled in Rome's old Jewish ghetto during celebrations marking Italy's victory in soccer's World Cup. And in November, fans of the Livorno team unfurled Palestinian flags and a banner reading "Free Palestine," written in Arabic, during a match with Maccabi Haifa.

Mayor Veltroni organized a meeting at Rome's city hall, in February, between representatives of the Roma and Lazio teams and three Holocaust survivors. One of the Lazio participants was a player, Paolo di Canio, who had been punished in the past for giving the fascist salute during games. Di Canio reiterated his pro-fascist views after the meeting, saying, "I've listened to the stories, but I still have my ideas." And yet he added, "It's important that people are aware of what happened. The race laws [introduced by Mussolini] were terrible. Violence is never a positive thing."

There were several episodes of vandalism against Jewish targets, most of them apparently linked to the situation in the Middle East. About 40 tombstones in Milan's Jewish cemetery were toppled in May. A score of Jewish-owned shops in Rome were defaced in August, the perpetrators also plastering fliers nearby bearing pro-Hezbollah slogans. These were signed by a group calling itself "Armed Revolutionary Fascists." In October, swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans were found scrawled on the walls of the synagogue in Naples.

### *Holocaust-Related Developments*

Once again, Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27, had an extremely high profile in Italy. There were scores of educational, cultural, and commemorative events not only on the day itself but also before and after. Among the exhibitions was one in Rome of photographs of Shoah survivors by Adriano Mordenti. Also in Rome, Roma Tre University announced it would initiate a master's-degree course in Holocaust studies, the first in Italy. A cantata on Holocaust themes, *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* (Remember What Amalek Did to You), premiered at Rome's prestigious Auditorium concert hall.

Mayor Veltroni led his annual trip for Rome high-school students to Auschwitz in November. This was an official program of the city's school system. Some 230 teenagers made the trip this year, including a number of Muslims.

The decision taken in 2005 to build a Holocaust museum in Rome caused some tension, since the national government had already, in 2001, decided to construct a national Holocaust museum in Ferrara. The Ferrara project was stalled despite an allocation of funds, but work on the Rome museum—scheduled to open in 2008 on the grounds of Villa Torlonia, the elegant nineteenth-century villa where Benito Mussolini lived from 1925 to 1943—moved ahead. Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel agreed to be honorary president of the Rome Shoah Museum Foundation, and Marcello Pezzetti, Italy's leading Holocaust scholar, was head of research for the museum. Meanwhile, Villa Torlonia was opened to tour groups in February after a \$6-million restoration. Ancient Jewish catacombs were located beneath the grounds.

Pope Benedict traveled to Poland in late May and used the occasion to visit Auschwitz and make brief remarks. He noted that it was difficult for him, as a German, to stand there. Benedict used the Hebrew term "Shoah" to denote the Holocaust, and recalled that the Nazis had wanted

to “crush the entire Jewish people [and] cancel them from the register of the peoples of the earth.” Some Jewish groups expressed disappointment that the pope did not explicitly condemn the anti-Semitism that led to the Nazi genocide. After returning home, however, speaking to tens of thousands of the faithful in St. Peter’s Square, he declared, “Today’s humanity must not forget Auschwitz and the other ‘factories of death’ where the Nazi regime tried to eliminate God in order to take his place. Humanity must not give in to the temptation of racial hatred, which is at the origin of the worst forms of anti-Semitism.”

The issue of Pope Pius XII’s role during World War II and the Holocaust remained a sore point. In September, some 30,000 files from the 1922–39 pontificate of Pius XI were opened. During that period the future Pius XII (then Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli) served the Vatican as envoy to Nazi Germany and as secretary of state. Scholars said the initial documents from this period showed that Pius XI opposed the fascist regime that gained strength in Europe in the 1930s. In December, 35 Jewish and Catholic scholars issued a petition urging the Vatican to open all of its Holocaust-era archives.

Also in December, Italian political leaders as well as the Vatican issued statements condemning the Holocaust-denial conference in Tehran.

## JEWISH COMMUNITY

### *Communal Affairs*

As many as 35,000 Jews were believed to live in Italy, only about two thirds of them formally affiliated with Jewish communities. Rome, with about 15,000 Jews (12,000 formally affiliated), and Milan, with about 10,000 (6,500 formally affiliated), were the largest communities. The rest of the country’s Jews were scattered in a score of other towns and cities, mostly in the northern and central parts of the country. All established communities were officially Orthodox in orientation and linked under an umbrella organization, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) whose leadership served as the political representative of Italian Jewry.

One newly formed, tiny Jewish community functioned in Trani, in Apulia, from which Jews had been expelled 500 years earlier. The group, aided by a rabbi from Rome, held services in the medieval Scolanova synagogue, long used as a church but returned to Jewish use in 2005.

In Rome, the Young People’s Synagogue celebrated 20 years of active

ity. The congregation was founded in December 1985 by a group of Jews, most of them in their twenties, who reopened a small prayer house in the old Jewish hospital on the Tiber Island, across from the main synagogue. The congregation, which was Modern Orthodox, organized itself on an American model, including study groups, public meetings, and other activities that depended in large part on volunteers.

In Milan, the scholar Haim Baharier played an important role as “master” for a number of well-known Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals. He gave lectures, classes, and study groups on the Talmud and other subjects. In February, at the initiative of one of his followers, theater director Andrée Ruth Shammah, he led five sessions at Milan’s Dal Verme Theater, where he interpreted verses from the book of Genesis, accompanied by music played by several of Italy’s top Jewish musicians. Baharier also published a book of his biblical commentaries.

Chabad was very active in several cities, including Rome, Milan and Venice. In Rome, Chabad ran bar mitzvah classes for adults.

Several small Progressive (Reform) groups were active. These included congregations in Milan (Beth Shalom) and Florence (Shir Chadash), an “association” in Rome, and a new *havurah* in Turin. None of these groups was recognized by the UCEI, but the two congregations were affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism. Shir Chadash arranged to get a full-time visiting rabbi in September, Rabbi Robert Rothman, who had served in Rye, N.Y., and in South Africa. He was to work on a volunteer basis at Shir Chadash through June 2007, and also to help Beth Shalom in Milan.

Barbara Aiello, an American Reform rabbi who had served for a time in Milan, started a new congregation in Calabria, Ner Tamid del Sud (Eternal Light of the South), as well as a study center there. On Rosh Hashanah, Aiello officiated at a service in the old synagogue in Ivrea, near Turin, when a Torah scroll given by American donors was dedicated for use by the new Turin *havurah*.

Major changes took place in the established Jewish communal leadership. Seventy-eight-year-old Amos Luzzatto, whose term as president of the UCEI was to have ended at the organization’s fifth quadrennial Congress in July, resigned in February, citing health reasons. Lawyer Claudio Morpurgo took over as acting president.

The Congress drew wide media coverage. Prime Minister Prodi and other senior political figures attended the keynote session. Prodi gave a speech that was intently scrutinized as an indicator of his new government’s policy toward Jews and Israel. Prodi’s remarks drew a mixed re-

sponse. The audience welcomed his statements condemning anti-Semitism, pledging support for minorities in Europe, and recognizing the strong link between Italian Jews and Israel. But Prodi did not tackle the problem of the perceived double standard used in judging the actions of Israel, on the one hand, and the Palestinians, on the other, nor did he refer to the fate of the kidnapped Israeli soldier in Gaza.

Renzo Gattegna, a lawyer from Rome, was elected president of the UCEI. The newly elected council represented a sharp break with the past: eight of the 15 members had never before served on it. In addition, representatives from the Rome and Milan communities—which accounted for more than two-thirds of Italian Jewry—made up less than half of the council members, with the much smaller provincial communities holding a majority. Representatives of some of the Progressive groups were, for the first time, permitted to attend as observers, and a decision was made to establish a commission to study ways of integrating the Progressives into the established community.

But the meeting also highlighted factionalism within Italian Jewry. Some who attended complained that too much energy was expended in politicking and electioneering, and not enough in discussing the serious challenges facing Italian Jews. Indeed, before the Congress, consultant Roger Abravanel told the Milan Jewish monthly *Il Bollettino* that the administrative structure of organized Jewry in Italy was obsolete and hampered by its imitation of Italian political and administrative models, which themselves were excessively bureaucratic.

In fact, the governing councils of the Jewish communities in Rome and Milan were so split by factionalism that their meetings at times erupted into shouting matches. The president of the Rome community, Leone Paserman, walked out of at least one council meeting to protest the tone of debate. A hotly contested election for the communal leadership in Milan pitted three “parties” against each other—For Israel, a traditionalist group based on a strong defense of Israel; the secular Chai group; and the centrist Kadima, which modeled its positions on the Israeli Kadima party. The election, extensively covered in the local media, ended in a decisive victory for the For Israel group.

Jewish communities were also split along religious and personal lines. In Milan, the case of an American-born woman became a focus of dispute. In a letter to *Il Bollettino*, she described how she tried to enroll her children in a Talmud Torah class organized by a “subcommunity” within the Jewish community, only to have them rejected because their father was not Jewish. Even though, as a Jew, her children were Jewish according to

Jewish law, and the family belonged to the Milan community, she was informed that only children with two Jewish parents could attend the Talmud Torah class.

As many as 10,000 Israelis had dual citizenship with Italy, and Italian Jews followed events in Israel very closely. Communal spokesmen and other leaders, in Rome and Milan in particular, weighed in during media debates and at conferences and meetings on issues of concern to Israel.

### *Interreligious Relations*

Italy's State Council, in February, rejected a petition by a non-Catholic to have a crucifix removed from his son's classroom in a public school. The ruling stated that even in secular settings such as schools, the crucifix—which was displayed in many public places in Italy, including hospitals and courtrooms—had a “highly symbolic, educative function, regardless of the religion professed by pupils.”

In January, Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, headed a small Jewish delegation that met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. Rome Jewish community president Leone Paserman termed the meeting “a tremendous success, beyond our expectations.” He said the pope was “very friendly, reiterating his strong condemnation of anti-Semitism as well as terrorism, and using language such as ‘love’ and ‘the people of Israel,’ indicating a positive step in the relationship between Jews and the Catholic Church.” The pope expressed concern at recent episodes of anti-Semitism and urged Jews and Christians to work together in a “common mission” against hate. Di Segni thanked Benedict for “denouncing anti-Semitism, past and present, for condemning fundamentalist terrorism, for his attention to the State of Israel, which, for all the Jewish people, is an essential and central reference.”

Several other Jewish delegations held high-level meetings at the Vatican. Israel Singer of the World Jewish Congress met with Foreign Minister Lajolo and other officials in January, and discussed, among other matters, the need for Jews and Christians to dialogue with Muslims. In meetings with delegations from the American Jewish Committee in March and the Anti-Defamation League in October, the pope stressed that Jews, Christians, and Muslims must work together for peace and mutual respect.

Pope Benedict offended the Muslim world when, in a speech made during a visit to Germany in September, he cited an obscure text by the fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor Manuel II: “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." There were violent demonstrations in some Muslim countries, including the firebombing of two churches in the West Bank. The Vatican asserted that the remarks had been misinterpreted and that the pope wanted to cultivate "respect and dialogue towards other religions and cultures," including Islam. The pope sought to mend fences during a visit to Turkey in November.

A conference was held in Rome to mark two decades since Pope John Paul II's historic visit to the Rome synagogue in April 1986. In the summer, the Vatican published an 80-page compilation of papal speeches and other Vatican material on Catholic-Jewish relations under the title *Awake! Do Not Forget Man, Your Creature*.

There were numerous interfaith meetings throughout the year. The Israeli-Vatican Bilateral Commission on Interreligious Relations convened at the Vatican in March. The three-day gathering of Church officials and representatives of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate dealt with religious perspectives on life and death. The group issued a statement saying that life is a gift from God and thus no person may "decide its value or extent." It affirmed "the principles of our respective traditions that God is the creator and lord of all life and that human life is sacred," and urged Catholics and Jews to "reach out beyond our own bilateral dialogue" in order to "engage and involve the Muslim world and its leaders in respectful dialogue and cooperation."

On September 4, more than 200 representatives of many different religions held a "religious summit" in Assisi under the slogan, "For a world of peace, religions and cultures in dialogue." Italy's president and other senior political figures also took part. The event marked the 20th anniversary of the first such "summit" initiated by the late Pope John Paul II in 1986. In the Jewish delegation were Yonah Metzger, Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbi, and Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni.

In November, the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) met for the 19th time. This year the meeting took place, for the first time, in Cape Town, South Africa. Two topics that drew considerable attention were the care of HIV/AIDS patients and the necessity to reach out so as to strengthen moderate voices within Islam. The ILC was made up of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) and the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

There were efforts to foster Jewish-Muslim cooperation. In March,

Chief Rabbi Di Segni made his first official visit to Rome's main mosque to demonstrate support for the Muslim community after the publication of cartoons that satirized Mohammed and touched off violent protests. In May, Di Segni and other Jewish leaders joined Christian and Muslim dignitaries in mourning the death of the mosque's imam, Mahmoud Hammad Shweita. Di Segni said his presence at the memorial service was a gesture of "sympathy and solidarity" that bore witness to the friendly relations between the two faith communities in Rome. A Jewish delegation headed by Milan's chief rabbi, Alfonso Arbib, and the president of the Milan Jewish community, Leone Sued, visited the main Milan mosque during the summer and met with leaders of the Italian Islamic Religious Community organization. Muslim leaders had visited Milan's main synagogue in 2005.

### *Culture*

Numerous Jewish and Jewish-themed cultural events took place in Jewish community centers, museums, theaters, civic spaces, and other venues. In January, the Polish Cultural Institute in Rome hosted a program called *Mazel Tov*, based on the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer. In February, during a visit to Rome's recently revamped and expanded Jewish Museum in the complex housing the city's main synagogue, President Ciampi called for dialogue and reciprocal respect among "peoples, cultures and religions" for the common benefit of humanity.

In the spring, a monthlong festival of Jewish culture called *Oyoyoy* took place in the northern Italian town of Casale Monferrato. The Jewish community in Casale, whose ornate synagogue was a Jewish museum, sponsored many cultural events during the year, including an international exhibition of Islamic art that opened at the end of October. The first Festival of Jewish Arts took place in Ferrara in June.

A major exhibit of works by the Italian Jewish painter Amadeo Modigliani was held in Rome during the summer, and it was announced that some 6,000 documents, photographs, and manuscripts relating to Modigliani's life would be moved from France to Italy. In July, the Jewish museum in Trieste held a series of Jewish music concerts called "Ercv/Laila." At the end of October, the ninth annual Pitifest festival of Jewish cinema and culture was held in the Tuscan hill town of Pitigliano.

There were many cultural exchanges between Italy and Israel throughout the year, many of them promoted by the culture department of the Israeli embassy. Israeli artists were featured in numerous exhibitions, film

presentations, and performances. In the summer, Israeli pop star Ninet Tayeb performed on Italian TV and also gave a benefit concert in Rome. A major exhibition showcasing a century of Israeli art opened in Milan in October. Called "Omanut: 100 Years of Israeli Art," it was sponsored by top political, civic, and Jewish bodies and ran through the end of the year at Milan's most prestigious art venue, the Royal Palace near the Cathedral. In November, a six-day festival of contemporary Israeli film was held in Rome. Reciprocally, the Italian Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv organized exhibitions, concerts, film presentations, and other events in Israel.

Numerous books were published, both fiction and nonfiction, on Jewish themes or by Jewish authors. These included Gabriele Rigano's *Il Caso Zolli* (The Zolli Case), a biography of Rome's wartime chief rabbi, Israel Zolli, who survived the Holocaust and then converted to Catholicism; *The Righteous of Italy: Non-Jews Who Saved Jews, 1943–1945*, detailing the stories of 387 Italian Righteous Gentiles; a travel book, *The Complete Jewish Guide to Italy: Tutto sull' Ebraismo in Italia*; and the novel *Pranzo di Famiglia* (Family Lunch) by Hungarian-born journalist Alessandra Farkas, New York correspondent for the Milan daily *Corriere della Sera*, based on her family's history.

*Vincitori e Vinti* (Winners and Losers), by television newscaster Bruno Vespa, discussed anti-Semitism and racism in Italian politics. The book sparked considerable debate, some Jews criticizing it for minimizing the importance of traditional Catholic anti-Semitism. The Rome Jewish community's decision to sponsor a book launch for Vespa triggered more complaints. Another important book launch in Rome was for *Café Savoy*, a volume about the Yiddish theater in Europe edited by Paola Bertolone and Laura Quercioli Mincer. Mincer's husband, the actor Olek Mincer, performed scenes from Yiddish plays at the event. Olek Mincer also issued a CD of Yiddish songs.

In February, the Center for American Studies sponsored a roundtable on "Literature Confronting the Challenges of the Contemporary World," whose panel included Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua and Rome Jewish academic David Meghnagi. Deborah Lipstadt, the Emory University professor and author of *Denying the Holocaust*, taught at the Gregorian Pontifical University during the spring semester. In November, the Association of European Jewish Museums held its annual meeting in Venice.

Italy was an enthusiastic participant in the annual European Day of Jewish Culture, held this year on September 3. Although the city of Modena was the national focus of the festivities, events in 55 towns and cities

all over Italy attracted 43,000 people, with more than 5,000 lining up in Milan to visit the main synagogue. Among the sites open to the public for the first time on this day were the ruins of a fourth-century synagogue at Bova Marina in Calabria that had been discovered in the 1980s during highway construction. A large mosaic of a menorah and other Jewish symbols that archaeologists had found there and had been kept for 20 years at the National Museum in Reggio Calabria was returned to the Bova Marina site in July. Plans were announced to conserve it in a special building there and to resume excavations. The town of Lugo, near Ravenna, took part in the day's events for the first time this year, and also formed a sister-city relationship with the Israeli town of Yoqneam Illit.

This year the ornate synagogue in Cherasco, near Turin, was opened to the public after restoration.

### *Personalia*

In January, the Vatican named Archbishop Antonio Franco as its new envoy to Israel and Cyprus, and apostolic delegate in Jerusalem and Palestine. Franco, 68, had served in the Philippines since 1999. He replaced Archbishop Pietro Sambì, who was named papal nuncio in Washington.

In the spring, Yossi Bar, the veteran Rome correspondent for the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot*, was elected president of the Foreign Press Association, the first time an Israeli journalist had been chosen for this position. In May, the Egyptian-born Italian Muslim journalist Magdi Allam, deputy director of the Milan daily *Corriere della Sera*, received Israel's Dan David award for fostering understanding and tolerance between cultures. He drew a standing ovation at the presentation ceremony in Israel when he declared "We are all Israelis" and "Am Yisrael Chai."

In September, Giacomo Kahn was named the new editor-in-chief of the Rome Jewish monthly magazine *Shalom*. In November, Israeli novelist David Grossman, who wrote occasional columns for the Rome daily *La Repubblica*, was awarded Italy's Premiolo journalism prize for the "extraordinary and exceedingly civil equilibrium with which he has recounted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the world." He received another award, the "Roma," given for "peace and humanitarian activities," in December.

Journalist and author Fausto Coen died in Rome in January at the age of 91. Jazz musician Romano Mussolini, the last surviving child of Italy's World War II fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, died in Rome at the age

of 78. The youngest of Benito Mussolini's five children, he was the father of right-wing politician Alessandra Mussolini. In April, Massimo Della Pergola, a journalist and sportswriter who created Italy's main soccer pools, died in Milan at the age of 94. In May, Davide Di Veroli, one of Italy's few remaining survivors of Auschwitz, died in Rome at the age of 81, an apparent suicide.

The crusading Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci died at her home in Florence of cancer in September, aged 77. During her controversial career, Fallaci, who was not Jewish, had gone from being a critic of Israel to one of the Jewish state's most vocal supporters. Her most recent work included strongly worded denunciations of anti-Semitism as well as criticism of Islam and of the West's weakness in the face of radical Muslims.

Filmmaker Gillo Pontecorvo died in October at the age of 86. He was most famous for his 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers*. Born into a wealthy Jewish family in Pisa, he moved to France after Italy's fascist regime imposed anti-Semitic racial laws in 1938, and fought in the resistance during World War II.