Italy and the Vatican

National Affairs

Early in the year the center-left government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi fought off a challenge from the center-right, led by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Although Prodi resigned in February, he won votes of confidence in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, and remained in office.

In November, the hard-line right formed a new party called simply The Right. Its leader, Francesco Storace, drew sharp criticism from Jews and others for a statement he made at the party's founding session harking back—proudly—to the fascist roots of the Italian right. Berlusconi spoke there as well.

Some Jews, especially on the left, expressed concern about what they saw as Vatican meddling in Italian politics and a growing alliance between the Church and the political right wing. The most blatant example was so-called Family Day, a rally held in Rome in May that was promoted by Catholic groups and backed unofficially by the Vatican. Its purpose was to rally opposition to a proposed law giving more rights to gay couples and other families consisting of unmarried partners. Hundreds of thousands of people turned out. Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, disappointed many in the Jewish community by declaring, in an article in the Rome Jewish monthly Shalom, that he opposed legal recognition of homosexual couples.

Israel and the Middle East

Italy

Italy—which headed the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon put in place after Israel's war with Hezbollah in 2006—maintained close relations with the Jewish state.

Throughout the year Italy had many political, cultural, and economic exchanges with Israel and other Middle Eastern countries, including high-level meetings. Prime Minister Prodi made a three-day official visit
to Israel and the Palestinian territories in July. Around the same time, Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema was one of ten EU foreign ministers to sign an open letter to Tony Blair, the new EU Middle East envoy, urging “dialogue” with Hamas in the hope of restoring unity in the Palestinian Authority. In August Prodi sparked some controversy by also appearing to call for dialogue with Hamas, saying that this could help the militant faction “evolve.” He later backtracked, stating that Italy's policy had not changed: it would not have contacts with Hamas until the latter recognized Israel, accepted past Israeli-Palestinian agreements, and foreshore terrorism. In September, Prodi spent time in Jordan and D'Alema visited Israel, Egypt, and the West Bank.

Israeli, Lebanese, Syrian, and other Middle East officials came to Rome for meetings during 2007. The new Israeli president, Shimon Peres, visited in September, the first foreign trip since his election. After a session with President Giorgio Napolitano and Prime Minister Prodi, Peres—a frequent visitor to Italy in his private capacity—told a news conference that Italy and Israel enjoyed “true friendship” and that bilateral relations were better than ever.

During a three-day September visit to Rome by an American Jewish Committee delegation, AJC executive director David Harris described Italy as a “critically important nation” as regards the Middle East. “With two thousand troops in Lebanon and command of the UNIFIL force, longstanding relations with Iran and Syria, friendly ties with Israel, an interest in encouraging conflict resolution, and membership in key UN bodies, Italy plays a very significant role in the region,” he said.

Italy's left wing was generally pro-Palestinian, often vocally so. Criticism of Israeli policies and outright anti-Zionism were frequently heard from politicians and intellectuals as well as in the Italian blogosphere, which included some virulently anti-Israel sites.

Italian Jews since World War II had been generally leftist in their political outlook, but some had begun shifting to the right in recent years as the mainstream left appeared increasingly unsympathetic to Israel. (The Jewish community per se did not adopt political positions.) As noted above, the views of Foreign Minister D'Alema appeared pro-Palestinian, and in an interview in May, Rome Jewish community spokesman Riccardo Pacifici described him as “still prisoner of a distorted vision of the conflict in the Middle East in which Israel is always guilty.” In November, D'Alema, taking part in an international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people, described himself as a “long-time friend” of that cause. D'Alema welcomed the outcome of the Middle East
summit in Annapolis, stating that the Israelis had to freeze settlements and the Palestinians had to reign in extremists.

Leftist Italian Jews were themselves often highly critical of Israel's policies, but they also worried at how one-sidedly Israel was treated. Gadi Luzzatto Voghera published a book about this in 2007 called *Antisemitismo a sinistra* (Anti-Semitism on the Left). A group calling itself Sinistra per Israele (Left for Israel), which sponsored occasional events and maintained an active on-line forum, supported the Israeli political left while striving to counter anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist, and "even anti-Semitic prejudices" found "in a substantial part of the Italian left."

The issue of possible media bias against Israel was addressed in May at a three-day conference in Rome attended by high-profile journalists from the national press. An ADL survey of Italian opinion released around the same time indeed showed that 45 percent of respondents believed that media coverage had been biased, but of those with this opinion, 53 percent said the bias was in favor of Israel and only 29 percent believed it favored the Arabs.

In September, Turin was the site of a meeting of representatives from Turin University, Hebrew University, and Jerusalem's Al-Quds Palestinian University about how the three institutions might cooperate. Far different was another event that took place in the city the next month, a roundtable organized by a Turin University professor called "Ethnos and Religion: The Case of Israel." It was part of a series of programs, Festivalstoria, which presented Israel as a racist state that wished to annihilate the Palestinians. Pamphlets calling for a cultural and academic boycott of Israel were distributed outside the hall where the roundtable was held.

In Milan there was a concert under the title "Jewish and World Music: Sounds, Words and Poetry in Support of Israeli Soldiers Jailed for Opposing the Occupation of Palestine." Among the performers was the prominent Jewish singer and actor Moni Ovadia, a leftist who had long expressed opposition to Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. Organizers said the proceeds would go to "organizations that support Israeli military conscientious objectors." In a letter to the leftist newspaper *L'Unita*, reprinted in the Turin Jewish paper *Ha Keillah*, one critic of the event asked why the concert and its organizers did not also support "the struggle of Palestinian objectors" who were "tortured and killed as collaborators, traitors and enemies of the [Palestinian] cause."

Egyptian-born journalist Magdi Allam, who had lived in Italy since 1972, made headlines in 2007 with his provocative, best-selling memoir
Viva Israele (Long Live Israel). Allam, deputy editor of the Milan daily Corriere della Sera, had been raised as a Muslim but was now an outspoken opponent of radical Islam, and had to employ bodyguards because of threats to his life. He told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, “Those who don't like me and condemn me for my opinions see this [book] as additional proof that I am a traitor to the Arab cause and an enemy of Islam, have sold myself to Israel and work for the Mossad. But for me, Viva Israele is a song of praise to Israel's life and to everyone's life.” More than 200 intellectuals signed a letter of support for Allam, while around 100, overwhelmingly leftists, signed on to a highly critical letter. Gad Lerner, a leftist Italian Jewish journalist who had been born in Lebanon, drew fire when he published a critical review of the book, as did Moni Ovadia, whose review called the book too one-sidedly supportive of Israeli policy.

There was continuing concern throughout the year about potential terrorism. In July, three North African immigrants, including an imam, were arrested in Perugia on suspicion of having links with Al Qaeda and possibly preparing attacks in Italy.

The Vatican

Pope Benedict XVI issued frequent calls for peace in the Middle East and for Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, as well as several specific appeals for an end to bloodshed in Gaza and a return to negotiations. Also, throughout the year he called for better conditions for Christians in the Middle East. “Christian minorities find it difficult to survive in the midst of such a volatile geopolitical panorama and are often tempted to emigrate,” he told representatives of Eastern Oriental Orthodox Churches in February. “In these circumstances, Christians of all traditions and communities in the Middle East are called to be courageous and steadfast.”

At a Vatican audience in February, relatives of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, two Israeli soldiers abducted by Hezbollah in 2006 and still held captive, met with the pope and appealed for his help in gaining their release. Benedict had already called for the Lebanese militia to release the two soldiers or at least to show that they were alive.

Throughout the year the Vatican and Israel held fitful and fruitless negotiations on outstanding questions that clouded their relationship. When Israel and the Holy See established full diplomatic relations at the end of 1993, several key issues were left to joint commissions for resolution. These primarily concerned the Church's financial and legal status in
Italy—and the Vatican

Israel—including taxation and property rights—as well as restrictions on Arab Christian clergy traveling in the West Bank. One minor agreement was in August, when the Israeli Tourism Ministry and the Vatican reached agreed on the implementation of charter-flight service for Catholic pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Benedict raised the key matters under dispute during a “cordial” audience with President Peres when the latter visited Italy in September. A Vatican statement describing the meeting said, “The hope was expressed for a rapid conclusion to the important negotiations currently underway, and for the creation of constant dialogue between the Israeli authorities and the local Christian communities with a view to the full participation of those communities in constructing the common good.” Peres, for his part, reiterated a longstanding invitation to the pope to visit Israel.

Pietro Sambi, the papal envoy to the U.S., addressed the subject of Vatican-Israel ties in a November interview posted on terrasanta.net, the Website of the Franciscan Order, saying that relations had been “better” before the establishment of formal links.

Anti-Semitism and Racism

Racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism remained high-profile issues in Italy. An Interior Ministry report published in June described a “galaxy” of small right-wing extremist groups around the country, including skinhead soccer hooligans. Some neofascist groups, it said, were so anti-Zionist that they aligned themselves with radical Islamists. The Vatican spoke out against anti-Semitism on several occasions, and in April announced that the topic would be on the agenda of a synod of bishops called for October 2008. According to a survey published in May by the ADL, 18 percent of Italians polled believed that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. Furthermore, 32 percent believed in the “probable” truth of at least three out of four anti-Semitic stereotypes (the complete results were posted on the ADL Website).

At the beginning of the year, ahead of the January 27 Holocaust Memorial Day, Justice Minister Clemente Mastella proposed a bill on combating racism and anti-Semitism that would also criminalize Holocaust denial. But many intellectuals and historians criticized that part of the bill, citing free speech concerns and opposing criminalization of opinion. Among the critics was Renzo Gattegna, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities. Italian Jews, he said, knew the importance of “freedom of thought, and thus of manifesting thought.” In the end,
the Council of Ministers approved a bill mandating up to three years in jail for "anyone publicizing theories of racial superiority" and up to four years for "anyone committing or inciting to commit discriminatory acts for racial, ethnic, national, religious, sexual or gender motives," but did not criminalize Holocaust denial.

A number of episodes of racism and anti-Semitism made headlines during 2007. In January, for example, vandals scrawled anti-Semitic slogans near the home of Barbara Aiello, an American-born Reform rabbi who lived in the town of Lamezie Terme in southern Italy (see below, p. 438). About 100 neo-Nazis gathered near Varese in April to celebrate Hitler's birthday, triggering reports that dozens of right-wing extremists in northern Italy were attempting to organize a Nazi-style party. The government launched an investigation.

In November, Rome Jewish community spokesman Riccardo Pacifici warned that xenophobia was mounting in Italy and that Jews could not remain silent. His comment came in the wake of attacks against Gypsy (Roma) immigrants from Romania that followed the arrest of one of them for the murder of a woman in northern Italy. Pacifici declared the solidarity of Roman Jews with the Romanians, who were the "object of attacks by xenophobic and racist groups." Also in November, a bookstore at Rome's main train station took copies of Hitler's Mein Kampf off the shelves following an appeal by the Rome Jewish community.

Holocaust-Related Developments

On January 16, President Giorgio Napolitano joined Milan's mayor and other dignitaries at a ceremony at Milan's central train station for the formal establishment a new national memorial to the Shoah. Scheduled to open in 2009, it would be housed in a large underground area donated by the Italian state railway near the platform from which more than 8,000 Italian and other Jews were deported to death camps in 1943-44.

The ceremony took place less than two weeks before Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27, which was observed with the usual educational, cultural, and commemorative programs both on the day itself and in the days before and after. These included wreath-layings, lectures, book presentations, exhibitions, concerts, school projects, youth programs, symposia, theatrical performances, recitals, and concerts. Television and radio featured special broadcasts, and newspapers and magazines published articles and special supplements. One theme running through these events was the role and function of Holocaust memory as the actual events re-
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ceded into history. As part of the observances, some 500 high school students from Tuscany traveled by train from Florence to Auschwitz to learn about the Holocaust in a program sponsored by regional authorities.

President Napolitano addressed political and Jewish dignitaries at the Quirinale presidential palace on Holocaust Memorial Day, saying “all forms of racism, starting with anti-Semitism” had to be fought even when, “disguised as anti-Zionism, it aims at denying Israel’s right to exist.” As part of observances in Rome, several people were posthumously honored as Righteous among the Nations, and Greek-born Holocaust survivor Sami Modiano, 77, celebrated his bar mitzvah at a ceremony in the city’s main synagogue. An inmate of Auschwitz on his 13th birthday, he had never marked this rite of passage.

On the occasion of Holocaust Memorial Day, the town of Maccagno unveiled a plaque and named a piazza in honor of the late Enrico Sibona, a wartime police officer there who was arrested and sent to concentration camps for rescuing Jews. Sibona was named Righteous among the Nations in 1992. In March, on what would have been his 100th birthday, Italian Catholic writer Odoardo Focherini was honored by a union of Catholic journalists. Focherini was arrested for helping save more than 100 Jews during the Holocaust and died in Hersburck, a German concentration camp, in 1944, aged 37.

Justice Minister Mastella came to New York in October to attend an ADL event where the first Giovanni Palatucci Courageous Leadership Award was presented to New York deputy police commissioner David Cohen. The award was named for an Italian police chief who defied the Nazis and saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. The ADL created the award to recognize Italian and American police officers who demonstrated “extraordinary leadership in the fight against extremism, bigotry and terrorism.” Mastella used the occasion to denounce anti-Semitism and pledge that his government would implement the tough new laws against it. In Rome, meanwhile, prizes in Palatucci’s memory were, for the fourth year, presented to police employees or their children who had written university theses on themes related to the Shoah, racism, interfaith dialogue or multiethnic society.

In November, Rome mayor Walter Veltroni accompanied nearly 240 high school students to Auschwitz, an annual project he had begun years before. Israeli ambassador Gideon Meir also went with the group. Veltroni told reporters he wanted to establish a permanent base at the former death camp for visiting Italian students, which could become a branch of the future Holocaust museum in Rome. The city also inaugu-
rated a new program whereby high school students who had already traveled to Auschwitz with Veltroni would spend time during the year effacing anti-Semitic slogans and scrawled swastikas from walls.

In October, neo-Nazi skinheads from the Alto Adige/South Tyrol region came under investigation for visiting Holocaust sites. Photographs were published in the media showing seven young skinheads at Dachau giving the Nazi salute and displaying Nazi symbols.

Citing security fears, the University of Teramo closed its law, political sciences, and communications departments in May to prevent a scheduled talk by convicted French Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson. He had been invited by Professor Claudio Moffa in the face of opposition from the dean, who said Faurisson’s qualifications were “absolutely inadequate and don’t deserve academic legitimation.” About 100 protesters shouted at Faurisson and Moffa outside a café on campus where they held a news conference. Moffa was a well-known leftist who used Holocaust denial to question the legitimacy of Israel. Earlier in the year he had invited Serge Thion, another French Holocaust denier, to lecture, and in April organized a conference on “The Middle East and the Holocaust: Gagged History” that concluded with a taped interview of Faurisson.

In January, a military court in La Spezia sentenced ten former members of the Nazi SS in absentia for their role in the massacre of some 560 civilians in the Italian village of Marzabotto, near Bologna, in 1944.

Erich Priebke, the 93-year-old former SS officer serving a life sentence in Rome for war crimes, was in the news in May, when he won a work-release permit, ostensibly to work for his lawyer as a translator. Priebke was convicted in 1997 of taking part in a 1944 massacre of 335 civilians at the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome and had been serving his time under house arrest. The decision to allow him out drew fierce criticism from Jewish groups, Mayor Veltroni, and others, including U.S. Representative Tom Lantos. In June, when Priebke arrived at his lawyer’s office on the back of a motorbike, about 100 protestors demonstrated on the street outside. A judge later ordered Priebke’s work-release permit withdrawn.

For the first time, the record of the British Army’s 5,000-member Jewish Brigade that fought in Italy during World War II was commemorated. This took place during the April 25 ceremonies marking Italy’s liberation from German occupation in 1945. At the event, attended by many delegations of resistance fighters, Jewish leaders carried a banner dedicated to the Jewish Brigade.

A traditional torch-lit march through Rome was held October 14 to
Italians marked the anniversary two days later of the deportation of Jews from the capital in 1943. Coinciding with the anniversary, the Italian publisher Einaudi released a boxed set of French director Claude Lanzmann's landmark 1985 Holocaust documentary *Shoah*, comprising four DVDs and a book.

At the end of the year, the Council of Ministers responded to numerous complaints by ruling that annuity checks paid to about 700 Jews as compensation for damage suffered under Italy's World War II racist laws did not constitute taxable income.

Roma Tre University instituted a graduate program in the teaching of Holocaust studies.

**Jewish Community**

**Communal Affairs**

As many as 35,000 Jews were believed to live in Italy. About two-thirds of them were formally affiliated with Jewish communities, but their number dwindled from year to year. Rome, with about 15,000 Jews (12,000 formally affiliated), and Milan, with about 10,000 (6,000 formally affiliated), were the largest communities. Outside these two main centers Jews were scattered in a score of other towns and cities, mostly in northern and central Italy.

Several communities experienced sharp internal discord between leaders and between factions, sometimes linked to broader left-right Italian or Israeli politics. In Turin, a bitter clash between the lay leadership and the chief rabbi led to the resignation in January of community president Tullio Levi. He and others had criticized the rabbi for being too rigidly and inflexibly Orthodox, and had called for his dismissal. Another divisive issue, particularly in Milan but by no means absent elsewhere, was whether the children of non-Jewish mothers might attend the Jewish school.

All established communities were Orthodox in orientation and linked under an umbrella organization, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), whose leadership constituted the official political representation of Italian Jewry. This year marked the 20th anniversary of a landmark accord between the UCEI and the Italian state that recognized this status, one of a series of agreements regulating the position of non-
Catholic religions in Italy. In November, the Rome Jewish community celebrated the installation of a new Torah scroll, believed to be the first copied out in Rome in 150 years.

Chabad was very active in several cities, most notably Rome, Milan, and Venice. Early in the year Chabad marked 30 years of activity in Rome with a gala evening attended by the Israeli ambassador and leading Chabad rabbis. Guest of honor was Rabbi Berel Lazar, one of the chief rabbis of Russia, who was born in Milan to parents who were among the first Chabad emissaries sent to Italy. At Hanukkah, Chabad-sponsored public menorahs were lit in at least half a dozen cities around the country. The lighting in Rome marked the 20th anniversary of the first public menorah. Dignitaries including Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, and the president of the Lazio region attended the Rome ceremony.

Small Progressive (Reform) congregations or groups were active in several cities, two of them in Milan. None were recognized by the UCEI, but the ones in Milan and Florence affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism and were broadening the scope of their services. The Lev Chadash congregation in Milan, for example, claimed 200 members, weekly services, bar and bat mitzvah classes, and other cultural and educational programs. It also had a permanent rabbi and carried out conversions.

Meanwhile, an American Reform rabbi, Barbara Aiello, who had served for a time in Milan, headed a congregation in Calabria, Ner Tamid del Sud (Eternal Light of the South), as well as a study center there focusing on Jewish historical roots in Sicily and Calabria. Her congregation shared a Torah scroll with another small Reform group in Turin. Aiello conducted Reform and interfaith weddings in various parts of Italy, sometimes for foreigners. In July an American boy had his bar mitzvah at her synagogue, and that same month she conducted what she said was the first Reform bar mitzvah ever in the city of Perugia.

A tiny, newly formed Jewish community functioned in Trani, Apulia, where Jews had been expelled 500 years earlier. The group, which operated as a branch of the Naples Jewish community, held services in the medieval Scolanova synagogue that had long been used as a church and reverted to Jewish use in 2005. In May the Trani congregation held a ceremony marking the acquisition of its first Torah scroll.

In March, the Milan Jewish monthly Il Bollettino triggered public discussion with a cover story on what it called an “identity crisis” afflicting Italian Jewry. "Something is changing profoundly in our community," wrote Il Bollettino editor Annie Sacerdoti. “It seems almost as if the
The malaise that ever more pervades modern society has also entered our institutions, undermining their former spirit. She noted generational, ideological, religious, and political conflicts. At their heart, Sacerdoti wrote, were “different concepts and different modes” of how to live as a Jew and how to confront social change.

Two developments in particular were changing the face of Italian Jewry, she argued, the passing of the generation that remembered the World War II antifascist resistance and the growing influence of the thousands of Jewish refugees from Arab countries who began arriving in 1956. “So,” Sacerdoti wrote, the community was now “divided between present and past, between varying degrees of religiosity and observance, between Jews who want a rigorous observance of Judaism and those who live it ‘Italian-style’—at the synagogue only for Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, but often with the desire to transmit a Jewish education to their children, at the community’s Jewish school, even if they are in a mixed marriage.” The only thing Jews had in common any longer, she believed, was concern for Israel. Over the next several months Il Bollettino printed numerous responses from both well-known and ordinary Jews. Some echoed Sacerdoti’s pessimism but others suggested that internal conflict was a sign of vitality.

The future of Italian Jewry also formed the topic of the annual national “Moked” conference that took place April 29–30 in Senigallia. The official theme of the event was “Looking Ahead,” and discussions focused on the same issues raised by Sacerdoti and others in Il Bollettino.

The largest recent group of immigrant Jews in Italy consisted of the families of the thousands of Jews who fled Libya in 1967 in the wake of anti-Semitic violence. Some of Italy’s leading Jewish figures, including Milan’s chief rabbi, Alfonso Arbib, were either immigrants themselves or were born into such families. Ceremonies were held this year in Milan and Rome to mark the 40th anniversary of the Libyan exodus. Libyan Jews in Italy also launched Memoria (Memory), a project aimed at creating an archive of Libyan Jewry through interviews and collections of documents and photographs, as well as the creation of an online museum of Libyan Jewry.

In addition to religious services, Jewish communities offered a wide variety of other programs and events. At the end of May, the Jewish school in Milan hosted its first intergenerational reunion, encompassing former pupils who had attended from 1938 to 2006. About 1,300 people attended, including former teachers. One aim was to fund-raise for the school, which, organizers said, had a deficit of 1.2 million euros.
Kosher food was experiencing a boom in Italy. There were a growing number of kosher restaurants and shops. This was especially the case in Rome, which featured at least five kosher restaurants as well as snack bars, butchers, groceries, and bakeries. A new store opened there in the spring called the Kosher Bakery Café. Kosher restaurateurs in Rome estimated that about half their clients were not Jewish. In any case, the Rome Jewish community had to more than double the size of its kashrut office from two people to five. In October Rome hosted an international exhibit of kosher wines. Nevertheless, the Jewish press carried repeated complaints about the high cost of kosher products and about confusion over kosher standards and certification.

In the spring, in conjunction with the Simcha Layeled organization, the Trieste Jewish community hosted a group of 25 ailing children from Israel, including Jews, Palestinians, Israeli Arabs, and Druse. Rome hosted the 12th quadrennial European Maccabiah Games in July, where more than 2,000 Jewish athletes from some 38 countries competed in 16 different sports. Hadassah International’s youth organization also met in Rome in July. In October, the Rome Jewish community marked the 25th anniversary of a Palestinian terrorist attack on the main synagogue that left a young child killed and dozens injured. As part of the ceremony, Mayor Veltroni laid a wreath.

In the fall, conferences in Milan and Florence discussed the performance of the Italian Jewish media. Jewish magazines were published in Milan, Rome, Turin, and Florence, and smaller newsletters and information sheets were published by independent groups or communal organizations. State-run television carried a regular Jewish program, and in recent years Italian Jewish Websites had proliferated. At the conference in Florence, editors of the magazines Shalom (Rome), Il Bollettino (Milan), Ha Keillah (Turin), Firenze Ebraica (Florence), and the Sorgente di Vita TV program discussed possible cooperative strategies.

**Interfaith Relations**

There were ups and downs in Jewish-Catholic relations during the year. On the one hand, cordial and productive meetings and conferences continued to take place between Jewish and Catholic leaders, including some involving Pope Benedict and other Vatican officials. On the other, lingering controversy over the wartime record of Pope Pius XII, who was placed on the road to sainthood in 2007, and other questions about several of the present pope’s actions prompted Jewish concern.
In January, Israel’s chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yonah Metzger, and other Jewish leaders met with Vatican officials in Rome at a conference on Christian-Jewish relations organized by the lay Catholic Sant’Egidio organization. Metzger described relations with the Church in very positive terms and repeated Israel’s invitation to Pope Benedict to visit.

The Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Israeli Chief Rabbinate issued a joint statement in Jerusalem in March that called “moral relativism” a “serious threat to humanity.” It claimed that “secular society still requires religious foundations to sustain lasting moral values” such as the sanctity and dignity of human life. While affirming the principle of freedom of religion, the statement made an exception “wherever and whenever a threat is posed by the promotion, teaching or exercise of violence and specifically terrorism and psychological manipulation in the name of religion.” In addition, it said, “it is legitimate for a society with a predominant religious identity to preserve its character, as long as this does not limit the freedom of minority communities and individuals to profess their alternative religious commitments . . . .”

In October, during ceremonies commemorating the 42nd anniversary of the Nostra Aetate document that opened the way to Catholic-Jewish dialogue, the first Lay Catholic-Jewish Conference was held at the Vatican. Also that month the pope visited Naples to participate for one day in the three-day annual interfaith World Peace Meeting, which encompassed leaders of various faiths, including Rabbi Metzger.

The issue of Pope Pius XII’s role during the Holocaust years continued to sour Jewish-Catholic relations. Critics accused Pius of having turned a blind eye to the suffering of the Jews; the Vatican, still keeping its wartime-era archives closed to scholars, maintained that he helped save Jews. In March, an Italian newspaper reported that documents had turned up in the archives of the Stasi, the East German secret police, showing Pius to have been an enemy of the Third Reich. Based on this, one Catholic commentator, Sister Margherita Marchione, theorized that Moscow had been behind efforts to criticize Pius’s actions so as to weaken support for the Catholic Church in Soviet-dominated postwar Eastern Europe. A new biography of Pius by Italian journalist Andrea Tornielli, published in May, also defended Pius, saying he helped the family of a Jewish school friend escape to Switzerland.

The papal envoy in Jerusalem, Archbishop Antonio Franco, threatened to boycott the annual Yom Hashoah ceremony at Yad Vashem in April because of a caption in one exhibit critical of Pius XII. The caption de-
scribed Pius as having “abstained from signing the Allied declaration condemning the extermination of the Jews” and said he “maintained his neutral position throughout the war.” In the end, Franco attended the ceremony. Yad Vashem said it would review the caption, but urged the Vatican to open its archives from the period to clarify the matter.

In May, Pius was formally placed on the path to sainthood when the Vatican’s Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved his beatification. Before actual beatification could take place, however, two miracles would have to be attributed to Pius, and Pope Benedict would have to approve. A number of Jewish organizations sharply criticized the process and urged the Vatican to put beatification on hold until Pius’s role during the Holocaust was clarified through opening the archives.

Another Vatican move that alarmed Jews was the decision during the summer to revive a Good Friday prayer in Latin calling for the conversion of the Jews. ADL national director Abraham Foxman went so far as to call it a “body blow to Catholic-Jewish relations.” Foxman, who met with Vatican officials in Rome, said his group was “extremely disappointed and deeply offended that nearly 40 years after the Vatican rightly removed insulting anti-Jewish language from the Good Friday Mass, that it would now permit Catholics to utter such hurtful and insulting words by praying for Jews to be converted.”

In August, Pope Benedict upset Jews by meeting with controversial Polish priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, director of Poland’s Radio Maryja, a station that had broadcast considerable anti-Semitic content. Jewish groups sharply criticized the meeting, during which Rydzyk kissed the pope’s hand. Jews were particularly puzzled about the audience because Rydzyk had previously been reprimanded by the Vatican for his remarks about Jews. A statement the Vatican issued after the meeting said it “did not imply any change in the Holy See’s well-known position regarding relations between Catholics and Jews.”

During the year there were also efforts at dialogue, or rather triadologue, among Jews, Christians and Muslims, as the pope made Vatican outreach to Muslims a priority. In October, Tuscan schoolchildren from the three religions met together in Florence.

Culture

Numerous Jewish and Jewish-themed cultural events took place around the country. These were organized by Jewish communities and institutions, private organizations and promoters, civic and state bodies, or a
combination of these, and took place in Jewish community centers, museums, theaters, civic spaces, and other venues.

Exhibitions during the year included one on the experience of Holocaust survivors who transited Italy en route to Israel after World War II, which opened in March at the Museum of Contemporary History in Milan. A large show of contemporary Israeli art opened in Turin in June. In the spring and summer Rome hosted an exhibition on Bauhaus architecture in Tel Aviv.

Among Jewish cultural events were the annual OyOyOy festival in Casale Monferrato in May and the Nessiah Jewish culture festival, held in Pisa, Livorno, and other towns in September, which drew a record crowd of more than 3,000 people. The annual Pitifest Jewish film and culture festival took place in Pitigliano in December. Italy was an enthusiastic participant in the annual European Day of Jewish Culture, held this year on September 2. Events took place in more than 50 cities and towns around the country and drew tens of thousands of people. In November, Rome’s first gallery devoted to Jewish and Israel art opened in the old Jewish ghetto.

There were many cultural exchanges between Italy and Israel. Israeli literature had a dedicated following, and a number of Israeli writers, artists and performers presented their work in Italy. In March, for example, Israeli novelist Amos Oz was the focus of the “Dedica” festival in Pordenone, and writer Uri Orlev was featured at the Minimondi festival in Parma; Oz would return in October to receive a literary prize in Cosenza. David Grossman took part in the OyOyOy festival as well as in the big Festivaletteratura in Mantova in September, and A. B. Yehoshua gave readings in October. The Habima Israel National Theater performed in Turin in April. Israeli artists took part in “White Night”—a nightlong event in Rome during September when museums, galleries, and other spaces remained open. In December, a major exhibition on Jewish Italy opened at the Israel Museum in Tel Aviv.

As usual, numerous books on Jewish themes or by Jewish authors were published, and there were many book launches, readings, roundtables, and other literary happenings. Significant nonfiction books included Gli Ebrei di New York (The Jews of New York) by Maurizio Monilari, a journalist for the La Stampa newspaper. Mayor Veltroni took part in a book launch for it cosponsored by the American Academy in Rome and the Rome Jewish community. Tullia Zevi, journalist and former UCEI president, recounted her long and colorful life to her granddaughter, Nathania, in Ti Racconto la mia Storia: Dialogo fra nonna e nipote sull’ebraismo...
(I’ll Tell You My Story: Dialogue about Judaism between Grandmother and Granddaughter).

One book that sparked intense controversy was Bloody Passover: European Jews and Ritual Murder by Ariel Toaff, a professor at Bar Ilan University and the son of Rome’s former chief rabbi. The book, written in Italian, appeared to accept as true that some medieval Jews may indeed have used Christian blood when making matzos, possibly in revenge for persecution. When it appeared in February there was a torrent of criticism not only from Italians but also from foreign Jewish organizations. “A Jewish tradition of this kind has never existed, nor has any indication or custom that allows the ritual use of human blood,” was the reaction of Rome’s current chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni. The book quickly sold out its first printing, but given the uproar, Toaff asked the publisher to halt further distribution so he could amend the text.

In November, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt came to Milan for the official launch of the Italian edition of their controversial book The Israel Lobby, sparking heated debate with the authors over their thesis that Israel’s American supporters had undue influence over American policies in the Middle East (see above, p. 125).

The annual WIZO Jewish literary awards, presented in October, went to Una Tromba nello Uadi (A Trumpet in the Wadi) by Israeli author Sami Michael for best novel, and to Dieci Bottiglie Verdi (Ten Green Bottles) by Vivian Jeannette Kaplan for best children’s book.

Israeli and Jewish-themed films were shown at a number of festivals and in cinemas. Several were presented at the Venice Film Festival, including Disengagement by Israeli director Amos Gitai — his 12th appearance at the festival. In November, the sixth edition of the Roma Kolno’a Jewish and Israeli film festival took place in Rome.

Personalia

In January, Gary Krupp, who headed the New York-based nonsectarian Pave the Way interfaith dialogue group, was named to the Pontifical Order of St. Gregory the Great. He thus became the first Jewish man to be knighted by two popes. In August, the pope knighted Rabbi Leon Klenicki, the ADL’s interfaith affairs director emeritus, for his contributions in creating positive relationships between Catholics and Jews around the world. Klenicki was inducted into the Order of St. Gregory the Great at a ceremony at the Vatican’s UN mission, presided over by Sean Cardinal O’Malley of Boston.
At a ceremony at Rome’s Campidoglio (City Hall) in May, 98-year-old scientist Rita Levi Montalcini, the oldest living Nobel laureate and a life member of the Italian Senate, received a special award from the Technion of Haifa, with President Napolitano in attendance. In November, at a ceremony at the Great Synagogue, Rome’s Jewish community awarded her honorary membership. Levi Montalcini, who was on the political left, had recently been insulted by right-wing leader Francesco Storace. Mayor Veltroni, who was at the ceremony in Rome, called Storace’s attack “a manifestation of political barbarity like few seen in our recent history.”

In November, Yossi Harel, commander of the Exodus, the ship that took Jews to Palestine in 1947, was awarded the Exodus Prize in La Spezia, the port from which the ship sailed. The award ceremony took place during a three-day festival featuring Jewish artists and musicians. Also in November, Anna Foa, a leading Jewish historian, became a by-lined columnist for the Vatican newspaper Osservatore Romano, the first Jew to hold such a post.

The noted Jewish artist, animator, and set and stage designer Emanuele Luzzati died in January at his home in Genoa. He was 85. Luzzati, who was nominated for Academy Awards for his work on two animated films, frequently used Jewish themes. He illustrated a Haggadah and also created the painting that decorates the Jewish archives in Rome (see www.museumluzzati.it).

In September, Alberto Aron Nirenstein, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto who wrote a noted book about his wartime experiences, died in Florence. He was the father of Fiamma Nirenstein, one of Italy’s best-known Jewish journalists.

RUTH ELLEN GRUBER