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MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

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Relations with Israel", 23 October 1984.

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THE JEWISH WEEK  
Oct. 23, 1984

VATICAN OFFICIALS FLOAT "TRIAL BALLOON" ON RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

By MARC H. TANENBAUM

Archbishop Deskur's leak to the media, I believe, was a calculated decision of the pro-Israel faction in the Vatican to warm up the atmosphere that might lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations. Some observers assert that since October 1965 will mark the 20th anniversary of the Vatican Council's adoption of its declaration on Catholic-Jewish relations, that would be a perfect time to bring about the diplomatic ties between the Holy See and Israel.

Despite subsequent denials by a Vatican spokesman, I have reasons to believe that the statement by a Polish Archbishop in Vatican City favoring diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel was a serious trial balloon.

The immediate denial of Deskur's proposal by an unnamed Vatican spokesman was described to me as the inevitable assurance to the Arab-Muslim world that nothing dramatic would take place without taking their interests into account.

In a carefully constructed scenario, Archbishop Andrzej Maria Deskur, former chairman of the Vatican's Secretariat on Social Communications and a confidant of Pope John Paul II, arranged to "plant" his views supporting diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Israel with NBC-TV's Marvin Kalb and the New York Times. The purpose of the "trial balloon" was to get a feel of Jewish and Arab-Muslim reactions.

As I experienced first-hand during Vatican Council II, the Vatican cannot make a friendly gesture toward Jews or Israel without taking into serious account the possibility of Arab reprisals against several hundreds of thousands of Christians in Arab and Muslim countries.

When the Council was preparing its declaration condemning anti-Semitism and calling for mutual respect between Catholics and Jews, President Nasser of Egypt and Iraq signaled their displeasure by abruptly closing down Catholic schools and turning off the electricity in Catholic hospitals.

Moslem Brotherhood fanatics in Egypt have burned down many Coptic churches. So any positive moves toward Israel inevitably involves Vatican authorities in a balancing act between Jews/Israel and Arabs/Muslims.

It is important to keep in mind that this diplomatic mandate did not materialize out of thin air. A whole series of discussions on this question have taken place between the last several Popes and various Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Israel. Beyond that, and less well known, during the last three years I have participated with other Jewish leaders in discussions with the Vatican Secretariat of State on setting up a process that ultimately would culminate in formal diplomatic ties between the Holy See and Israel.

The discussions, involving high top Vatican authorities and the Interfaith Committee for Interreligious Consultations, have generally been positive but cautious. More than likely, I suspect, some interim steps will be explored - such as the models of the papal nuncio in Washington, D.C., or the Polish working visas which are this side of full diplomatic ties.

It is important that diplomatic relations be established between the Holy See and Israel for both symbolic reasons. But quite frankly, it is far more important perceived by the Jewish community to interest in trying to bring recalcitrant Arab states such as Jordan and Lebanon to

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It is important that diplomatic relations be established between the Vatican and Israel for moral and symbolic reasons. But quite frankly, it is far more important politically that Jewish energies be invested in trying to bring recalcitrant Arab states such as Jordan and Lebanon to

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from the American mainstream. Put directly, many Jews and other Americans\* fear that an unbridled resurgence of an Evangelical Christianity that seeks to "restore" America to its pristine origins as "a unified Evangelical America" poses challenges of regression to a society which could reduce, Catholics, and others to second-class citizens.

In the face of such complex developments, it is evident that the publication of this volume is not only necessary but is an urgent requirement for helping enlightened Evangelical Christians and Jews to sort out their common concerns and correct misperceptions not only for their own integrity but for the well-being of American democratic pluralism as well.

