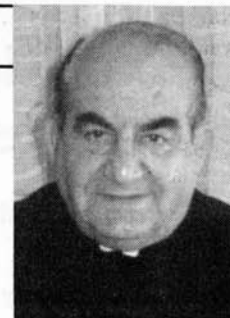

Interview: Msgr. Raouf Najjar



Vatican ties with Israel are a step toward peace

Msgr. Raouf Najjar, who is the Apostolic Delegate in Jordan, gave the following interview to Muriel Mirak-Weissbach in Amman on Jan. 29, 1994.

EIR: Monsignor Najjar, can you tell me about the status of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel, and Jordan?

Najjar: What was done by Israel and the Holy See was a step to allow the Catholic Church to have more authority, moral personality with its institutions, because what was discussed at the beginning was the difficulties of religious respect of dignity of the human being and also how the Catholic institutions in the Holy Land pay taxes or no taxes, teach religions or not, respect of the Holy Places. It is a broad problem that we had to reorganize before establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Over 15 months, both commissions from Israel and the Holy See held many sessions and discussed these problems and reached a solution, which was signed on Dec. 30, 1993. After that it was agreed that they would appoint two special envoys, from the Holy See to Israel and from Israel to the Holy See, with the rank of ambassador.

But in the whole discussion, the status of Jerusalem was not discussed. Jerusalem is a holy place of the whole world, and I can say openly, it is not our problem to say who will have the authority or sovereignty over Jerusalem. What we look for is that Jerusalem should be an open city for the whole world and for all religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The rules governing this open city should be given by the United Nations, not by a single state, because in a single state, ministers will change, and then we'll have a problem again with this open city. The status of Jerusalem should be guaranteed by the United Nations.

On the other side, having relations with Israel is like relations with any other state. Full diplomatic relations might be established within four or five months. The agreement signed on Dec. 30, 1993 is being presented to the Knesset [Israeli parliament] now; if the Knesset accepts it, it will have to go also to the prime minister, who has to sign, and then

the Holy See and Israel will be ready for full diplomatic relations. So much for Israel.

As for Jordan: Jordan has no problems at all with the Holy See. It is only a kind of exchanging routine papers, after which diplomatic relations will be established. It did not happen before, because Jerusalem was always a problem—the key. Since 1988, when Jordan left the West Bank, Jordan could ask for diplomatic relations any time, but they did not until last year. We had a session together with the foreign minister of Jordan, and told them they could ask any time and the Holy See would be ready to establish relations with Jordan. The Holy See, traditionally, never asks to have relations with any country; countries would ask the Holy See, and then the Holy See prepares a paper, asking for freedom of religion or some kind of action for the church in that country, and so on. There are things that the Vatican asks to protect the Catholics in that region, but generally, there is no problem. With Jordan, there is no problem at all with that, so they can do it quickly. I think it will happen in a few weeks.

EIR: What impact do you think this will have on the peace process?

Najjar: You know, the peace process started in Madrid, and the Holy See was not invited and could not say anything in the process, because it had no relations either with Israel or with Jordan or with the Palestinians. But, now, if the Vatican will have relations with them, then it could act as a member, and when the Holy See is a member in that peace process, it can use its moral support and influence many countries in the world, which can then influence both parties for the peace process. This is why the Vatican is very interested in finalizing relations with Israel and Jordan—and the Palestinians, if they want—so that it can apply its influence on other parties. Peace is always the aim, the purpose of religion. Religion always looks for peace. So this is how they hope, being in real contact with those countries, they can do something for peace also, which is the first duty of the Holy See, I think.

EIR: Have the Palestinians requested diplomatic relations?

Najjar: Not yet. They were told indirectly, that, if they want, they can ask for relations. They have not yet, I don't know why. Two weeks ago, a delegation of the PLO went to the Vatican to ask for clarification about what was done between the Holy See and Israel. They were told what was done and were satisfied.

EIR: What do you personally think would be the status of Jerusalem?

Najjar: Personally, I think what would satisfy the Arabs, the Israelis, and the whole world, would be to have one city as two capitals, one for Israel and one for the Palestinians. Then everybody would be satisfied, because Jerusalem is for the whole world, it's not only for Israel or for the Arabs. Israel is there now, and it is impossible to have them leave it. The idea would be to satisfy both. I don't say to divide it, but [have] two parts: one Israel and one Palestine.

So the whole world will be in peace again, because after so many years of war, I don't think that people want to continue fighting. They want to stop. Maybe it's normal, somebody in the army is always ready to fight, but if you go to the soldiers themselves, if you go to their mothers, they are fed up, they want to stop it. War does not bring any tranquility, any settlement, any economy; war is against all these things. The human being likes to live in peace, likes to live in a family, likes to travel, have holidays and so on, but this doesn't exist in these days, on either side. This is not human.

EIR: The agreement between the Vatican and Israel concerns only the Catholic Church. What are the reactions of other churches to the accord? The Coptic Church has rejected it.

Najjar: They took it from the religious side, whereas it is not religious at all. They thought that the Vatican was recognizing the entity of Judaism. They say that the Vatican has done something wrong, because they are giving forgiveness to the Jews. In 1964, Vatican Council II had a declaration saying that the Jews of today are not responsible for killing our Lord. We said this to fight anti-Semitism and to expand love for one another. Jews always say, "We are despised by people, because you, Catholic Church, say that we have killed the Lord," and so on. Nobody denies that they killed our Lord. But why say that if the Jews of 2000 years ago committed a crime, that the Jews of today are responsible for it? The Vatican said that they are not responsible today, which is very normal, and very just, and very human. You would say the same, I think.

EIR: There is no such thing as collective guilt.

Najjar: But, here, because of the sensitivity of the situation, because of what the Jews have done against the Palestinians, injustice, killing people, kicking people out of their homes, they say, "You see what the Jews are doing? And you say

they are not responsible for a crime." This is why many among other religions are always attacking us. They are writing about the declaration, which was years ago, but the whole problem comes from the sensitivity of the situation. All Arabs recall what was done, which is why they are upset, but governments are not upset at all. No one has attacked the Vatican for what was done—not Jordan, not Egypt, not Syria—nobody. Maybe it was criticized by some Muslim sheikhs, by Christian non-Catholics.

EIR: How do you think this will influence relations between the Catholic Church and Islam?

Najjar: They will go along very smoothly. What criticisms there were came from some individuals, not communities, not the whole of Islam.

EIR: I mean, do you think it will positively influence these relations?

Najjar: As long as peace is signed with Jordan, with Syria, with Lebanon, everything will proceed smoothly, I'm positive about that. Because, as I said, everyone wants to live in peace and have a good economy, and so on.

EIR: What was discussed at the inter-religious conference held here in Amman about ten days ago?

Najjar: The conference was about nationalism and religion. We discussed how you can be a very good citizen and also be a model Christian. We, as Christians, our theory was to separate between nation and religion. We are very faithful to our nation, even if we are Christian, we belong to the Arab nation, we should be very proud of that. But don't touch our religion: I believe in a Catholic way, you believe in Muslim way. They would understand this, and they respect us, and they said that we should always collaborate and cooperate to build up a good nation and a good, religious people. This was the theme of the meeting, which lasted only one day.

This is a kind of routine meeting, which takes place one year in Jordan and one year in Rome and the third year in Switzerland or England, with other religions, either with the Orthodox Church or with the Protestant Church. These meetings were started by His Royal Highness Prince Hassan, who is a real scholar, and who likes to bring religions together because he believes, as we do, that in understanding each other, you can have a better life and you can have better belief and faith in God also.

It is true: If you don't know me and I don't know you, we might hate each other or speak against one another, but the day we know each other, we can love each other. This is why it was a very good idea. Because Islam is not known outside, and here, the Christian religion is not known by many people, so by coming together and dialoguing together, we will know them better and vice versa. And also the broad population will have more respect for our religion.