



Gideon Shomron



Sister Rose Thering

Impossible to say 'yes' to Jews and 'no' to Israel,

By SYLVIA HART
Press Register Reporter

"At the end of the 20th century it is not possible for anyone to say to the Jews 'yes' and to say to Israel 'no,'" according to a Jewish leader.

THE STATEMENT was made by Gideon Shomron, Israeli adviser for church relations in North America, based in New York, during a session sponsored by the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue Group.

Shomron, who said in the meeting at Ashland Place United Methodist Church that "Israel is central in the life of most Jewish communities in the world," was supported in his views by a second speaker at the session, Sister Rose Thering, a professor at Seton Hall (N.J.) University.

BOTH THE Catholic nun and the Jewish official presented talks supportive of Israel.

Sister Thering said Christians cannot omit "the land of Israel from our understanding of Jews."

She quoted a 1975 statement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops: "In dialogue with Christians, Jews have explained they do not consider themselves of the church, a sect or a denomination as is the case with our Christian communities, but rather as a peoplehood that is not solely racial, ethnic or religious, but in a sense a composite of all of these.

"IT IS FOR SUCH reason that an overwhelming majority of Jews see themselves bound in one way or another to the land of Israel. Most Jews see these ties to the land as essential to their Jewishness.

"Whatever differences Christians may experience in sharing this view, they should strive to understand this link between land and people which Jews have expressed in their writings and worship throughout two millennia and a longing for the homeland, holy Zion."

BOTH SPEAKERS in the Mobile meeting made reference to a peace agreement reached last March

between Israel and Egypt.

As background, here are highlights of events connected with the peace agreement, as reported in the national news:

The agreement calls for a phased return to Egypt of the Sinai Desert which Israel has occupied since 1967.

Additionally, the agreement calls for a five-year transition period on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip, which have been occupied by Israel since 1967. The transition period is to lead to autonomy for the Palestinian Arabs living in the occupied areas.

THE PEACE ACCORD did not settle the nature of the autonomy for the Palestinian Arabs or the future of Jerusalem. Israel has occupied the Arab sector of Jerusalem since 1967.

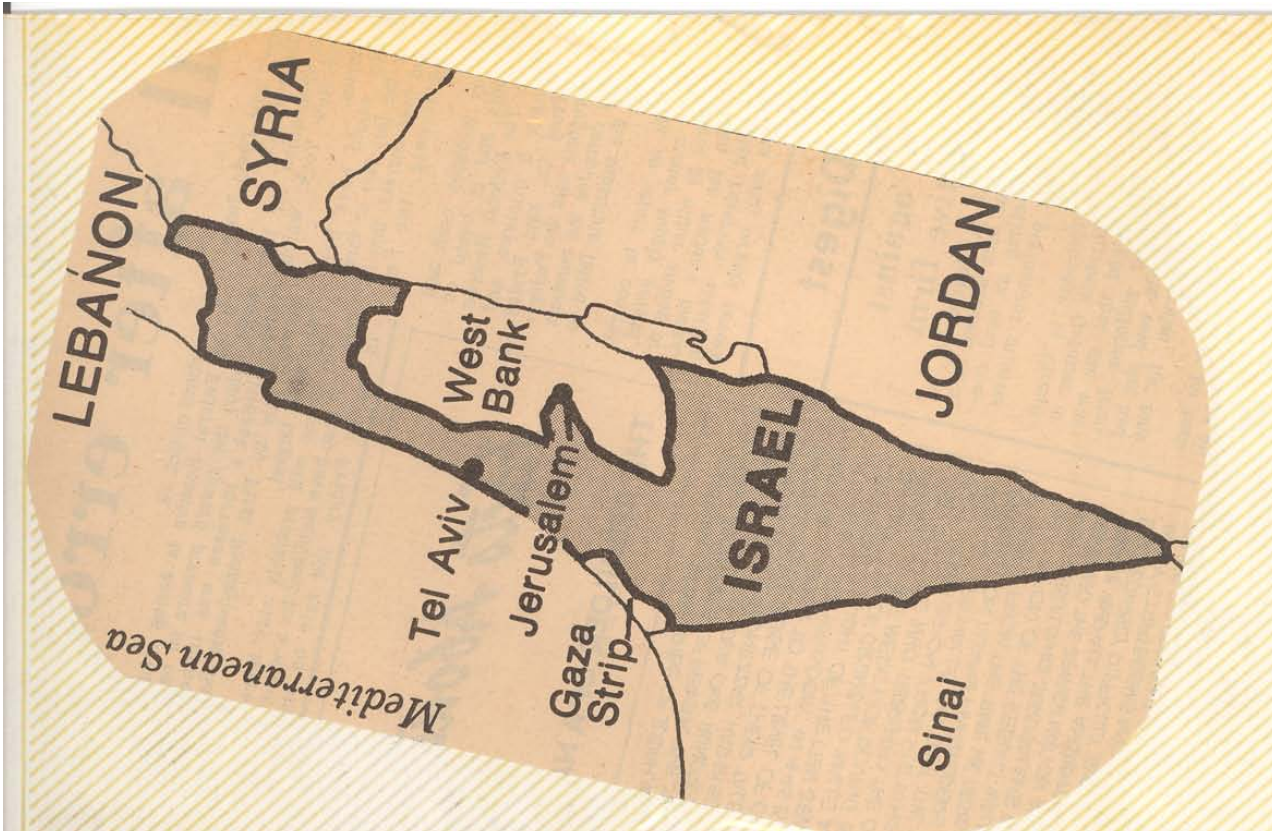
In her address, Sister Thering spoke words of praise about the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement: "After 30 years of impassioned Arab denials of the Jewish people's right to statehood, (Egyptian) President Anwar El-Sadat accepted Israel as a legitimately founded sovereign state and as an equal in international affairs.

"THE ISRAELIS under Prime Minister Menachem Begin gave up land, resources, even precious settlements within the Sinai to Egypt for a peace that the Israelis had prayed and worked for unceasingly for over three decades."

Sister Thering expressed concern about the future of the Middle East even though the Egyptian-Israeli accord has been signed.

She said, "You and I know there are still many crossroads to be faced, many challenges to be faced. There is the question of Jerusalem. There is the question of the West Bank and Gaza. The implementation of the treaty has gone forward with both Sadat and Begin, but still we know that the Arab world continues to reject this peace movement. Nevertheless, with both these great statesmen, Sadat and Begin, we hold out for peace."

IN REGARD TO the future of Jerusalem, national



according to views of two speakers in Mobile dialogue

news stories have reported disagreements between Begin and Sadat. Sadat has said the Arab sector of Jerusalem should be included in the Palestinian autonomy plan for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Begin has said Jerusalem should remain an undivided city in the control of Israel.

In her talk, Sister Thering endorsed the view of the Israeli prime minister. She said that in leading study groups on visits to Israel, she has seen Israeli-controlled Jerusalem as "a city of peace open to Jews, to Christians and to Muslims."

SHE SAID, "I could tell you an entirely different story of the 19 years that Jordan held Jerusalem," when Jewish and Christian holy places were destroyed.

According to the Catholic sister, "The National Coalition of American Nuns strongly supports the current status of Jerusalem under Israeli jurisdiction."

In regard to the future of the West Bank and Gaza, Shomron was asked about Jewish settlements on the West Bank during a question-answer period.

According to national news reports, both Egyptian and U.S. government officials have voiced disapproval of what they view as an Israeli policy of strengthening civilian settlements in the occupied areas.

IN A DEVELOPMENT this week, according to a national news report, the Israeli Supreme Court has ruled the Israeli government illegally seized private Arab land for the Jewish settlement of Elon Moreh on the West Bank, and the Israeli court has ordered that the settlement be dismantled within 30 days. The militant Gush Emunim settlers have said they will resist leaving.

Speaking in Mobile before the Israeli Supreme Court decision was announced, Shomron called the Gush Emunim a small, vociferous group which believes Israelis should settle the whole land of Israel regardless of whether it is government land or Arab-owned land.

SHOMRON SAID THE view of the Gush Emunim "is rejected but unfortunately brings us a lot of inconvenience and bad public relations."

The Israeli official acknowledged that in regard to the issue of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, "there is a constant debate going on ... and there is not only debate but there are demonstrations for, and there are demonstrations against."

He said, "The government for the time being is pursuing a policy that they do not want to prohibit this (settlements on Israeli government land on the West Bank), but that is not disturbing the peace process with Egypt. When the time comes in five years to decide the fate of the West Bank for these settlements, if we come to an understanding with the Palestinians — that doesn't mean the PLO (the militant Palestine Liberation Organization) — or with the state of Jordan about some firm solution for the West Bank, then if there is a free exchange, it will not disturb anyone if there are some Jews living on the other side (the West Bank)."

IN HIS ADDRESS, Shomron expressed to Catholics in the audience his disappointment that "today, 32 years after the creation of Israel, the Holy See (the pope) has not brought itself to recognize Israel officially, and we are still waiting for such a recognition to come through."

During the question-answer period, Sister Thering was asked why the Vatican has not recognized the state of Israel.

The Catholic educator agreed with Jews in the audience that the Vatican is concerned about how Christian Arabs would react to the Vatican's recognition of Israel. The nun called the Vatican decision "political."

SISTER THERING ASKED Christian groups to communicate to the Vatican their support of recognition of Israel.

Despite the lack of recognition, the sister said, "I do know this, and it's not by way of rationalization or explanation, but ... the relations between the Vatican and the state of Israel are very good."