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בס"ד

Jerusalem, 11 Kislev, 5774

November 14, 2013

His Holiness Pope Franciscus

Status Civitatis Vaticanae

The Vatican

Rome

00120

Your Holiness Pope Francis,

Re: Return of the Holy Vessels of the Jewish Temple in your coming

visit to Israel

In the year 70 AD, year 3828 from the creation of the world according to the Hebrew calendar, Roman soldiers entered the Jewish temple on Temple Mount in Jerusalem, what was then the Kingdom of Judea, brought about its destruction, and took from the temple the holy vessels that had served the people and the priests for their worship of the only G-d of Israel in their permanent and temporary temples. In this matter, I appeal to you, as you have only recently attained your high role, imbuing it with a new and creative spirit:

- A. I am a member of the Jewish People. I do not represent anyone, rather only my faith and the wish of my people wherever they are, and I am acting by power of my inner desire and recognition to bring about, with your assistance, a real transformation after many years of stagnation, imperviousness, and disregard of historical truths.
- B. I have learned in a short time, observing your service as Head of the Christian Church and as one who occupies such a high position, to whom the eyes of

millions of Christian faithful all over the world are lifted, that you have been endowed, among your other virtues, with the willingness to listen to other nations, and to people with all their weaknesses and limitations.

- C. As one closely acquainted with the edicts of Christianity in general and the history of the Jewish People in particular, including your familiarity with the Jewish faith on all its levels, I believe that it is time, especially on the eve of your visit to Israel – the Holy Land, that this visit, which in itself has special and historical dimensions, be utilized by Your Holiness to return the holy vessels which, as known to the entire world and proven strongly by historical and other proof, are located in the archives of the Vatican and under your control.
- D. The return of the holy vessels, particularly through your intervention, shall lend special status to your position among all nations, and shall serve as a real complement of the Jewish prayer "**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.**"
- E. By this appeal I do not mean to defame in any way or to engage in any legal-social or historical debate involving a theological argument and discussion accompanied by proofs, evidence, citations, writings, commemorations, archeological findings, and the like. It is a fact that over the years many experts from the Jewish faith on one hand, and from the Christian faith on the other, as well as members of other nations and faiths, have occupied themselves with these. That is not the purpose of my appeal!
- F. I therefore appeal from the depths of my heart first of all to your heart and conscience and only then to your mind and plain logic, with all your knowledge, to do the right thing, like "**Nachshon's leap**", as described in our sources and by our Sages.
- G. "**Nachshon's leap**" – is known as the unique act of a member of the **Tribe of Benjamin, Nachshon son of Aminadav**, who when Israel left Egypt, pursued by the Egyptians and standing on the bank of the Red Sea, it was **Nachshon**

son of Aminadav who dared to leap first into the sea, and once he had done so, the sea parted and Israel passed through it on dry land. This is evidenced by the **Talmud**, in the Tractate of **Sotah**:

"Rabbi Meir said: When the Israelites stood by the Red Sea, the tribes strove with one another. This one said, I will go first into the sea. And this one said, I will go first into the sea. The tribe of Benjamin jumped and descended into the sea first. Rabbi Yehudah said to him: That's not what happened. Rather, this tribe said. I'm not going into the sea first. And another tribe said, I'm not going into the sea first. Nachshon the son of Aminadav jumped and descended into the sea first." (Tractate Sotah, 36b).

H. Furthermore, the courage and historical force of Your Holiness's action will not only be the equivalent of the deed of **Nachshon son of Aminadav** rather it will be the equivalent of the Christian tradition's attribution of the leap of Jesus, as described in the **Gospel of Luke**:

"They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way." (The Gospel of Luke, 4, 29-30)

- I. So what is the challenge – request – idea – leap which I, from my lowly position, request from Your Holiness?
- J. It is time for the holy vessels, stolen at the time of these difficult historical events and taken to Rome as spoils of war and remaining to this day in the hands of the Vatican authorities and under your control, **to change status!**
- K. If it was previously not possible to perceive them as stolen objects and by virtue of the theft to recognize their holders as the long arm of those who destroyed the temple, **you have the power to transform the status and the thesis and to perceive the current holders of these vessels – as trustees responsible for their safeguarding!**

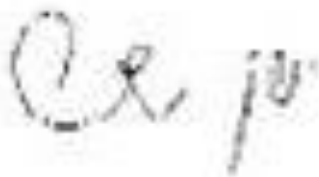
L. This trusteeship is one based on honor and as any trusteeship it exists only if side by side with it there is a beneficiary who is entitled to this trusteeship, and the beneficiary is one – the Jewish People.

M. Therefore, you have the power to perform the leap, the innovation, by returning the honor to the holders on one hand and to the beneficiaries on the other by the act of returning the vessels when you come, the moment you set foot in the Holy Land.

For all these reasons, I ask that you devote a little of your time to real and deep inner observation of those aspects of your heart and soul that brought you to your lofty position, and that you make use of this position in a special and unique way, and direct that the vessels – the holy vessels – be prepared, gathered, packed, and taken with you when you come to Israel in order to hand them over to the Jewish People to guard forever.

With all due respect,

Rabbi Yonatan Shtencel

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Yonatan Shtencel".