



12th Academic Consultation Between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity explores “Sanctity of Place, Sanctity of Space”

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The 12th Academic Consultation between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity, convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), took place from 7-10 December 2025 (17-20 Kislev 5786) in Geneva, Switzerland.

At the opening, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew delivered the keynote address. The consultation – marking nearly half a century of dialogue between the two global faith communities – was dedicated to the theme, “Sanctity of Place – Sanctity of Space,” and was co-chaired by His Eminence Elder Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon and IJCIC Chair Rabbi Mark Dratch.

In his keynote remarks, the Ecumenical Patriarch said “sacred space is not a museum of beauty. It is not a lifeless window into the past. It constitutes a moral and spiritual vocation to experience our faith within the world. It calls us to holiness, to justice, to compassion. The corporeal experience within the church – from the open naves that resemble ships ready to transport the faithful, to the postures of prayer – reminds us that worship is not a flight from the world, but a transformation for the sake of the world... At this point, we find again a strong resonance with the Jewish tradition. Sacred space is inseparable from moral responsibility... [I]n the eyes of God, authentic holiness must be expressed through justice and mercy.”

He continued, “Here, in this consultation, we are building sacred space together, as we encounter one another in a field of learning, trust, and hope. As we continue our dialogue, may we be strengthened by the witness of our traditions and our spiritual giants, so that we do not withdraw into isolation, but expand the boundaries of holiness in our world.”

The Ecumenical Patriarch’s address was preceded by introductory remarks by Metropolitan Emmanuel and Rabbi Dratch, and was followed by a response by Rabbi Prof. Richard Marker, one of several IJCIC past chairs in attendance and IJCIC’s primary liaison with Orthodox Christian partners in preparing for the bilateral consultation. Organizing committee members included: Rev. Presbyter Michael Azar, PhD; Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand; Rabbi Dr. Joe Kanofsky; Rev. Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne Nicolas Kazarian, PhD; Rabbi Daniel F. Polish; Very Rev. Archpriest Geoffrey Ready, PhD and Dr. Gary Vachicouras.

In his welcome remarks, Rabbi Dratch saluted “the courage and vision that have sustained Jewish-Orthodox Christian dialogue,” as well as the “patient diplomacy” and “personal warmth” that “have turned institutional commitment into real friendship.” He said, “Since our earliest encounters, we have walked a path few could have imagined. We have learned from each other, spoken with each other, dreamed with each other.”

After his own welcome remarks, Metropolitan Emmanuel presented a tribute celebrating 50 years of Jewish-Orthodox Christian relations, in commemoration of the late Metropolitan Damaskinos of

Adrianople (1936-2011) and Dr. Gerhart M. Riegner (1911-2001) and their pathbreaking role in enabling the dialogue. He stated: “[W]e find ourselves here, in Geneva. A place of particular gravity, a space that has been steeped in history and the agony of dialogue, marking nearly fifty years since this conversation commenced. It is, one might say, a moment when history encounters theology as an experiential reality that transcends abstract concept.” It was followed by the screening of a photographic montage, prepared by Dr. Vachicouras, that retraced five decades of a rich and meaningful history.

The prior evening, following greetings at an opening dinner by Metropolitan Emmanuel and IJCIC Vice Chair David Michaels, Rev. Azar offered a review of previous consultations between Jews and Orthodox Christians.

During the remainder of the dialogue’s first day, Rabbi Kanofsky and His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia discussed the topic, “What Makes a Space Holy?” Rabbi Dr. David Sandmel and Rev. Azar addressed the ongoing project “How to Speak About the Other?” Subsequently, Rabbi Noam Marans and His Excellency Ambassador Micha? Klinger presented on “Space as Power – Control, Identity and Sacred Expression.”

The following day, Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand and V. Rev. Ready led delegates in a joint exercise exploring religious texts and their interpretation. Afterward, Rabbi Sandmel and Dr. Theodor Keskos discussed “Sacredness in Spaces Beyond the Primary” ones in each tradition.

Participants then visited the historic Beth-Yaacov Synagogue of Geneva and the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy. There, they heard remarks from community representatives including, respectively, Geneva Chief Rabbi Mikhaël Benadmon and Communauté Israélite de Genève (CIG) Vice President Fabrice Madar, and His Eminence Metropolitan Maxime of Switzerland, director of the Orthodox Centre. Dr. Vachicouras led a tour of the center.

On the last day of the consultation, Rabbi Dratch led a reflection on the topic, “How do our Traditions Teach the Same Texts?” Afterward, he and Rev. Kazarian delivered presentations on the theme of “Virtual Space,” which were followed by a lively discussion on the challenges posed by digital culture and social media within both faith traditions.

Delegates then reviewed and approved this communiqué, presented by Rev. Kazarian and Mr. Michaels, and heard closing remarks after discussing continued efforts to advance and deepen ties between Jews and Orthodox Christians worldwide.

The first Jewish-Orthodox Christian international academic consultation took place in Lucerne in 1977. Subsequent dialogues were held in Bucharest, Athens, Jerusalem, Thessaloniki and Vienna. Those meetings explored subjects including law, tradition and community, continuity and renewal, modernity, peace and justice, religious liberty, global crises and ethical challenges, the environment, spiritual centers and diasporas, the significance of Jerusalem and navigating “relations to the world and each other.”

The Geneva consultation included senior representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Bulgaria, the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the Orthodox Church of Greece, the Orthodox Church of Poland, the Orthodox Church of Albania and the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. Primate from multiple parts of the world also sent written messages to the assembly. As is customary in the history of the consultation, the Holy See also sent an observer: His Excellency Archbishop Flavio Pace, Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and Vice President of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

IJCIC is the recognized representative of the international Jewish community in dialogues with other major world faith groups. Its constituent organizations include American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Israel Jewish Council on Interreligious Relations, Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbinical Council of America, Union for Reform Judaism, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and World Jewish Congress.

Participants concluded the consultation with deep gratitude for the spirit of fellowship and mutual respect that had shaped their days together. Their conversations, shared experiences, and moments of learning created a genuine sense of collaboration and renewed dialogue.

Source: [Ecumenical Patriarchate](#), 12 December 2025.