



Fifth Academic Meeting between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity in Thessaloniki, Greece

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The Fifth Academic Meeting between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity on 'Faithfulness to Our Sources: Our Common Commitment to Peace and Justice,' took place May 27-29, 2003 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, (Thessaloniki-Perea).

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Thessaloniki -- The Fifth Academic Meeting between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity on 'Faithfulness to Our Sources: Our Common Commitment to Peace and Justice,' took place May 27-29, 2003 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, (Thessaloniki-Perea). The Meeting was organized by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, who heads the Office of International and Intercultural Affairs of the Liaison Office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the European Union, Brussels, in cooperation with the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, New York, co-chaired by Rabbi Israel Singer, who is also Chairman of the World Jewish Congress, and Rabbi Joel Meyers, who is also the Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Assembly.

The highlight of the consultation was the opening presentation by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew . He opened the meeting by underlining that 'Judaism and Christianity have been living in a state of dialogue for two thousand years,' and strongly endorsed continuing the dialogue and furthering partnership efforts. In the course of his remarks the Ecumenical Patriarch denounced religious fanaticism and rejected attempts by any faith to denigrate others.'

Greek Government officials who addressed the gathering included His Excellency Ioannis Magriotis, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and His Excellency Evangelos Venizelos, Minister of Culture. Introductory remarks were delivered by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Rabbis Joel Meyers and Israel Singer, and Mr. Andrew A. Athens, President, World Council of Hellenes. Messages were delivered from the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Present at the meeting were more than sixty delegates from around the world. Among the observers present were representatives from the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. The consultation's theme was analyzed by focusing on three subjects, each of which was addressed by a lecturer from the Orthodox and Jewish traditions; in each case, considerable discussion followed. The first subject was 'Athens and Jerusalem – Memory and Recollection,' for which Rabbi Dr. Alan Brill (USA) and Professor Dr. Vlassios Phidas (Greece and Geneva) presented lectures. On the subject of 'Commitment to Peace and Justice in the Jewish and Orthodox Traditions' presentations were made by Rabbi Daniel Polish (USA) and Mr. Roman Silantiev (Russia). The final plenary

'Religions as an Ethical force in a World in Crisis' was addressed by His Grace Bishop Irinej (Serbia) and Rabbi David Rosen (Israel).

The participation by the Ecumenical Patriarch in the rededication of the Thessaloniki Holocaust Memorial on May 29 was a poignant reminder of the near total destruction of the Thessaloniki Jewish community by the Nazis during the Second World War. The current small but vibrant Jewish community, led by Mr. David Saltiel and Mr. Moses C. Constantinis, remains in the tradition of the past glory of the historic Thessaloniki community once known as the Jerusalem of the Balkans. A permanent Holocaust Memorial Day is to be established on January 27 similar to that observed in other European countries.

During the course of the consultation an Orthodox participant stated that anti-Semitism is anti-Christian and the consultation adopted this as an abiding principle. Jewish participants added their concerns cautioning against gratuitous, inflammatory anti-Israel behavior as a cause of anti-Semitism, which was accepted by the assemblage.

The following principles were adopted by the conference:

- Judaism and Christianity, while hearkening to common sources, inviolably maintain their internal individuality and particularity.
- The purpose of our dialogue is to remove prejudice and to promote a spirit of mutual understanding and constructive cooperation in order to confront common problems.
- Specific proposals will be developed to educate the faithful of both religions to promote healthy relationships based on mutual respect and understanding to confront bigotry and fanaticism.
- Being conscious of the crises of ethical and spiritual values in the contemporary world, we will endeavor to identify historical models of peaceful coexistence, which can be applied to minority Jewish and Orthodox communities in the Diaspora.
- We will draw from our spiritual sources to develop programs to promote and enhance our common values such as peace, social justice and human rights, specifically addressing the concerns of religious minorities.

It was agreed to establish a permanent coordinating committee to maintain and foster continuing relationships. The Committee would jointly monitor principles enunciated at the meeting and would further enhance the dialogue and foster understanding between the respective religious communities.

Also a proposal was made to establish an annual day devoted to Jewish-Christian relations to be organized together by respective religious communities.

In addition, the consultation also welcomed new developments that could bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians and urged the immediate recognition of the Patriarch Irineos of Jerusalem by the Government of Israel.

Department of Communications

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.goarch.org)