



# Problems and Prospects of Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Russian Perspective

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## Problems and Prospects of Christian-Jewish Dialogue:

A Russian Perspective

**By Yuri Tabak**

As a precursor to dealing with the problems and prospects for Jewish-Christian dialogue, an attempt needs to be made to define “religious dialogue”, for it is a term open to interpretation. The last few decades have seen the emergence of several Jewish-Christian organizations, with many joint conferences convened to discuss a broad range of issues. These conferences are often of a scholarly nature, their participants meeting to discuss religious problems and using a common and recognized scientific and methodological approach not bound first and foremost to the limitations of religious dogma.

In the context of this paper “religious dialogue” shall refer to the discussion of religio-historical problems central to both religions and carried out by representatives of each of the religious traditions. Such a dialogue is vitally important to Christians, since it enables us to attain a deeper insight into the origins of our own religion. For Jews the importance of this dialogue lies in the opportunity to discover proto-Christianity as an integral part of Jewish history and part of Jewish religious thought in the first century C.E. and which was to play such an enormous role in subsequent history of the West. Finally, Judaism and Christianity have evolved along largely autonomous lines by force of historical circumstance. Now is the time for each to derive benefit from the wealth of experience accumulated through the ages by the other.

## The Socio-historical Prerequisites for Dialogue

Dialogue demands the participation of at least two sides. In the earliest development of Christianity within Judaism, a process began which might be called Jewish-Christian dialogue (or better yet, Jewish-Christian polemic). However, this dialogue was conducted between what might be considered to be various currents within Judaism and the polemics did not go much beyond Judaism’s boundaries. With the disappearance of the Judeo-Christian communities and the

triumph of rabbinic Judaism, these internal polemics lost their relevance. The very brief span of unrestricted Jewish-pagan and Jewish-Christian polemics ended when Christianity was declared the state religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 324. Later, as a result of the social and religious persecution of Jews in the Christian realm and antisemitism as a cornerstone of the Christian faith, any dialogue was out of the question. At most, Jews took part in enforced medieval “disputations” and confined themselves to a handful of apologies.

Direct cultural and religious contact between Jews and Christians was virtually non-existent. This began to change with the Renaissance when the humanists, and in their wake figures of the early Reformation and the Enlightenment, rediscovered the Jewish religious legacy as one of the cornerstones of Christian civilization. However, the periods of warming gave way to the next wave of antisemitism and persecution, which further reduced the likelihood of establishing stable cultural contacts between Jews and Christians.

A radical turning point in Jewish-Christian relations came in the 20th century following the genocide of Jews during the Second World War – the Holocaust/Shoah. Only after the War did western Christians acknowledge the church’s enormous responsibility for the tragic mass destruction of Jews. The evolution of post-Holocaust Christian thought has led to a radical reassessment in some denominations of the traditional foundations of their theology. A major factor in influencing these changes was the overall liberalization of social and religious attitudes that took place in Europe and America during the second half of the 20th century.

On one hand, the tragedy of the Holocaust dealt the final blow to any trust Jews might still have had in the Christian world. However, on the other some Jewish thinkers paradoxically turned to Christian symbols in an agonizing quest to come to terms with the meaning of what had happened, resorting to such ancient Christian images as Calvary and the cross. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, the image of the suffering Jesus began to be associated in Jewish art with the suffering of the Jews, an association which was reinforced after the Second World War.<sup>1</sup>

Israel was declared an independent state in 1948. This led to the growth and strengthening of economic and cultural ties between the Jewish State and the Christian world. It also had the positive effect on mutual religious relations and one of the more important consequences of improved relations was the establishment of joint Jewish-Christian organizations.

Another factor in the rapprochement between Jews and Christians has been the ideology of Reform Judaism with its emphasis on reconciling Jewish religious values with the demands of contemporary society has fostered further religious contacts between Jews and Christians, and has had a positive effect on the dialogue.

## **Pre-conditions for an Impartial and Open Dialogue**

For close on two millennia Jews have been ruthlessly persecuted in the Christian world. It is no surprise then that the initiative for promoting Jewish-Christian dialogue has to come from Christians, a view shared by many Christian scholars today. Also the staunch and understandable rejection of Christianity by many Jewish believers does nothing to further religious dialogue. As the first and necessary pre-condition to dialogue, Christians have decisively condemned antisemitism. At the same time Christians have recognized the unique role Jews play in the divine scheme. They have also declared their rejection of a series of postulates still occasionally encountered in Christian theology, for example that the Jews are an “accursed, God-forsaken nation”. Up to this point there is a great deal of agreement across the Christian denominations. After this, however, the paths of Christian thinkers part. The differences may be expressed as primarily concerning the ultimate goal of the church in relation to the Jews. Two main approaches to the Christian-Jewish dialogue may be distinguished: the missionary and the non-missionary approach.

- *The missionary or proselytizing approach.* In the most general terms, this approach may be summed up in this way: the gospel teaches it to be Christians' sacred duty to spread the good news among the Jews concerning Jesus, the Son of God and the Messiah. His coming was prophesied in the (Jewish) Old Testament, and only by embracing Jesus can Jews be granted deliverance and eternal life. Moreover, relying on New Testament texts such as Romans 1:16-17 and Ephesians 2:8-9, the refusal to proselytize is presented as a manifestation of antisemitism because it denies Jews their right to be saved.<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of this approach the ultimate goal of dialogue is the conversion of Jews to Christianity. To be sure, today's religious convention is civilized and often excludes any form of spiritual coercion. Christians are expected to treat Jews with love, and do not follow the medieval policy of converting Jews with "the cross and the sword".
- *The non-missionary approach.* This approach relinquishes all attempts at proselytizing by converting Jews to Christianity. Arguments in favor of this are both theological and ethical. After all the centuries of Christian antisemitism, trying to convince the Jews of the benefits of the Christian religion would be odd, to say the least. The proponents of the non-missionary approach point out that any attempt to convert Jews, even when done "with love", essentially pursues the same goals as medieval Christianity. All that has changed are the tools of religious persuasion. It can thus be said that these attempts are still antisemitic. Furthermore, opponents of the missionary approach believe it is inimical to Jewish willingness to enter into the dialogue, and thus to the development of the dialogue itself. The non-missionary approach wants that Jewish-Christian dialogue be conducted among equals, with neither side laying claim to religious superiority. Such a dialogue should aim at achieving a deeper mutual understanding and deriving mutual benefit in religious, philosophical, social and cultural terms.

In the last decades, the task of converting Jews has been made a top priority by a number of organizations that usually function under the auspices of Protestant churches – such as the Lausanne Consultation of Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), the Messianic Mission to Israel (MMI), and others.

Support for the non-missionary approach may be found in the more liberal wing of the Roman Catholic Church and in certain mainline and liberal Protestant churches. This approach is also supported by a number of leading contemporary Christian scholars engaged in historico-religious research and working closely with Jewish scholars.<sup>3</sup> The ideology of this approach is expressed by influential organizations such as the Councils of Christians and Jews represented in many countries.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a growth in the number of organizations supporting the non-missionary approach and a significant number of Christian organizations in Israel affirm it as a basic tenet of their activity. For example, the "Declaration of Principles" issued by the Christian kibbutz Nes Ammim states it is determined to "renounce both practically and in principle any pretension to engage in missionary proselytism (that is, efforts to make Jews members of the Church)."<sup>4</sup>

In the 1990s, the two approaches appear to have reached a certain impasse. In terms of numbers, the missionary approach is predominant because of the overwhelming number of Christians who adhere to traditional conservative views. In terms of quality, however, they are clearly at a disadvantage as a consequence of the weak theological and scientific grounds on which they usually base their arguments. Moreover, the non-missionary approach is part of the modern liberal tendency to grant autonomy to religious beliefs as a demonstration of their "right to truth" – the result is the non-missionary approach finding support from more liberal clergy and the secularized public at large. It is no accident that virtually all religio-scientific contact between Jews and Christians takes place under the banner of the rejection of missionary activity.

Without analyzing either approach any further, it is clear that the future of religious Jewish-Christian dialogue will rely on unequivocal rejection of the missionary approach. The very notion of dialogue presupposes respect towards one's interlocutor as possessing an equal claim to the truth. Any attempt to convert Jews to Christianity, no matter how veiled, are inherently contemptuous of religious Judaism.

As for the other partner in the dialogue, the Jewish side, here the situation is somewhat different. The majority of Christians almost unanimously accept the need for a relationship and differ only about goals and objectives. In contrast, mainstream religious Judaism and observant Jews have responded in three ways.<sup>5</sup>

- Jews who exhibit total indifference to, or even open disapproval of, such a dialogue. This group, with few exceptions, includes Orthodox Jews and the Hasidim.<sup>6</sup>
- Jews who welcome the dialogue with Christians and are actively involved in it. This group includes the Conservative movement. Reform Jews play the most active part in this group.
- A third group is what may be called messianic Jews. They accept Jesus as the Messiah but insist on staying within the paradigm of Jewish religious thought. They also intentionally remain outside any formal Christian denomination. However, every movement in Judaism, from Orthodox to Reform, categorically denies the religious Jewishness of these "messianic Jews".<sup>7</sup>

## The Problems of Doctrine and Methodology in Jewish-Christian Dialogue

To a large extent, Jewish-Christian dialogue is held back by the undeveloped nature of some basic themes. Three of these are:

- The shared acceptance and recognition of the religious value of Holy Scripture (called the Old Testament by Christians).
- The view of the New Testament as a body of religious texts rooted in and arising from Jewish tradition and which reflect, at least partially, the religious situation in Palestine and within the Jewish Diaspora during the first century C.E.
- New Testament figures, particularly the figure of Jesus, viewed from their definite historic association with Judaism. Behind this lies the understanding of proto-Christianity as one of the currents within Judaism at the turn of the era.

Even though the formulation of these themes as presented here is unlikely to be disputed by either Jews or Christians, discussion nevertheless gives rise to serious historical and methodological problems.

While traditional Christian theology acknowledges the Jewish Holy Scriptures (the Hebrew Bible) as inseparable from the Christian Bible, it sees a distinct hierarchy in the two testaments. The New Testament is held as more important because here is told the story of God becoming human. The Old Testament, on the other hand, is read as a sort of prototype, the preliminary material for the New Testament, a set of prophetic or prognostic statements realized in the New Testament. Moreover, even when declaring the books of the Old Testament sacred, many theologians (followed by traditionalist Christian believers) differentiate between the prophetic content of the Old Testament and its ritualistic and law-making instructions and view the latter as harbingers of Pharisaic or rabbinic ideology found later in the Talmud. There is a widely held opinion that the pre-captivity (i.e. before the deportation into Babylon) religion of Israel is fundamentally opposed to the post-captivity religion of Judaism, viewed in a disparaging way as *Spätjudentum*, or "late Judaism".<sup>8</sup> Most Christians attach no importance to post-biblical Jewish religious literature and Roman Catholics consider the Christian Holy Tradition to be the fundamental and unquestionable source of interpretation of the Old Testament. For them the Christian Holy Tradition consists of

decrees of Ecumenical Church councils, the legacy of the Fathers of the Church, and so on. Protestants too have their Holy Traditions – the teachings of Luther, Calvin, and other Protestant theologians.

In contrast, Jews treat Holy Scripture as self-sufficient and fundamental. With the Torah given to Moses at Sinai he received the oral law, which was subsequently laid down in the Talmud. Orthodox Jews and the Hasidim continue to follow the Talmudic precepts, which are considered fundamentally immutable.<sup>9</sup> The Talmud functions as the Jewish Holy Tradition. It represents Judaism's supreme and unquestionable authority for interpreting Holy Scripture.

In other words, the content of the shared religious source, accepted as sacred by both religions, is interpreted in such a way that the validity of the other is rejected. If we also take into account the marked differences in tools and methods of interpretation (see below), it comes as no surprise that the Hebrew Bible is read in completely different ways by Christians and Jews. This considerably reduces the value of its being shared by the two religions.

The New Testament, despite all the arguments about its origins, is inseparable from the multiform Jewish religious heritage of the late period of the Second Temple. Nevertheless, due to a series of unfortunate, but inescapable historical circumstances, it remains outside the main body of religious texts for the overwhelming majority of Jews. Moreover, Jews harbor a historically justified antagonism and anxiety towards the very notion of a New Testament and Christianity, which is associated with centuries of persecution. Though it is the product of first century Judaism and should be interpreted in light of the religious tenants of the time, the New Testament remains the exclusive domain of the Christian church.

As for the figure of Jesus, the church has never overcome the Monophysitism and Docetism (two expressions of the dogmatic error emphasizing Christ's divinity to the exclusion of his humanity) that have characterized Christian history, despite the dogmatic agreement about Christ's natures established at the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.). As a consequence, divinity overshadowed humanity in the Christian mind, and not only in popular thinking. This had the effect of belittling, wittingly or unwittingly, Jesus the man, a Jew by flesh and blood who lived in *Eretz Israel* some two thousand years ago.

The struggle for the "historical Jesus", launched at the turn of the 20th century by liberal Protestant theology, ended in failure. The highly intellectual studies by Dibelius, Bultmann and their followers laid the theoretical basis for the claim that it was impossible, and in fact unnecessary, to recreate an authentic historical picture of early Christianity, and consequently of its Jewish roots. As a result, the Jewish origins of Jesus the man lost its concrete historical content for many Christians and retained only a purely theological meaning.<sup>10</sup> This movement away from the importance of history was furthered by the universalist and spiritualized nature of classic Christian theology, which nullified the ethno-social element that shaped first century Christianity. According to this approach, Jesus is an ideal model for humanity, with the imagined ideal projected onto the historical reality of any given era.<sup>11</sup> Such an abstract image is met with indifference by Jews, who have many ideal models of their own and the figure of Jesus the Jew loses any potential interest he might have had for them.

No less problematic are the different methodological principles used as the basic guidelines for interpreting Holy Scripture by Jewish and Christian scholars. Traditionalist Christians, who base their reading of the text solely on (their perception of) its literal meaning, or the supreme authority of a recognized interpreter (e.g. the Holy Fathers), are not considered here. With the more liberal Christian approach, we affirm that Scripture meets (to a greater or lesser extent) the modern requirement of historic and linguistic science. On the Jewish side, those outside the Orthodox movements conform to these requirements. However the more traditional groups employ the exegetical and hermeneutic principles established during the first and second centuries C.E. by



Hillel, Rabbi Eliezer ben Yosef, Rabbi Akiva and other lawgivers – principles of interpretation which have remained virtually unchanged to this day. These principles have had an enormous influence on the evolution of religious and philosophical thought, both Jewish and European by being absorbed into medieval Christianity. However, these principles have nothing in common with the hermeneutics used in modern scientific and critical methods.

A major difference between the Christian and Jewish approaches to their religious heritage lies in the increasing tendency of Christians to view the genesis of religious beliefs in the context of historical, social, psychological, and economic life. Orthodox and Hasidic Jews use the traditional Jewish sources only with their strong reliance on *Halacha*. They do not consider historical, scientific and critical principles.

The extent to which this problem hampers Judaism from exploring its religious and historical nature is shown in an interview given by a prominent Israeli scholar, the late Shlomo Pines, to the 22 magazine.<sup>12</sup> In the interview, Pines states: “Since Judaism came under the rule of the Talmudic sages, historiography as such ceased to exist ... [The sages] preserved only that which pertained to the *Halacha*. History they obliterated as if with an eraser. For instance, they obliterated everything to do with the reign of the Hasmoneans.” Pines goes on to talk about their attempts to gloss over “the rebellion against Rome and the events that accompanied the destruction of the Temple”.

In a separate comment (and one that is especially important in the context here), Pines also refers to Christianity. “Take, for example, the birth of Christianity. A stupendous event by any standard – and yet completely overlooked in our sources.” Such an approach, in Pines’ view, has led and continues to lead to grave misconceptions in the way Jews evaluate their own religious heritage. By way of example he points out that all the major movements in contemporary Judaism associate Pesach, which celebrates the Exodus from Egypt, with the fundamental notion of freedom. encegoes on that this can even be considered a traditional association. However, he points out that this interpretation emerged only late in Jewish teaching, when the Temple had already been destroyed. The connection of “Exodus from Egypt” with “freedom” was made only under the influence of Greco-Roman ideas by Hellenistic Jews, members of dissident sects who would definitely be regarded as marginal elements and apostates by today’s Orthodox Jews.

Pines, however, does not address the issues underlying the attitude of the Talmudic sages and later Jewish sources to history. One of the main reasons was the difficult struggle for survival in the face of imposed polemics with Christians. There were also the pressures of Christian censorship and of forced self-censorship. In this hostile environment Jewish lawgivers were compelled to observe double standards, an internal and an external morality.<sup>13</sup> Thus in their desire to refute the Christian methods of treating the Hebrew Bible as a collection of messianic auguries concerning Jesus, Jewish sages would discard ancient exegesis that traditionally might have defined certain verses as messianic prophecy. For example, Rashi comments on the verse in Psalm 2 “... rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed” as follows: “Our teachers understood the word ‘anointed’ here to apply to the Messiah. Yet in its literal meaning it may serve as an objection to Christians, and it would be right to view it as applying to David, as in other places in the Scriptures.” There are many other examples, where commentaries pursue purely tactical goals and begin with the words “Christians may be met with the following objection...”.

Times may have changed, but certain interpretations of the biblical text that were once part of Jewish tradition are now ignored. At the same time, despite the obvious advances made by biblical criticism in the Christian world, scientific conclusions are still frequently tainted by religious bias. This is clear when the Christo-centric interpretation of Holy Scripture and the theology of penal substitution predominate. Under these circumstances dialogue is considerably narrowed.

A significant role is played by the difference in status of Jewish and Christian scholars. Since the

Renaissance, there has been a steady weakening of dogmatic restrictions on the study of religious and general history in western Christianity. Orthodox Christianity however, does not share this tendency (see below). At present Protestants and Roman Catholics may use any scientific methodology and are able to defend extreme conclusions in their religious studies. During the last few decades certain scholars have been denounced for their views by the church authorities. The Anglican Bishop John Robinson's book *Honest to God* was condemned by many and Hans Küng was summonsed to the Congregation of Faith and stripped of his authority to teach. However, these were isolated instances that triggered a wave of protests from lay people and clergy alike, including the bishops, especially in support of Hans Küng. This is a testimony to the general spirit of tolerance and the more or less unrestricted nature of theological research today. This freedom of research is enjoyed by secular scholars and by ordained clergy too.

A different situation exists in the fundamentalist currents of Judaism where learning is strictly subordinate to clerical injunctions. Thus Rabbi Steinzalts, who enjoys an enormous reputation in the Jewish world and can hardly be accused of reformism, nevertheless has had his books branded as heretical by Rabbi Eliezer Shach. What is even more surprising, Rabbi Steinzalts repented of his opinions and offered to redeem his blasphemous works.<sup>14</sup>

In discussing the future prospects of Jewish-Christian dialogue it is impossible to ignore the severe difficulties each side brings to the dialogue. Besides conflicting opinions about the purpose of the dialogue (there is a marked discrepancy in the choice of fundamental theological sources), there is also the matter of deciding which subjects are to be considered (there are denominational and clerical restrictions here). Tools for dealing with the topics under discussion will also need to be settled and there are serious methodological disagreements to be overcome. For all these reasons there is unlikely to be rapid progress in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. However, this dialogue is important for both Jews and Christians and the dialogue will continue to grow and evolve. We remain inseparably linked by our shared religious past and may be hopeful of the growth of this dialogue, in part because of the modernization of religious life and the continued secularization of religious research. The basis and model for this dialogue may be the long-existing and fruitful cooperation between Jewish and Christian scholars – historians, linguists, and religious experts in Israel, the United States, Great Britain and other countries – which has brought us this far.

## The Situation in Russia

Till now reference to Christian participants in the dialogue has been to mainly western Christians. Is it possible for this dialogue to take place in Russia? Can there be dialogue between the synagogue and the Russian Orthodox Church, the dominant Christian denomination? In order to approach the question, the situation in Russia, which is quite different from Europe, needs to be looked at briefly.

- The Russian Orthodox Church's main representative in Russia is the Moscow Patriarchy. The Patriarchy harbors a widespread and powerful medieval form of anti-Judaism, which at times is indistinguishable from antisemitism.<sup>15</sup> This spirit is reflected in the sermons of priests and the declarations of nationalist Russian Orthodox organizations. It is further apparent in the printing and reprinting of Russian Orthodox books and pamphlets by official church institutions which are openly anti-Jewish and antisemitic.<sup>16</sup> For example, the Moscow Patriarchate has remained virtually indifferent to the openly antisemitic statements, articles and books by the prominent hierarch, the late Ioann (Snychev), former metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga.<sup>17</sup>

Active anti-Judaism evolved into antisemitism among a large section of Orthodox believers because it had such strong theological support. The cornerstones of Russian Orthodox teaching are the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition. The Holy Tradition is permeated by a strong anti-Jewish spirit<sup>18</sup> that determines the views of the faithful. The Roman Catholic

Church and many Protestant denominations have taken decisive steps in the second half of the 20th century to reevaluate their historical and theological views of Jewishness and Judaism. The Russian Orthodox Church has done virtually nothing about its views. An exception is the extraordinary speech of Patriarch Alexiy II to New York rabbis in 1991. This speech met with vehement criticism in Orthodox circles and has had no long-term positive effect.<sup>19</sup> However, without a radical reassessment of the Christian religious legacy, there is little point pursuing the possibility of Christian-Jewish religious dialogue. This much is clear, the Christian church must make the first steps to initiate this dialogue.

- One of the issues holding back this dialogue is the glaring ignorance of the problems by so many Orthodox Christians. Only a small number of religious books available are of a high modern academic standard.<sup>20</sup> Most of what is being printed and reprinted consists of hopelessly outdated pre-Revolution catechisms and pamphlets. There is also no modern verse-by-verse commentary of the Bible available in Russian, besides the rarely found, and far from good translation of a commentary by the Protestant William Barclay, which is practically unavailable in churches. So, believers (including most of the clergy) lack the basic knowledge of religious history and exegesis. This has occasionally led to totally absurd situations.<sup>21</sup> Given all this, the shared ground for religious dialogue with the Jews is simply non-existent.

It is no wonder then that the Russian Orthodox Church in its present state is not interested in maintaining any sort of dialogue with Jews. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, the clergy and the rabbis do not meet, except at official government functions.

Round-table discussions and religious conferences held in recent years have been cultural exchanges and have not raised any genuine religious issues. Nevertheless, these meetings, and the few newly formed ecumenical and inter-denominational organizations (such as Moscow's Face to Face), may provide a sound basis for future dialogue.

Concerning Russian Jews as potential partners in Jewish-Christian dialogue, their problems are essentially the same as those of western Jews. However, Russia's unique culture and history makes existing problems worse and adds new ones. Some of these new issues are:

- There is a mass emigration of religious Jews from Russia. This has meant there are significantly fewer potential participants in the dialogue.
- An extremely small percentage of Jews belong to the Reform movement. Again, this has meant few potential participants in the dialogue.
- Russian Jews are isolated from the rest of the world of Jewish religious learning. Further there is no scientific base, no professionally qualified scholars, and no essential literature. As a result, there is a strong provincialism that isolates people from other religious contacts. This cultural and religious isolation has begun to disappear in recent years with more books being available and the establishment of new learning centers, and so on. However, this is a lengthy and arduous process and it will be a long time before it begins to bear fruit.
- Russian Jews are passive in their dealings with the Orthodox Church, which is itself in a state of crisis. This passivity is noticeable regardless of which movement Jews belong to.

The combined affect of these issues is that we should not expect any significant progress in Russian Jewish-Christian dialogue in the near future. This does not mean that all efforts to keep the dialogue going should be abandoned. This dialogue remains crucial and any existing problems that hinder the dialogue must be dealt with in an urgent and serious manner. As for the future prospects of this dialogue, these are inseparably linked to the gradual democratization of Russian society and the growth of religious, historical and general humanitarian education. All these will need to be supported by intense efforts at rapprochement and mutual understanding.



At the time of writing, material was published of the Third Academic Conference of Orthodox Christians and Jews meeting in Athens.<sup>22</sup> This material included something about the history of the Jewish-Orthodox Christian dialogue and confirms that the dialogue is indeed taking place, albeit at a very low intensity. Since 1976, the year the first preliminary conference of Orthodox Christians and Jews was held in Geneva, only three similar meetings have taken place. The Orthodox churches are represented almost exclusively by members of the Greek and Romanian churches. There are also a small number of representatives of other churches who attended the conferences only as observers. As for the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest of the Orthodox churches, the 1993 conference was the first to be attended by two of its representatives and one of them, Protopresbyter Vitaly Borovoy, delivered a speech. By way of comparison, 11 people represented the Greek Orthodox Church.

Turning to the substance of the reports and presentations delivered at the conference, we should note the desire of both sides for mutual understanding, and categorical rejection of religious enmity and antisemitism. However, none of the Orthodox contributions were significantly different from the conservative approach currently predominant in the West. The dichotomies of Old Testament versus New Testament, law versus grace and the paternalistic and didactic approach to missionary activity were all elements still there, and still detrimental to fruitful dialogue.

At the same time, most of the presentations do show a greater level of openness and erudition such as we see in the Russian Orthodox press and the media, with the possible exception of reports that occasionally appear on Radio Sofia and in certain secular publications. Father Borovoy, the official envoy of the Moscow Patriarchate at the conference, made a very favorable impression. His presentation shows there is a genuine desire for mutual understanding with the Jews and he condemns antisemitism in unequivocal terms. Father Borovoy shows his concern about the present situation in Russia by his appeal to the Eastern Orthodox churches to draft a declaration setting down the Christian attitude to Jews. The idea is this declaration will then serve as the guiding principle for the Russian Orthodox Church as the authoritative voice of universal Orthodoxy. It is important to get the eastern churches to produce this declaration because, according to Father Borovoy, opinions originating in the West, even when they come from Orthodox Christians, are rejected in Russia. A statement like this is extremely rare from official representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, the very fact of it testifies to the potential, if very limited, for the development of Jewish-Christian dialogue in Russia.

#### Notes

[1.](#) See David G Roskes. *Vopreki Apokalipsisu*. Jerusalem 1989, pp 285-300 (Russian translation of the English original *Against the Apocalypse*).

[2.](#) Roy Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers*, New York, 1967, p 65.

[3.](#) Contemporary proponents of the missionary approach lack any serious experts. In fact, the inferior standard of their scientific inquiry, published literature and training of qualified specialists are all of concern to them. See John Fisher, "Theological Education and Jewish Evangelism", *Lausanne Consultation of Jewish Evangelism (LCJE)*. August 8-9 1991, p 242.

[4.](#) Quoted in Arthur P. Glasser, "Evangelical Objections to Jewish Evangelism", *LCJE*. August 6 1991, p 83.

[5.](#) "Mainstream religious Judaism" refers to Orthodox, Hassidic, Conservative and Reform

Judaism. No account is taken here of their various branches and their marginal movements such as Reconstructionism, the “Godless Synagogue”, etc.

6. For example, the famous Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveichik urges Jews not to enter into religious dialogue with Christians because he believes it is aimed at undermining the religious foundations of Judaism and then at Jewish assimilation. At the same time religious Jews in this group know about Christian issues only by hearsay. They then dismiss the issues as having no value whatsoever. This is so with many translated pamphlets dealing with the New Testament and early Christianity published by the Hasidim and Orthodox Jews in Russian and are marked by their inferior scholarly quality and undisguised tendentiousness. Contrary examples are scant, but there are occasional brilliant instances of unbiased scholarly work. See, for example, R. Menahem’s article “*Epitropos/Pakid* in the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard”, *Immanuel* No. 24/25. Jerusalem 1990, pp 118-132. The author, an Orthodox rabbi (who unfortunately suffered an untimely death), dedicated his work to the prominent Jewish New Testament scholar David Flusser, who “opened a pathway to both the Christian and Jewish sources”.

7. As for the entangled issue of messianic Jews, we tend to accept T. Ptushkina’s point of view that they should be viewed as within the framework of Judaism – see “U Kosmy I Damiana”, *Yevreiskaya Gazeta*. 1993, No. 11-12. Some messianic groups such as Jews for Jesus however, actually represent a purely Protestant movement that has little to do with Judaism. See also F.R. de Gasperis, “Un nouveau judéo-christianisme”, *Etudes* juin. 1993, pp 795-804.

8. See J. Parkes, *The Foundations of Judaism and Christianity*. London 1960, p 10.

9. “He who finds in the Torah a meaning incompatible with the *halacha* ... thereby forfeits his share in the future life” (Avot, III, 12). The following is by the prominent contemporary Jewish author, Rabbi A. Steinzalts: “*Mishnah* ... possesses indisputable authority ... [T]he statements that make up *Mishnah* are utterly precise ... [A]ny errors, even in *Mishnah*’s lexicon and phraseology, are impossible in principle”. *Vvedene v Talmud* (Introduction to the Talmud). Moscow, 1993 p 7 (Russian).

10. “... Jesus is above nationality. And not by divine grace but by human nature.” V. Gubanov, “Iisus Khristos – Bogochelovek” (Jesus Christ – the God-Man). *Russkii Vestnik*, 1993, No. 17 (Russian).

11. Thus Jesus as interpreted by such people as Jacques Maritain, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Nikolai Berdyaev, may be perceived as an extraordinary religious and philosophical image – moreover, an image capable of exerting a profound humanizing influence on society and culture. In other interpretations, such as those of Torquemada or Archimandrite Photius, Jesus becomes the inspiration for the most inhuman actions and reactionary ideas. In both cases this image has little in common with the actual historical person of Jesus the Jew.

12. 22. Jerusalem, 1989, No. 66, pp 100-113 (Russian).

13. See J. Katz, *Bein Jehudim le-Goim* (Between Jews and non-Jews). Israel, 1961 (Hebrew).

[14.](#) *Kratkaya Evreiskaya Encyclopedia* (The Shorter Jewish Encyclopedia) Supp 1. Jerusalem, 1992, col. 121 (Russian).

[15.](#) For specific articles devoted to the issue of Orthodox antisemitism, see *Pravoslavnaya Tserkov i evrei. XIX-XX vv* ("The Orthodox Church and the Jews. The 19th and 20th centuries"). Moscow, 1994 (Russian) and *Russkaya ideya i evrei* ("The Russian idea and the Jews"). Moscow, 1994 (Russian).

[16.](#) A glaring example is the reprinted edition of *Vospominaniya* ("Recollections") by Prince Zhevakhov, published by the Balaam Monastery (1993) next to which even the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* pales in comparison! As a matter of fact, in recent years the *Protocols* have been actively sold in Russian Orthodox bookshops under the jacket of S. Nilus *Velikoe v malom* (The great in the small).

[17.](#) The views of metropolitan Ioann are excellently summarized and analyzed in I. Levinsky's article "Rannii Gitler, pozdnii Stalin, nezlobivyi Ivan Groznyi i drugie" (The early Hitler, the late Stalin, the meek Ivan the Terrible and others) in the St. Petersburg *Barrier Magazine*. 1994, No. 4, pp 11-13 (Russian).

[18.](#) See, for example, the classic study of the roots and nature of Christian antisemitism in the Tradition of the Holy Fathers by M. Simon, *Verus Israel*. Paris, 1983 as well as a more general work by Yves Chevalier, *L'Anti-sémitisme*. Paris, 1988.

[19.](#) *Rech patriarkha Alexia II k ravvinam g. Niu-Yorka 13 noyabria 1991 goda i eres jidovstviushih* (The speech delivered by Patriarch Alexi II before the New York Board of Rabbis on November 13, 1991 and the heresy of the Judaizers). USA, 1992 (Russian).

[20.](#) One such author is the archpriest Alexander Men whose wonderful books are unfortunately not usually sold in churches. Even though the church authorities have not brought any formal accusation against them, his books have been branded heretical.

[21.](#) See Y. Tabak, "Melochi pravoslavnoi zhizni" (The Trivia of Orthodox Christian life), *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 6, 1993 (Russian).

[22.](#) "Orthodox Christians and Jews on Continuity and Renewal", *Immanuel*, No. 26/27, Jerusalem, 1994.

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