Jewish and Orthodox Christian Interfaith Leaders Strengthen Dialogue

30.06.2013 | Rabbi Eric J. Greenberg

June 11, 2013. ADL Interfaith Director Rabbi Eric J. Greenberg discussed rising anti-Semitism and the state of Orthodox Christian-Jewish relations at the Eighth Academic Consultation Between Judaism and Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Greenberg and His Grace Bishop Petroniu of Romania appeared on a panel titled "Establishing Solidarity: Obstacles and Challenges" which explored the consequences of continued negative teachings and portrayals of the other in educational and religious texts and traditions. They were among a dozen Jewish and Christian noted interfaith clerics and scholars to give presentations at the three-day conference, titled "The Spiritual and Physical Environment: Respecting Our World, Respecting One Another."

Co-sponsored by the Liaison Office of Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Bartholomew, and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), a Jewish umbrella group of which ADL is a charter member, the meeting was the latest in an on-going effort to improve relations and dialogue between Orthodox Christianity and Judaism, a project which began in 1976.

About 40 priests, rabbis and academics from around the world, including Russia, Georgia, Romania, Israel, France, Greece, Finland, and the United States participated.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew provided a message of welcome, emphasizing the notion of our planet as our home and our shared religious obligation to protect the environment. "…the natural environment – the forest, the water the land – belongs not only to the present generation but also to future generations," he wrote. "We must frankly admit that humankind is entitled to something better than what we see around us," noting such threats to the ecology as the misuse of technology, deforestation and overfishing. "That is why we have repeatedly emphasized that abuse of the natural environment is tantamount to sinning against God and neighbor," Bartholomew stated.

Rabbi Chaim Weiner, Director, European Masorti Bet Din in London, Professor Shira Lander of Rice University in Houston, Texas, and Professor Georges Prevelakis, University of Sorbonne, Paris, discussed how people with religious values can influence and interact with secular society. Israeli Rabbi Julian Sinclair and Finnish Rev. Heikki Huttumen discussed the religious obligation to care for the earth, and how faith adherents must take immediate steps to work together to protect our water, land and air.

Rabbi Greenberg's paper focused on the manner in which we presently teach about each other, and the ways in which we ought to teach about each other. He identified a myriad of relevant topics in which our understanding of the other is formed, including educational materials, biblical presentation and interpretation, liturgy, homiletics, Holocaust education, modern racial anti-Semitism, religious anti-Judaism and contemporary catechetical and Jewish day school curricula. Citing academic papers from previous Orthodox Christian and Jewish scholars, Rabbi Greenberg presented a detailed analysis of negative texts and presented sociological studies that

demonstrated a high correlation between the religious teaching of contempt of Jews and increased anti-Semitism. He urged that both sides begin to address these issues now. "There are serious and painful issues that face our two faith communities, and we minimize their importance at our peril," he stated. "The progress achieved thus far is indicative of the ways in which our two communities have grown closer together, and our ability to have such a frank and open discussion gives us hope for the future.

"There is much that Jews need to learn about the Orthodox Christian world," he said. "Jews must appreciate the strength of apostolic and patristic authority in Orthodox Christianity, even as Judaism invokes z'chut avot v'emot – the merits of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs."

The Orthodox Christian delegation was led by His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, and the Jewish delegation by IJCIC Chair Professor Lawrence Schiffman. Participants met with local government and religious leaders including Thessaloniki Mayor Ioannis Boutaris, Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki, and David Saltiel, president of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki. The delegations also visited the Monastiriotes Synagogue, the Holocaust Monument and the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

One theme of the meeting was to commemorate the solidarity Jewish and Christian Orthodox citizens of Thessaloniki displayed at the time of the Shoah in World War II, and to discover what processes are necessary to sustain that level of solidarity in today's increasingly contentious world.

Noting that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has declared 2013 the Year of Global Solidarity, Metropolitan Emmanuel said: "It is well documented that Greeks living in Thessaloniki at the time of the Shoah stood with their Jewish neighbors and friends. Today, more than ever, we must stand together to battle the evils of anti-Semitism, religious prejudice and all forms of discrimination."

Professor Schiffman, vice provost at Yeshiva University in New York said: "These meetings are extremely important for both the Jewish people and Orthodox Christianity because we share a long history and common roots. We are committed to building mutual respect and better understanding between our two faiths."

Source: Anti-Defamation League

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