



# To Recognize Christ in His People: Declaration by a Round Table of Eastern Orthodox Priests and Cultural Representatives

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*Twelve Eastern Orthodox priests and lay leaders from Greece, Georgia, Italy, Russia, and Ukraine issued this statement at the conclusion of a five-day visit to Jerusalem, April 20-24, 2007.*

## To Recognize Christ in His People

**The final declaration by the Christian Round Table of Eastern Orthodox priests**

and cultural representatives from Greece, Georgia, Italy, Russia, and Ukraine

visiting Jerusalem, April 20-24, 2007

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For centuries Jews and Christians have been both united and separated by the relation to Christ. St. Peter said: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Son Jesus; whom you delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go" (Acts 3:13). Yet if the Apostle's words "you delivered" could refer only to the crowd that screamed "Crucify him!", then the reference of "the God of our fathers [who] has glorified his servant Jesus" is forever pointed at all the Jews and all the Christians. It is as eternal as the Covenant made at Sinai. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Moses, David, Solomon, the God of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, the God of Judas the Maccabean, the God of Anna the Prophetess and Simon the God Bearer, was, is, and will always be the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The idea of succession is conveyed particularly vividly in the anaphora of Vassily the Great's Liturgy. Jesus was, is, and will be the true son of the Jewish people and the true and only and profoundest revelation of the Father that is given us in the Holy Spirit.

For centuries the links of Jesus to His people have been in the shadows. Yet it is the words "you delivered" that came in the foreground and became the basis for an ideology, for contempt, for rejection, for the ghetto, the pale, the hate, the pogroms, and ended in the Holocaust . . . We propose to reflect why enraged cries of the people who were not aware of what they were doing made an imprint in the Christians' memory, while the Lord's prayer of forgiveness was lost, or why were not heard the words of St. Peter's: "...And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he has so fulfilled." (Acts 3:17-18)

Yet even after the death of six million people anti-Semites feel no guilt. On the contrary, anti-Semitism is growing in Moslem and former Communist countries. As a totalitarian ideology, anti-Semitism is in the state of spiritual obsession that continually invents new enemies in old disguise. In any form it is a poison that contaminates a Christian soul. And he who in our day uses the word "Jew" as a curse lies when he calls himself a Christian. As we go over the tragedy of the Holocaust, we are being called on to discover something on a truly evangelic scale: to know Christ who is being crucified with His people. The Holocaust is an obvious sign that points at the anti-Christ nature of the replacement theology. It must lead us to atonement and search for new paths, including theological ones. It is time that we called anti-Semitism a grave sin against God and man.

## What Befogs Our Eyesight?

We worship Christ as True God and True Man. We know that the Divine Word addressed to all people first sounded in the native language of Jesus, who read the Testament that laid down the law of the people to whom He belonged. But so badly did the rejectionist position befog our eyesight that we could neither utter nor even conceive of things so evident. We forgot that Jesus who was originally sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, healed and resurrected the people of this House, that he loved them and bemoaned them as His brothers and sisters. This love permeates the entire Gospel – is it not the expression of his True Humanity that we worship?

And this True Humanity of our Lord cannot be dissolved into abstract universality. Christ the God-man, the New Adam, who sacrificed Himself for the world's sins, was and is also the Son of "Blessed among Women" and the Son of His People in flesh. Whatever brings us the new knowledge of Christ as He was in his earthly sojourn can only enrich our faith.

## Gifts Without Repentance

St. Paul's words, "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29), never reached the Christians' hearts in their fullness. They were replaced by the so-called "replacement theology" whose lack of justification was revealed by the Holocaust. The conflict between two Israels does not follow from the Revelation and is not etched forever in the Christian consciousness. The New Israel does not cancel out the Original one. In order to know the mystery of coexistence of two Israels we have to start with a prayer for reconciliation.

We must reflect on the fact that the gifts received by the Jews still remain outside the reality of our experience. Our faith should help us understand Judaism more profoundly. We have to admit that a theological substitute for “replacement theology” has not yet been offered. Yet we place our hopes in the Christian – better yet, joint – prayer of reconciliation. Reconciliation does not signify theological, liturgic, or confessional mixture. Instead, it brings atonement, forgiveness, and love.

## **Our Heritage**

In the spirit of this love we must review our own hymnal heritage (in particular, certain hymns of the Passion Week). We should make sure that everything here is in the spirit of the charity that "suffers long, and is kind; charity envies not; charity vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." (1 Corinthians 13:4-6)

## **Ridding Ourselves of Poison**

Indifference to promulgating anti-Semitic literature in the church shops of Orthodox communities and cathedrals; ignoring and even encouraging of this regrettable activity – all these contradict Christian ethics. We expect this practice to be eliminated.

## **Martyr Experience**

The Christians have undergone an incredible experience of martyrdom. In the course of this experience sometimes it was very hard to distinguish proper martyrdom for faith from passion-suffering, i.e. dying not in the name of Christ, but in the spirit of Christ, in the spirit of a voiceless "lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7). Can one not see this Lamb in all the Jewish victims of pogroms and genocides?

## **Right to Land**

If we are to realize the Jews' centuries-long suffering, we should actively acknowledge their right to their own land and their own country. Looking back on their own history, the Christian community should not forget that they failed to guarantee the security of the Jews in their midst. Therefore it is the duty of all men of goodwill today to promote peace and security for the State of Israel. The pilgrims to the Holy Land ought to remember that this Land is on the territory of a state with a history that stems from the Bible. One cannot fail to see a God's sign in reviving this state nineteen centuries after its destruction. This does not imply supporting any nationalism and indicates respect for rights and dignity of all the people residing in the Holy Land.

## **Condemnation of Terrorism**

One of the most important conditions of the necessary dialogue between Christians and Moslems is the demand of unconditional condemnation of terror in all its forms on the part of Moslem religious leaders. We should show zero tolerance to terror, as well as its inspirers and champions.

## **Dialog with Judaism**

For centuries Jewish theologians ignored the very existence of the Prophet from Galilee. In the second half of the last century the situation finally changed. Besides the turning of Christians to Judaic heritage, the Jews also showed interest in Christian heritage, as shown by the research and publications of Jewish scholars (Flusser, Klausner, Shuraki, etc.) Of course for us Jesus is not merely an historical personality, not merely a teacher, not merely a prophet. For us, there is no Jesus outside the Holy Spirit that gives us faith, outside the Holy Trinity, or outside Resurrection. Yet we are prepared to meet even such interest with understanding and sympathy. Especially notable in this context is the Dabru Emet (Jews on Christians and Christianity) declaration adopted by rabbis and Jewish scholars 2000.

## **Israel and Reconciliation among Christians**

The connection between reconciliation between Christians and Israel, on the one hand, and among Christians, on the other, becomes more indisputable. This does not mean that we would instantly forsake our traditions and centuries-long discords; rather, it suggests that, while staying faithful to our traditions, we should time and again turn to the mystery of reconciliation in the living and blessed feeling of Christ who carries and saves mankind.

We call on Christians, people of goodwill, to join us in this declaration.

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