

# COMMUNIQUE

## THIRD ACADEMIC MEETING BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND JUDAISM

“CONTINUITY AND RENEWAL”  
ATHENS, MARCH 21-24, 1993

The Third Academic Meeting between Orthodox Christianity and Judaism took place from March 21-24, 1993, at the Astir Hotel (Vouliagmenis). The meeting was organized by the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Geneva), with the collaboration of the representatives of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, and with the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece. The co-presidents were His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, Director of the Orthodox Center, and Dr. Gerhart Riegner, Honorary Vice-President of the World Jewish Congress.

The opening of the meeting began with the reading of the message from His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios I. There was a greeting by Mr. Israel Singer, the General Secretary of the World Jewish Congress, on behalf of Hon. Edgar Bronfman, Chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

An important message was also given by Mrs. Virginia Tsouderou, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The purpose of the meeting was defined in a comprehensive presentation by the Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, which Dr. Gerhart Riegner answered on the part of the Jewish side.

The significant message of the Ecumenical Patriarch included and underlined the following:

This common spiritual origin of Christians and Jews seems today, more than ever, to offer a fruitful ground toward the rejection of the consequences of mutual prevailing hostility during the past, and the establishment of a new relationship between them, genuine and authentic, rooted in the willingness to work toward mutual understanding and improved knowledge of each other.

The Patriarch declared that

Today, more than ever before, those who believe in God, most especially the members of the same spiritual family, are called to offer together, and in dialogue, the rich witness of their traditions in the urgently necessary quest for better solutions to the great and serious problems which we face, concerning the collapse of moral and spiritual values in general, and, in particular, the violation of the value of the human person, the unique and incomparable image of God.

Mr. Israel Singer underlined the following:

The purpose of the dialogue is the mending of the world (*tikkun olam*). However, this would not be successful with the change of one side, but rather that each side will change itself, which is facilitated by the proceedings of the dialogue.... The rabbinic tradition says that, just as there are no two persons exactly alike, every member of the dialogue maintains their identity.

The Deputy Minister Mrs. Virginia Tsouderou stressed in her address the following:

The Third Academic meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism in the city of Athens constitutes a profoundly significant event not only for the historical relations but also for the contemporary possibilities of cooperation between the two biblical faiths. The selection of Athens for this meeting by the organizers was a very positive step. Athens was the cradle of classical philosophy and thinking, the first city to seek the reasons of existence on the basis of human thought and fruitful creativity.... Despite the existing religious differences between Judaism and Christianity, these two religions substantially contributed to the development of a universal spirit, so that we can speak about their positive coexistence pertaining to humanity.

Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland made reference to the history of the Meetings, underlining that:

It is indeed with special satisfaction and joy that I participate in the experience of "Continuity and Renewal" in these academic meetings between representatives of Orthodoxy and Judaism, with the purpose to seek the common elements of both religious traditions. These elements would be able to be developed from both sides for the promotion of a spirit of sincere respect and mutual understanding in a period of un-

foreseeable and intensified explosion of the phenomenon of religious intolerance and violent fanaticism, not only in the agitated Europe, but also on a world-wide scale....

The initiatives of the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in organizing academic Meetings, as much with Judaism as with Islam, express the open spirit of the Mother Church for a more positive contribution of Orthodoxy toward the direction of the peaceful coexistence of the faithful of the three religions, who live together in the same geographic area and are confronted with common problems. In this framework, the First Preconciliar Panorthodox Conference (1976) already declared the will of the Orthodox Church to collaborate in a spirit of mutual understanding with the other religions for wiping out fanaticism and establishing peaceful coexistence of the people. The Third Preconciliar Panorthodox Conference (1986) ... invited the local Orthodox Churches to "contribute to interreligious collaboration, and thereby to the suppression of fanaticism from all sides, and thus to reconciliation among nations and the triumph of the goods of freedom and peace in the world for the well-being of contemporary man, independently of race and religion. It is understood of course that this collaboration excludes all syncretism, as well as any attempt on the part of any religion to impose itself on the others."

As regards the main theme of this meeting, it seemed good to choose a dialectic approach on a subject of exceptional importance not only for each of the two sides, but also for the deeper relationships of both religions: "Continuity and Renewal." The claim for "continuity" as much as the claim for "renewal" comparatively present many common elements in the phenomenology of religious experience, although they are essentially differentiated according to their context, as well as according to their reference to the relation of God with man and the world. The criteria of interpretation of these two expressions of religious experience are on the one hand, for Judaism, the Law (Torah) and the historical appropriation of the first Testament of God to man, and on the other hand, for Christianity, the New Testament of God to man in Christ, which is appropriated in the Christian Church as the "fulfillment" of the Law and of the prophets of the Old Testament.

No one can argue that the Old Testament, i.e., the Hebrew Bible, does not remain an organic and unalienable element of Christian tradition, as, indeed, it was such for the authors of the books of the New Testament.... [It] also remains the basic source of faith for Judaism in the later period and until today.... Certainly, neither Judaism nor Christianity could ignore their sacred tradition. However, they could purify their essential content from their external historical overcharge in order to facilitate a more authentic and consistent understanding of their different positions.

The Honorable Vice-President of the World Jewish Congress, Dr. Gerhart Riegner, addressing the Deputy Minister, said:

Let me also assure you, Madame, that we are extremely happy to meet in Athens, the capital of Greece and the cradle of one of the greatest cultural centers in world history, one of the major foundations of European civilization. We hope that this great tradition of the *genius loci* will inspire our deliberations in the days to come.... But in facing the future we may have to learn that the respect of what we have in common in our spiritual heritage should lead us to overcome polemic terminology and historical confrontations.... In the midst of a world torn apart by conflicts, violence, poverty, exploitation and social injustice, only a concerted effort of all spiritual forces can give us hope to overcome the calamities and sufferings, the threats and dangers of the present.

After Session I (Sunday, March 21) with the introductory addresses and greetings, there were four meetings followed by presentations and discussions. The general topic of the meeting was "Continuity and Renewal," which was organized in four specific units covered respectively in four sessions.

In Session II (Monday morning, March 22) the theme "Scripture and Hermeneutics" was presented by Rabbi Walter Wurzburger, Professor of Philosophy at Yeshiva University, and Elias Oikonomou, Professor of Hermeneutics of the Old Testament at the University of Athens.

In Session III (Monday afternoon, March 22), the theme was "Memory and Responsibility." Papers were presented by Prof. Jean Halpérin, University of Basel, and Bishop Irineos (Bulovic) of Batska.

In Session IV (Tuesday morning, March 23), the theme "Christian Orthodoxy and Judaism in the Modern World" was addressed by Judge Israel Finestein of London, and Rev. Prof. Vitaly Borovoy of Moscow.

In Session V (Tuesday afternoon, March 23), the theme "Faithfulness to the Roots and Commitment toward the Future" was examined by Prof. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Rev. Prof. Theodore Stylianopoulos, Holy Cross School of Theology, Boston.

The presentations in each session were followed by discussions conducted in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect of both traditions from each side. Explanations were given to questions posed during the discussion, and it was accepted that there is a need to continue these meetings for an improved knowledge of the two traditions and their effective witness in the contemporary world.

The general positive evaluation of the significance of the meetings toward mutual understanding and dispelling of misconceptions, such as racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, as a contribution to interreligious peace, has led to the decision to maintain ongoing relations and to hold academic meetings every three years.

– Athens, March 24, 1993

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