

# FAITHFULNESS TO THE ROOTS AND COMMITMENT TOWARD THE FUTURE: AN ORTHODOX VIEW

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## **I. Introduction**

My first task, an easy and pleasant one, is to express my gratitude to the organizers and hosts of this third international consultation of Christian Orthodox and Jewish representatives for the honor given to me to participate in its deliberations and to address this distinguished group of leaders and scholars on the theme of "Faithfulness to the Roots and Commitment toward the Future." As a student of the New Testament who nurtures deep interests in Judaism, and as a member of the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People of the World Council of Churches, I am delighted to take part in the work of this meeting. As an Orthodox theologian, I welcome especially the opportunity to participate in the efforts toward the strengthening of mutual understanding and friendship between the Christian Orthodox and Jewish peoples, who share a long history of similar experiences and most importantly common spiritual roots.

I am also delighted to share the podium with my colleague Prof. Werblowsky, who exhilarated my spirit with his words, not only in terms of style, but also of content. At the risk of creating a two-member mutual admiration society, if he paid me the tribute of accepting the substance

of his remarks as part of my own, I may see his remarks as the setting — let me say humbly, not for myself, but for the dialogue — of a possible diamond, a little stone that could be the first foundation of a theological construction of genuine acceptance and friendship between Jews and Orthodox Christians.

There was one slight disagreement about Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* that we may quibble about in the halls: I would not call it polemical. It is certainly written from a Christian point of view, but if you recall Justin and Trypho left as friends. May I add that when I met Prof. Werblowsky earlier in the halls during these past several days, although I did not know about him, in my heart a spark of friendship lit up. So whatever our differences were, we shall leave this meeting as friends.

Let me begin with a few statements of presuppositions from which I am starting. I am not here to debate or negotiate about ultimate values or transcendent claims of my faith. I am here to seek clarification, understanding, to let the light of truth build trust in such a way that pure freedom and mutual respect will develop between Christian and Jew. Prof. Werblowsky and I walk down this beautiful seashore lovingly and laughingly witnessing to the treasures of each other's faith without the slightest desire to manipulate one another to the other's position. That is what I call good faith. For in Romans 14:23, Saint Paul writes, "for whatever does not proceed from faith [or faithfulness] is sin" before God and before humanity.

What is the thesis of this paper? That it is possible for two peoples such as Jews and Christian Orthodox to hold on with faithfulness to their convictions, to their ultimate beliefs, to their transcendent values, and still nurture mutual respect and friendship. Not merely tolerance, but positive tolerance of one another. I shall try not merely to state the thesis, but to provide a theological construction, a foundation stone that might let us begin, with each one faithful to its own tradition, to build such a dialogue. My last hidden agenda, if you like, is to expose as clearly as I can the diabolical abuse of religion, if not directly, then indirectly through culture. To marginalize, to oppress, to hurt, and to even destroy others. In this connection, I want to tell you briefly three stories. Some have defined my thinking, and some have moved me deeply as recently as last night visiting the Jewish museum in Athens.

When I was about eight years old living in the village of Gargaliani, in Trifilia, in the Southern Peloponnese, we used to have an annual celebration of a local martyr. He was an ethnic martyr, not a religious martyr, who died in the disputes and battles between Bulgarians and Greeks early in the century as the Ottoman Empire was weakening and seemingly would pull out, and Bulgarians and Greeks had conflicting interests

over that area. Already as a young man I had grown, no doubt about it, to hate the Bulgarians just a little less than I hated the Turks, attitudes that I picked up from culture and from school. In fact, this hatred of Bulgarians intensified when in a history book I saw a picture of Bulgarians literally holding Greek heads separated from their bodies, holding them by their hair. It was our local hero who died in that confrontation, and we had a statue of him and an annual celebration.

Then suddenly one day I discovered that the Bulgarians were Orthodox Christians. I did not say anything to anyone, not even to my father. But from that time on, I said, "I'm going to do my own thinking about matters. I'm not just going to accept what everybody else tells me is true and is right, when I realize how skin deep supposedly our precious Orthodox faith is when two Orthodox peoples, though they may have legitimate disputes, cannot settle them peacefully." They had to fight each other. That was my first religious scandal and revelation, and it taught me a lot for my life.

The second, very briefly, is the story of a friend who told me of an event that took place when virtually two million Greeks were expelled from Asia Minor in the early 1920s, as all of you know. Smyrna was being emptied quickly by the Greeks as the Turkish soldiers were approaching the city. This young man, at about the age of eight or nine, along with another friend lingered behind without realizing the risks. They went into a home to find something to take with them, when suddenly two Turkish soldiers burst into the room and found the two young people. The boys froze in their tracks. They heard the conversation because they understood the language. One soldier said, "Let's kill them!" The other said, "No, they are only children." The soldiers left and the children ran to the docks to get on one of the last boats to be saved, and one of them came to America and eventually told me this story.

The last story moved me last night while visiting the Jewish museum. It comes from the newsletter, published by the museum, that I took with me and read last night. It reprints several letters from a Jewish widow who lived in Thessaloniki and, sensing the danger of the Germans, moved her family to Athens, but then went to Thessaloniki to fetch her belongings and she was captured and incarcerated. She wrote to her children the following words:

Dear Children,

In spite of my trying not to upset you, I see that the last hour is near. I do not find comfort being separated from dear children that I wish with all my heart to see, to feel near me, and in these last days to have the unique joy of my life.

For two nights we sat on the bed dressed, waiting for the knock at the door to wake us and to take us away. Everyone is selling their things in the street. The cries, the moans, the tragedy cannot be described.

The day before yesterday, the chemist's daughter came to see me and I pleaded with her to tell her father that I wanted to visit him and to rest there for awhile. He refused! Today, she came again and gave me a very small jar of marmalade and a small *tsoureki* bread, and asked me to forgive him for his refusal. The streets are crowded with people who are falling upon others like hyenas on a dead horse to steal their things from them. Used sold three quarters of their belongings and Daisy does nothing but cry all day watching the buyers coming into her home. We are living a bad dream, day and night in indescribable anguish.

God, who sees my tears, should pity you and keep you alive. Live happily if you can. May God preserve you from evil. This is my prayer every night.

I ask, how can responsible religious leaders, theologians, over the centuries have allowed what they see as precious treasures of their faith, their religion, to build up such an atmosphere in culture? And not to teach their people otherwise than for such things to occur? It is virtually unimaginable in my mind.

It is from this point of view that I approach my topic, and I am so grateful to His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch for the strong support for this dialogue in his message to us.

My second task, a difficult but hopefully stimulating one, is to develop the dynamics of my topic in an authentic and challenging way within the context of the consultation's main theme, "Continuity and Renewal," as well as its subsidiary themes, all of which are sufficiently general to risk pedantic repetitions, especially in view of the subjects already discussed in previous academic meetings between Christian Orthodox and Jewish scholars.<sup>1</sup>

Our challenge is to define each sub-theme's particular line of relevance or cutting edge, and to identify central points of discussion in order to gain a sense of forward movement on a practical as well as academic level. At the first international meeting in Lucerne (1977), She-maryahu Talmon already suggested that even academic discussions are inevitably concerned with the life of individuals and of society, and that they should aim at clarifying principles, rules and attitudes which help regulate everyday life. To quote him: "Every debate among sages ...

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1. The first officially sponsored dialogue between Jewish and largely Greek Orthodox scholars occurred in New York (1972). The papers of this meeting were published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 13 (4, 1976) and in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22 (1, 1977). The two previous international consultations between Jewish and a wider circle of Orthodox scholars took place in Lucerne (1977) and Bucharest (1979). The papers of these meetings were published respectively in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 24 (4, 1979) and in a book by the Romanian Patriarchate (no editor given) under the title *The Christian Orthodox-Jewish Consultation II*.

must have as its end not the mere elucidation of theories in the form of a scholastic exercise, but should — at any rate, ideally — lead to practical conclusions.”<sup>2</sup> Exploratory stages, necessary as they are for many reasons, should also include efforts at establishing continuity of structure and of subjects which may lead to beneficial institutional and social results for both religious communities.<sup>3</sup>

## II. Faithfulness to Roots

Concerning my own topic, it would be pedantic to focus on the key biblical concept of “faithfulness,” based on the word “faith,” one of the richest words in the biblical vocabulary. Faithfulness literally means a state of fullness of faith, a spiritual quality intrinsic and dear to the deep biblical consciousness of Jews and Christians. Alternate terms are fidelity, steadfastness, loyalty, unwavering obedience, absolute reliance and others. All of these words and expressions resound with profound and powerful echoes in the history and self-understanding of both the Jewish and Christian Orthodox peoples, for whom tradition is virtually equivalent to survival over the millennia. Faith and faithfulness constitute the very ground of Jewish and Christian life from the human as well as the divine sides.

The more problematic word is “roots” which is, of course, used metaphorically. This word is not particularly biblical and has a sociological rather than theological ring to it. Why not formulate the topic as follows: “Faithfulness to the Past and Commitment toward the Future” in order to achieve a smoother historical and linguistic parallel? I assume that the good reason lies in the vagueness of the term “past,” and the intent of this academic meeting to guide the discussion in part to “the roots,” that is concrete and fundamental areas of faithfulness. Moreover, the term “roots” can also possess theological significance precisely be-

2. Shemaryahu Talmon, “Torah as a Concept and Vital Principle in the Hebrew Bible,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 24 (4, 1979), p. 271.
3. An excellent example of continued dialogue with institutional results is that of the Jewish-Roman Catholic dialogue. See Eugene J. Fisher, A. James Rudin and Marc H. Tannenbaum, eds., *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986). Numerous similar dialogues have engaged Jews and Protestant Christians with official statements by Protestant Churches. An excellent selection of such statements may be found in *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, ed. Allan Brockway, Paul van Buren, Rolf Rendtorff and Simon Schoon (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988). On the wider issue of religious pluralism, see *The Meaning and Limits of Religious Pluralism*, eds. Allan Brockway and Jean Halpérin (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987) and the articles in the *International Council of Christians and Jews* 14 (Winter 1988) with the theme, “The One Way and the Many Ways: Dilemmas of Pluralism.” For the current status of the WCC Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People and its work, see the Report of its most recent meeting in Geneva, 22-26 October 1992.

cause the faith and the concrete expressions of faithfulness of our respective religious communities are almost inextricably intertwined theologically and sociologically. By "sociologically" I understand the whole complex of the institutions, religious rites, customs, educational traditions, system of values, operative attitudes and patterns of behavior which mark the multi-dimensional identity and consciousness of a people.

Therefore, the problem lies in the question, "faithfulness to what roots?" Here I would not presume to speak for the Jewish but rather for the Christian Orthodox side. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest a basic outline of "roots" which may have relevance for both religious communities. The first and great subject and goal of faithfulness is the living God, the One who was, who is and who is to come. Despite the decisive difference of the Christian trinitarian understanding of God, both Jews and Christians are bound together by their faith in the one God, historically revealed as Creator, Lord and Father in the Scriptures, a God of glory and majesty, love and mercy, justice and peace, righteousness and judgment. His true servants, whether Jews or Christians, are called to walk humbly before Him and to live as thankful witnesses to His greatness and mercy before all peoples.

The second subject and goal of faithfulness is the religious community called into existence by God's self-disclosure, now painfully divided into variegated Jewish communities<sup>4</sup> and a multitude of Christian churches. The Scriptures teach us that the living God revealed Himself in order to establish His people as a light to the nations, and that knowledge of the living God is intimately connected with the life of the community which worships and serves Him. Whatever the historical vicissitudes, doctrinal differences, differing concepts and shortcomings of each community of faith, we must be faithful to our respective religious communities. One of the fundamental commandments is to honor our fathers and mothers who have struggled to know and communicate God and His ways to us. Genuine dialogue at any level cannot occur without genuine faithfulness to the communities that have nourished us in the experience and knowledge of God.

The third goal or area of faithfulness is comprised of God's gifts, covenants, great acts of deliverance, laws, faithful agents in salvation history and promises for the future. These constitute the heart of the self-understanding of our communities. Although we differ in the interpretation of the meaning, duration and present validity of these gifts, never-

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4. In *The Christian Orthodox-Jewish Consultation II*, the article by Israel Singer, "The Individual and the Community in the Jewish Tradition," pp. 56-69 explains variegations within the larger Jewish community, including the "acute problem" between religious and non-religious Jews, p. 63.

theless we are bound, for faithfulness' sake, to recognize them precisely as God's gifts and to regard them with requisite awe and thankfulness. Should we fail to honor God's gifts by viewing them superficially or even negatively in polemical critique of one another, we dishonor God Himself.

The fourth and final major area of faithfulness is the whole integrated complex of institutions, practices, teachings, values, customs, offices, structures and ways of conduct which seek to manifest the good order and spiritual vision of our respective communities in ongoing history. It would indeed be both arrogant and foolish to regard lightly, from an allegedly superior modernistic critical viewpoint, time-honored expressions of faith, however culture-bound they may seem, which in their totality enshrine not only the deep experiences, constitutive truths and ultimate values, but also the very cohesiveness, strength and vital spirit of our communities.

You may by now object that I have placed all things under blessed faithfulness, and you would be right. But if so, one would ask, how is it possible to conduct any meaningful dialogue at any level between sharply different traditional communities such as ours, though they may manifest a number of formal parallels? That is the crux of the problem in the Christian Orthodox-Jewish dialogue. We both possess, if I may use the key terminology of our consultation, deep faithfulness, canonical Scriptures, rich traditions and long memories, all invested with an embrace sanctity that seems as inviolate as the principle of faithfulness itself. And yet, according to another sub-theme of the consultation, we all live "in the modern world." It is this element of our experience of the modern world and of multi-faceted modernity that inevitably thrusts us toward dialogue, as in the case of all religions. Significant reasons validate the dialogue. Above all, a shrinking, unjust, exploitative, violent and perhaps dying world, both spiritually and ecologically, urgently needs the sacred treasures of our living traditions, as His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomaios pointed out in his message to us.

One of the most important documents in the ongoing dialogue between Jews and Orthodox Christians, in my judgment, is to be found in the very first meeting in New York in 1972, in an article written by Prof. Ankori. He not only pointed out quite clearly the similarities of Jews and especially Greek Orthodox Christians as Mediterranean peoples with a long history and so on, but for me more importantly pointed out that as Jews and Christians we also have clashing beliefs and conflicting interests which readily impinge on daily life in the present, for example, in the Holy Land.<sup>5</sup> There is no way we can leave out of the dialogue those

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5. See Ankori, especially pp. 28-46, where he analytically presents the forces, sources and areas of friction between Christians and Jews under the Byzantine

elements of conflicting interests, including the rights of Palestinian Orthodox Christians living in Israel.

Here, if I may be allowed to come back to asymmetry, the word of Prof. Werblowsky — for ages there has been asymmetry between Jews and Christians. Now there is some kind of asymmetry in Israel between Christians and Jews, Jews who quite naturally and understandably want their own land, to possess it fully and exercise power, but in the process can also begin a new tendency of violating rights and bulldozing homes and perhaps running a bulldozer over human rights. We have to recognize those things and in friendship at our academic and theological level be able to discuss them in ways that politicians and common people could not.

Dialogue, as is well known, is a fairly recent and distinctively modern phenomenon. The histories of our religious communities, with rare exceptions (e.g., Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*), have been marked since New Testament times by conflicts, separation, polemics, disdain, persecution and even killings, although there have also been periods of tolerated co-existence.<sup>6</sup> Past conflicts, suspicions, enmity and recriminations have had plenty of theoretical and practical ground from which to rise. The crucial question now is whether or not our communities have sufficiently discerning and courageous leadership, as well as the necessary moral and spiritual strength, to seek and to find, both in their common roots as well as in their own respective traditions, principles and values upon which to build bases for a gradual great reversal — positive, respectful, just and cooperative relationships worthy of the God whom they claim to worship. In so doing, they would also serve as faithful and convincing witnesses to other conflicting religious communities.

We must admit our human limitations, as much as we may be in-

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Empire, including political and geographic interests which continue to the present. We can now add other Christian Orthodox-Jewish disputes in the Holy Land, including the murder of an Orthodox monk at the site of the Well of Jacob some years ago and the current occupation of St. John's Hospice by Jews against the strong protests of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In Israel and other lands of the Middle East there are Arab Orthodox Christians whose human rights are at stake. The World Council of Churches has supported the rights of Palestinian Christians and Muslims numerous times, of course followed by Jewish objections.

6. See the different standpoints of Demetrios J. Constantelos, "Greek Orthodox-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22 (1, 1977), pp. 6-16, and Zvi Ankori, "Greek Orthodox-Jewish Relations in Historic Perspective — The Jewish View," in the same volume, pp. 17-57. Constantelos emphasizes the tolerance toward Jews under the Byzantine Empire, while Ankori points up more sharply the conflicts without rejecting that there were also welcome periods of tolerance.



spired by the divine possibilities, because of an additional strong reason. On both sides we have many co-religionists for whom dialogue, as modernity itself, is contrary to faithfulness. For them dialogue, especially between Jews and Christians, is not only too late in history but also a betrayal of history. For such faithful people, and admittedly claimants of a longer historical polemical tradition than the dialogical one, "Commitment toward the Future" is exactly the same as "Faithfulness to Roots."<sup>7</sup> The two parts of the present topic would be tautological! These are brothers and sisters whom we must constantly seek to include both in our field of vision as well as, wherever and whenever possible, in the dialogical process itself. This call does not signify merely strategic interests to win them over to the principle of dialogue, but also, and more so, to consider respectfully their witness and learn from it in order that the dialogical process itself may be authenticated and enriched to the maximum degree of faithfulness and truth.

### **III. Commitment toward the Future**

As for me, I should lay my cards on the table and say that, after much prayer and anguished thinking, I have long been committed to the principle of dialogue on intrinsic theological and spiritual grounds. I firmly believe that my personal faith in Christ and my commitment to the Orthodox Church not merely permit but actually propel me toward dialogue which, without compromise to the transcendent claims of the Christian Orthodox faith, seeks God's love, truth, justice and peace among all peoples. The perspective of this personal testimony, I should openly admit, certainly informs the treatment of my whole topic, but especially what I am about to say concerning "Commitment toward the Future."

One of the primary nuances of the verb "to commit," should one care to consult an English dictionary, is to put in charge of something or, even more appropriately for our topic, to entrust or consign something of value for future preservation. Indeed faithfulness to the roots necessarily implies commitment to the preservation of the gifts and treasures of those roots. It was wise of the organizers of the program not to use the superficial expression "openness to the future" because commitment, as well as faithfulness, implies an obligation, indeed a binding pledge, to matters of the highest importance for our respective

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7. The Jewish scholar Michael Wyschogrod, "Tradition and Society in Judaism," in *The Christian Orthodox-Jewish Consultation II*, p. 24, writes that from a certain viewpoint "the very attempt to distinguish between Scripture and tradition is futile." A number of Orthodox Christians would agree, but Orthodox scholars usually do not. See Elias Jones-Golitzin, "The Role of the Bible in the Orthodox Tradition," in the same volume, who writes, "although Scripture and Tradition cannot be separated, they can be distinguished," p. 39.

communities. Both as Jews and Orthodox Christians we do not come to the contemporary world and face the future with empty hands. On the contrary, we carry virtually on our backs rich heritages and uncountable treasures, even if our hands sometimes seem shamefully empty to us and to others.

But another significant nuance of the verb "to commit" is to make available or to put at the disposal. Commitment implies not only preservation but also responsible use and effective availability of the treasures of our roots for the present and future generations. I submit that faithfulness, too, carries an equivalent force of meaning. True faithfulness bears within itself the responsibility of the discerning and effective use and application of God's gifts in the present and in the future for the benefit of humanity and for the glory of God. In the ongoing process of change and adaptation in historical circumstances, a blind faithfulness to roots may well turn out to be unfaithfulness! No one but a stubborn and blind person can possibly deny change and growth in the traditions of our religious communities. The critical question is how to guide the continuity of tradition in such an authentically faithful way that its gifts and treasures may shine brightly and usefully for the urgent issues as well as the practical questions of daily life. From this perspective continuity and renewal, involving both spiritual and practical aspects, go together and make available the treasures of our roots as living realities. Thus the religious community, and each member thereof, ought to be faithful to a living tradition, always penetrated by the spirit of renewal, and not merely be enslaved to the forms of a dead past.

I must now try to exemplify the above concepts on the basis of the outline of "the roots" given earlier in the paper. This indeed is a very delicate and most difficult task. Permit me the caveat that what follows are suggestive lines of thought rather than well-defined principles. In view of the subjects and questions raised, I would be utterly presumptuous to offer anything but expressions of my own life-long struggles with continuity and renewal within my own religious community. I do so in good faith, trusting in the loving correction of my Orthodox colleagues to whom I mainly speak, as well as counting on the principle of consensus so highly valued in the Christian Orthodox community. If my words have some meaning and relevance for the Jewish participants as well, I would be delighted and thankful to the One whom we address as Father in heaven.

The earlier outline of "the roots" or fundamental areas of faithfulness is intentionally hierarchical. Our primary faithfulness is to the living God, the sovereign Lord Himself, who stands within but also above the community of faith and all its innumerable institutions, teachings and practices which constitute the ongoing life of His people. The first

commitment of both Orthodox Christians and Jews is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:29-30). Continuity and renewal meet and interact most essentially at the point in which we worship, pray and live in such faithfulness to and intimacy with the Holy One that we put nothing in His place, much less above Him, not even His precious gifts to us, which would constitute a kind of idolatry. All conflicts between Jews and Christians have ultimately derived from either unwitting or willful forgetfulness of our common rootedness in and commitment to the first and greatest commandment! We have tended too easily to put "our religion" in the place of the transcendent God, and thus made our religion God instead of God our religion. If I walk humbly before the Lord my God, and truly love Him as the One who commands justice, mercy and peace toward all, how could I long entertain arrogant thoughts of evil, prejudice and enmity — much less raise up audaciously a hand of exploitation, injustice and violence — against any people, even those with whom I may strongly disagree? Christ has taught His followers to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them, yet not necessarily to agree with their principles and values. Deep renewal in interreligious relations cannot occur without such a humble and fervent faith in God and without discernment of the great difference between godly respect for others and disagreement with them over transcendent values.

The sharpest difference between Christians and Jews is Christ who paradoxically both binds and separates us. It is often said by scholars that Christ and Christianity do not constitute a theological problem for Judaism but rather that Judaism constitutes such a problem for Christianity.<sup>8</sup> But Rabbi Jacob B. Agus has wisely observed:

If our self-awareness as Jews is determined by our overview of Jewish history, we cannot but regard the emergence of the Christian branch out of the Jewish stem as the most momentous event in our millennial experience.<sup>9</sup>

Along with the historical results, Rabbi Agus goes on to point out that, through Christianity, "the God of Israel triumphed over the pagan deities and all of their works...a magnificent triumph" which paradoxically "was associated with a systematic denigration, even the demonization, of the Jew."<sup>10</sup> I tend to agree with this view, but abhor the pernicious

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8. For example, the Jewish scholar Seymour Siegel, "Judaism and Eastern Orthodoxy: Theological Reflections," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22 (1, 1977), p. 64.

9. Jacob B. Agus, "Judaism and the New Testament," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22 (1, 1977), p. 86.

10. *Ibid.*

cious Christian backwash against Jews. Yet I do not see how history and theology can be separated pertaining to these painful issues. We are, as Jews and Christians, both historically and theologically not only problems but also gifts, one might dare say, to each other, and should be, precisely because of our common spiritual roots and mutual experiences in history. Apart from the sufferings inflicted upon Jews, and sometimes upon Christians, perhaps God would not have it any other way! Certainly the apostle Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil. 3:5), who continued to be a Jew among Jews (1 Cor. 9:20), saw it that way (Rom. 11).

But should the role of Christ, and the consequent Christian trinitarian experience and understanding of God, be valid sources of mutual conflict, rather than mutual joy and mutual witness, between Jews and Christians, despite the sad history of our religious communities from the inception of Christianity? Both Jews and Christian Gentiles ought to rejoice that the Holy One of Israel elected to call all Gentiles to be His people through Christ.

It is true that Jews and Christians have sharply clashing views regarding the dignity and role of Jesus, as well as the dignity and role of the Mosaic Law, in salvation history according to the deep religious experiences of their respective communities. But these transcendent claims on both sides *need not necessarily* lead to conflict but should lead to profound spiritual meditation and theological thinking. Patriarch Athenagoras of blessed memory once, in the context of Christian ecumenism, defined theology as "a celebration of truth" rather than as "a weapon" to be used against others. This definition, filled with as much truth as beauty, is applicable as well to the dialogue between the Jewish and Christian communities. Jews and Christians, mindful of their primary faithfulness to the Lord God and His inscrutable mystery of salvation for all peoples, ought to rejoice and celebrate in utter humility and freedom, undefiled by proselytism, their mutual respect for and witness to one another, and thus together to work toward the fulfillment of God's purposes in the world.

A Jew *qua* Jew ought to rejoice that a substantial part of the Jewish spiritual heritage is universally spread to the nations through the good news of Christ, notwithstanding the sins of Christians. A Christian *qua* Christian ought to rejoice that the Holy One of Israel is worshipped, praised and obeyed by Jews all over the world, notwithstanding the sins of Jews. Who has not sinned? Who has not been disobedient? Who needs no repentance before the Lord God? Christians above all need to repent, on account of their numerous theoretical and practical expressions of anti-Judaism and antisemitism.<sup>11</sup> Yet if our primary faithfulness

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11. Seymour Siegel, *op. cit.*, p. 65, rightly attacks the sin of antisemitism and quotes the paradox of this sin by quoting the Orthodox religious philosopher

is truly to the Lord God, our Father in heaven, we would nurture "in fear and trembling," to use a Pauline expression from another context (Phil. 2:12), mutual respect toward one another and toward our respective deep religious claims. Conflict could arise, as it did arise, only if and when one community insists that the other must accept its claims or when one community denigrates the claims of another.

For example, appropriate respect and peace in the name of the Lord God could be maintained even if a reflective Jew would say to a Christian, "Jesus of Nazareth was only a prophet, a charismatic rabbi, or even a radical Jew who called for an unacceptable renewal of Judaism," but the same Jew would necessarily have to add humbly, "for my community and me," in other words as we understand the mysterious workings of the Lord God in history.

Similarly, appropriate respect and peace could be maintained in the Name of the Lord God if a reflective Christian would say to a Jew, "The dispensation of the Mosaic Law has ended by being fulfilled by the dispensation of Christ," or even to say, "Your view of God can be enriched through a trinitarian understanding," but the same Christian would have to add humbly, "for my community and me," that is, as we understand the mysterious workings of the Lord God in history. Then they could say to each other, if interested: "Let us therefore discuss together these important matters in mutual love and respect, under mutual faithfulness to the Lord God, and see what we can learn about each other, and from each other, and even clarify our own ideas and convictions about our own respective faiths. Above all, let the truth itself, revealed in grace and love, draw us to itself and lead us in freedom."<sup>12</sup>

If we are strong and mature in our own personal faith, what true need is there to deny the revelatory experiences of one another's religious communities and the deep convictions of their members, and conse-

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Nicholas Berdyaev, *Christianity and Antisemitism* (Aldington: Kent Publishing Company, 1952), p. 12, who formulates this paradox in a striking way: "Perhaps the saddest thing to admit is that those who rejected the Cross have to carry it, while those who welcomed it are often engaged in crucifying the other."

12. I hope my line of argument clearly suggests that, contrary to a number of Western scholars, I do not in any way call for a diminishment of New Testament Christology or the classic Christology of the Church, which I view and believe as continuous and coherent, as a basis for the renewal of Jewish-Christian relations. In fact such diminishment of Christology neutralizes and cancels authentic dialogue precisely because it is, on the part of Christians, a foolish and pernicious expression of lack of faithfulness to Christ and to the Christian community. It also strikes at the heart of the enduring power of Christianity, especially the so-called main-line churches in our times.

quently to let conflicts arise? Where there is true faithfulness to and love for the living God, there is no such true need.

But there are many false and pernicious needs at work in history: willful and ignorant zeal, wrong use of Scriptures, subtle psychological efforts to hold on to one's own weak or immature religious convictions by denying or attacking the religious convictions of others, and even a triumphalistic collective ego of a religious community stubbornly set to diminish, control or even destroy another religious community. Add to this the too human cultural, social, political and economic self-interests, and you have the ugly soup of the painful tragedies of history insofar as religions are concerned. In such cases we have placed "our religion" on the throne of the almighty God and presume to judge others, denying their God-given freedom of conscience, and in the process committing idolatry, blasphemy and injustice, all in the name of God. A scandalous result is that religion, instead of being a liberating power inspiring culture and people to mutual respect, justice and peace, is perverted into a kind of satanic force to hate, slander and destroy others. "And no wonder!" we might say with Saint Paul's words from another context. For those who are fanatically and self-righteously blind to God's love and truth, "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

If the sharpest theological disagreement between Jews and Christians can be faithfully treated and discussed in a humble and respectful manner, thus preserving continuity while working at renewal in the relations between the Jewish and Christian communities, it is obvious that the other important areas of our "roots" can be discussed with less difficulty. Accordingly, I offer only a few comments on the three remaining major areas of faithfulness and commitment.

With regard to the ongoing community as the nurturing ground of our life and faith, faithfulness to our community does not need to deny the right of other people to be faithful to their own communities. In particular, Christians ought to re-learn and be repeatedly reminded of the welcome and joyous fact of the continuity of the Jewish people in history, the bare fact of which shows that God has neither rejected nor abandoned His people, just as Saint Paul declared long ago (Rom. 11:1,11).

Christian Orthodox theology ought to go at least as far as Saint Paul went in affirming that the Jewish people, despite their disobedience toward Christ, are still the elect people of God, and that Christian Gentiles are honorary citizens engrafted onto the rich tree of the Jewish heritage. Saint Paul severely warned Gentile Christians not to be haughty or boastful toward unbelieving Jews — much less to cultivate evil intent and engage in persecution against them — a critical warning almost totally and shamefully forgotten by Christians in history (Rom. 11:17-22). While

it is true that, for the apostle, the unbelieving Jews are in a state of disobedience regarding Christ, (i.e., from the viewpoint of the Christian experience and understanding of salvation history and, in the case of Saint Paul, the Damascus experience), nevertheless he unreservedly affirmed both their continued electedness and existence. In fact, on account of the faithfulness of God Himself, Saint Paul could not possibly conceive of the end of the drama of salvation history without the participation of Jews as the crescendo of history produced by God Himself (Rom. 11:15,28-36). Christians have remembered the Jews as “enemies,” but not as “beloved” of God (Rom. 11:28). They have taken to heart Saint Paul’s critiques of the Jews, and used them viciously against Jews, but have forgotten Saint Paul’s ineffable sacrificial love for the Jews and their sacred traditions (Rom. 9:1-5).

Had Christian leaders heeded Saint Paul’s theology and taught Christian people accordingly over the centuries, the history of Christian-Jewish relations would have been quite different. Christians in history would not have ironically proven themselves “superior” to Jews in unfaithfulness to the Lord God by denigrating and persecuting His people. Part of the commitment toward the future through renewal in this area means unreserved Christian affirmation of the theological validity of the continuity of the Jewish people as God’s people, as well as the validity and continuity of the Sinai Covenant for the Jews,<sup>13</sup> however disobedient they may be in His eyes, just as Christians are also His people, disobedient though they surely have been according to their principles in many ways in His eyes. Moreover, God has given both of His peoples, Jews and Christians, a charge to fulfill. We have positive and constructive work to do in the world. We have forgotten that we are servant communities of God, not self-righteous critics or exploiters of society or of each other, being entrusted with a mission by God which as yet we are far from having accomplished.

As regards our “roots” in terms of God’s gifts to us from Abraham to

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13. An exceptional example of this Orthodox theological approach is George C. Papademetriou, *Essays on Orthodox Christian-Jewish Relations* (Bristol: Wyndham Hall Press, 1990). I take this opportunity also to correct myself on an essential point made in my article, “New Testament Issues in Jewish-Christian Relations,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22 (1, 1977), p. 77, where I endorsed A. Roy Eckardt’s critique of Saint Paul as teaching a “non-functional election” for Jews who do not believe in Christ. I no longer interpret Romans 11 in this fashion. Rather, it is my considered judgment that, though disobedient regarding Christ, they are still the elect people of God, according to Saint Paul. Insofar as God continues to have plans for all Jews, even during the period of the call of the Gentiles, His election of Jews continues. There is no such thing as “non-functioning election” according to Paul and certainly according to God whose faithfulness to the Jewish people could not be questioned according to Paul.

Paul, from Moses to Christ, from the Sinai to the Golgotha Covenants, from the Mosaic Law to the Sermon on the Mount, all these ought to be, as mentioned above, faithfully regarded with honor and awe as God's gifts. We disagree in our interpretation and application of them, but surely in faithfulness to the Giver we must respectfully allow each community to witness to these gifts in its own way on the basis of freedom and far from any shades of proselytism. Saint Paul was convinced that the period of the Mosaic Law had come to an end and had been fulfilled by Christ, according to his experience of Jesus of Nazareth as the risen Lord of Glory (Gal. 3:23-29; Rom. 10:4; 1 Cor. 2:8). However, he continued to regard the Mosaic Law as "holy," "good" and "spiritual" (Rom. 7:12-14), and did not hesitate to use it for Christian instruction (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:8-9; cf. John 1:17; 4:22). Although the apostle advocated freedom from the Mosaic Law for Gentile Christians, he neither expected nor preached that believing Jews in Christ — much less unbelieving Jews — had to abandon observance of the Law.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as is well known, the Orthodox Church reveres Abraham, Moses, the prophets and many other figures in the Hebrew Scriptures as saints.

We have so much to learn about each other and from one another. Orthodox Christianity never fell into the Western temptation of contrasting Law and Gospel, free will and grace, works and faith, nor consequently into the inclination to demonize the Jewish heritage as being intrinsically legalistic and lacking grace, although admittedly Orthodox cultures not infrequently have demonized Jews as an ongoing people on the basis of wrong inferences drawn from the Scriptures, liturgical texts, and popular customs.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth and final major area of "the roots" is the whole complex and variegated fabric of the innumerable institutions, rites, customs, teachings, values, offices, sacred documents, written rules and oral traditions which express the actual life of our communities. On the one hand, faithfulness to these roots is vital because they represent the practical and front-line faith experience for all of us. On the other hand, to absolutize all of these faith expressions and put them on the same level of importance could prove to be an act of unfaithfulness to the very nature, spirit and mission of our communities as servant communities of

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14. For Jewish and Christian Orthodox perspectives on the Law, see S. Talmon, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 24 (4, 1979), pp. 271-289, and Basilios Stoyiannos, "The Law in the New Testament from an Orthodox Point of View," in the same volume, pp. 309-322.

15. Popular examples of Christian Orthodox anti-Judaism and even antisemitism include the blood libel, the burning of the effigy of Judas during Holy Week in some lands, and anti-Jewish gestures of abuse or even persecution during Holy Week.



God. It is here that we must be especially careful not to give to these various traditions the kind of faithfulness that only belongs to God. We must not identify our religious values with our ethnic self-interests, a potentially dangerous mixture, although religious values and ethnic interests can also have noble and liberating aspects. Differentiation between religion and ethnicity, at least in theory, is probably easier for Orthodox Christians than for Jews. However, with regard to this area of faithfulness and commitment toward renewal, each community must deal primarily with its own members. A general operative principle that we share is the principle of distinguishing the greater from the lesser, the constitutive from the useful, the unreformable from the reformable, as time marches on and the circumstances of life change.

Let me end with a telling example about both the possibilities and difficulties regarding continuity and renewal in my own Orthodox community on a practical level. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was one of the first Orthodox theologians to distinguish between tradition and traditions as a principle of ecumenical change and renewal in a programmatic article published in 1960.<sup>16</sup> Thirty-one years later, the Metropolitan published another article dealing with the same issue but on a practical, popular level. An ordinary Orthodox Christian posed the occasional question: "Has the Church aged?" in other words has the Church become in many ways irrelevant to contemporary society?<sup>17</sup> The Metropolitan graciously sympathized with the question and used it to formulate a mild prophetic call for change in the Orthodox Church, using several examples, among them the activation of the laity in the life of the Church. To those of us who live in the West, Orthodox Christians included, this subject appears frequently on our agenda. But the power of tradition in traditional Orthodox lands compelled the Metropolitan to devote enormous attention to defending and qualifying the concept of any change in the Church. Against a background of the authority of traditional consciousness in which allegedly nothing changes, including a tradition of heavy clericalism in native Orthodox countries, the eminent and enlightened Metropolitan had to write ever so guardedly to justify such an obviously legitimate and welcome task as the activation of lay ministries in the Church! This is only one example of the dynamics of continuity and renewal in theory and practice.

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16. Chrysostomos Konstantinidis, "The Significance of the Eastern and Western Traditions within Christendom," in *Orthodoxy: A Faith and Order Dialogue* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1960).

17. Chrysostomos Konstantinidis, "Ekklesia gerasmene" (Has the Church Aged?) in *Episkepsis*, February 1, 1991, a bulletin of the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Geneva.

The possibilities of renewal are as many as they are wide, but the road ahead is long and difficult. But the good Lord, blessed be His Name, is merciful and patient.

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