

# LIFE

RUSSIA'S FABULOUS ART MUSEUM

## THE HERMITAGE

HISTORIC TURNING POINT  
FOR THE NEGRO'S CAUSE



With Archbishop Iakovos, Walter Reuther and other supporters in Selma, Ala., Martin Luther King holds a wreath to the martyred Reverend James Reeb

MARCH 26 • 1965 • 35¢

# SELMA AT 50

The Legacy of Archbishop Iakovos  
and the Civil Rights Movement



“

*Equality is not  
a political doctrine;  
it is a Christian axiom,  
based on the Bible,  
taught and reinforced by our  
Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who never practiced discrimination:  
political, social or religious.”*

**Archbishop Iakovos  
of North and South America**



# SELMA AT 50

**The Legacy of Archbishop Iakovos  
and the Civil Rights Movement**

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Brought to you by the  
Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

*A Brief Summary by Fr. Michael N. Varlamos on*

## **His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos & The Civil Rights Movement: Selma 1965**

In response to a nation-wide call by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., religious and civic leaders from across the country gathered in Selma, Alabama on March 15, 1965 to memorialize two recently fallen heroes of the civil rights movement: Deacon Jimmie Lee Jackson and Reverend James Reeb. Among the dignitaries who arrived in Selma that day was His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

As Dr. King concluded his eulogy in the Brown Chapel, they prepared for the long-awaited march to the courthouse. Dr. King led the march with Archbishop Iakovos on one side and Reverend Ralph Abernathy and Ambassador Andrew Young on the other. "As we walked toward the courthouse, there were so many ugly faces staring at us," Iakovos told a New York Times reporter. "The whites' spirits were so poisoned by hate and bias. But when you believe in the rightness of what you're doing, you discount fear."<sup>[1]</sup>

Soon after the march, His Eminence issued a statement to the press that read in part, "I came to this Memorial Service because I believe this is an appropriate occasion not only to dedicate myself as well as our Greek Orthodox Communicants to the noble

cause for which our friend, the Reverend James Reeb gave his life; but also in order to show our willingness to continue this fight against prejudice, bias and persecution..."<sup>[2]</sup>

That same evening, due to the peaceful march demonstrations, President Lyndon Johnson introduced his voting rights bill to Congress. The next day Archbishop Iakovos reflected on CBS's *The World Tonight*: "The commitment that our President made before our nation last night renews the faith of our people in equality, democracy and human dignity."<sup>[3]</sup> Many scholars and historians consider the events that transpired in Selma that year the crowning moment of the civil rights movement.

Archbishop Iakovos knew that voting did more than give people a voice in their government: voting erased their invisibility. Archbishop Iakovos labored tirelessly for almost four decades on human and civil rights causes for all peoples – along with his dear friend, Dr. Martin Luther King – earning him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980 from President Jimmy Carter. The Greek Orthodox Church continues to fight against racism, prejudice, and discrimination with fervent love for God and all people.

For a more detailed account of the events that transpired please visit:  
**[civilrights.goarch.org/introduction](http://civilrights.goarch.org/introduction)**

[1] Nicholas Gage, "Archbishop Iakovos," in *Iakovos: The Making of an Archbishop* (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, 1996), 68.

[2] Archbishop Iakovos and Archdiocesan Central Council, "Statement by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos on the Occasion of the Memorial Service for Rev. James Reeb in Selma, Alabama," March 15, 1965, box E24, folder CD, Archbishop Iakovos, Papers, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, New York.

[3] Archbishop Iakovos, "Telegram Sent By Archbishop Iakovos To President Johnson," March 16, 1965, box E24, folder XX, Archbishop Iakovos, Papers, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, New York.

*Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Statement on*

## **Racial Equality**

### **1963**

The Greek Orthodox Church is against racial segregation, and believes in the full equality of all races and peoples. Our Church believes, moreover, that all Americans, regardless of faith or color, should be granted equal opportunities for public education and for employment in all fields of endeavour, consistent with the best of their abilities and qualifications; and that all should enjoy equal advantages and be the beneficiaries of equal public accommodations and facilities.

In this spirit we call upon our fellow citizens of all faiths, and upon all those who cherish truth and justice, to oppose every expression and demonstration of bigotry. We also urge all our fellow citizens to desist, in word and action, from whatever might seem to further the circulation of false reports, rumors, or representations that distort our mutual relations and the progress of our common welfare.

But the Christians of America should feel that they have a special mandate to work for equal rights for all. We are challenged to prove that the Legions of Christ can, in His Name, uphold these rights wherever and whenever they are endangered. Christian love is not a semantic symbol. It is a commandment to which we must conform our actions as Christians and strive in every way to make a reality, consistent with the will of God which was expressed by His Son Jesus Christ when He said, "Love ye one another."

The whole question of integration and equal rights for all races, and humane understanding among them,

has an ethical basis linked not only with our own national security but also with our relationships with half the nations of the earth. Justice, peace and equality are not meant to be merely noble words; they are meant to be the basic and workable concepts of humanity, which will teach us to help and respect each other.

The present integration conflict is wasteful and unproductive. The American Negro has great talents which he should be given every opportunity to develop for the further cultural enrichment of America, to which he has already contributed so much. Wherever the Negro has been given real opportunities, or has had the initiative to seize them himself, he has excelled. We see this perhaps most dramatically in the fields of music, the performing arts, and athletics; but in a less spectacular way it is true of all fields of endeavour, none of which should be closed to or made difficult for the Negro.

We must point out, however, that in the heat of the integration problem, the great gains that have been made over the years towards equal opportunities for Negroes may tend to be overlooked or minimized. We therefore urge patience and forbearance upon all concerned. Violence breeds bitterness, and bitterness only serves to retard the ultimate achievement of human equality which our democratic processes dictate. These processes must survive the anguish of the times and remain the basis of the American will and government.



1965

Archbishop Iakovos, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders and protestors marching in Selma, Alabama. Upon reaching the Dallas County Courthouse, a eulogy was given for the fallen Rev. James Reeb.



1980

Archbishop Iakovos places a wreath of white flowers on the tomb of Martin Luther King, Jr., which is located in Atlanta, Georgia, adjacent to Ebenezer Baptist Church. Members of the Archdiocesan council and delegates to the Twenty-Fifth Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress, joined the Archbishop in his commemoration of Dr. King.



President Barack Obama greets Archbishop Demetrios on the Edmund Pettus Bridge during the 50th Anniversary of the March on Selma.

2015



Archbishop Demetrios of America converses with Martin Luther King III and Bernice Albertine King, the children of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the 50th Anniversary of the March on Selma.

*Remarks of His Eminence  
Archbishop Demetrios of America at the*

# **Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King Unity Breakfast 2015**

God, Struggle, and Unity.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.

These words from the Book of Psalms (Psalm 135: 1) were not uttered in a time of tranquility and joy. They were not spoken when all was secure, protected, and safe. They are a witness of deep faith and unwavering hope in the midst of great struggle. Under the threat of persecution and death, in the face of hatred and violence, these words of truth are offered by the Bible as a testimony of the power of faith and hope to overcome.

In great struggles, hope is sustained by faith in God and the assurance that He will fulfill His promises. He has given us life and abundance of life (John 10:10). He has promised to nurture and protect our souls, offering the unique fellowship with Him. Through faith in Him, our lives are transformed, and the promises of a blessed and abundant life are real and renewed every day, in spite of any kind of difficulties, ordeals and afflictions.

In the midst of struggle, we know that hope sustained by faith is strengthened when it is shared. With shared faith and hope with unified vision of the purpose and nature of human life, in true relationships with God and each other, we are able to offer a beautiful and powerful witness of what true life should be. In our unity we are able to defend the right to the

fullness of life for every human being and to stand for all that is just and good and sacred.

On this anniversary we commemorate the heroic faith and hope of those who struggled, of those who upheld human dignity through powerful yet peaceful protests and demonstrations against racism, prejudice, fear and hatred. In the midst of fierce struggle, they remained firm and uncompromising and united in the truth and hope of the civil rights peaceful movement.

Today, we honor a legacy of noble struggle, as so many sacrificed so much for equality and freedom. We honor great people like Martin Luther King and also fighters like Rev. James Reeb and Jimmy Lee Jackson. But we also celebrate a legacy of faith in God, and hope for change—hope that offers dreams of a better future; hope that sees these dreams fulfilled in greater respect for human life and dignity; hope that realizes the affirmation and protection of equality and inalienable rights for all; hope in a shared commitment to ideals and principles that are revealed by God, innate to our human existence and potential, and essential in a free society and for the life and prosperity of all humanity.

And we know that God is with us and that His mercy endures for ever. Hence, we repeat in unison: We give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy endures forever. Amen.

*Statement issued at the  
17th Biennial Ecclesiastical Congress  
on the Occasion of the*

## **Signing of the Civil Rights Bill into the Law of the Land 1964**

Glory to God in the highest! His will that “good will toward men” prevail someday in the world, is at last a reality here in the United States of America. Independence from civil wrongs is that which we hail today. We do not simply celebrate and commemorate Independence Day this year, we implement and enrich its meaning with the signing of the Civil Rights Bill. July 4, 1964 marks a most significant milestone in our history and in the history of mankind. A rekindled spirit reflect-

ing the beauty of the Spirit of 1776 and that of 1863, is brightening the horizon of the world with the refreshing hope that justice and equality for all men regardless of race, color and creed, shall fill the hearts of all men.

May this glorious decision of our Congress mark a new era for humanity; an era in which the Word of God will be our command and direction in life, and when people will meet people face-to-face singing Hosannah and Alleluia!

†ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS,  
Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church  
of North and South America

*Statement by Archbishop Iakovos on the Occasion of the*  
**Memorial Service for Rev. James Reeb**  
**1965**

I came to this Memorial Service because I believe this is an appropriate occasion not only to dedicate myself as well as our Greek Orthodox Communicants to the noble cause for which our friend, the Reverend James Reeb gave his life; but also in order to show our willingness to continue this fight against prejudice, bias and persecution.

In this God-given cause, I feel sure that I have the full and understanding support of our Greek Orthodox faithful of America. For our Greek Orthodox Church and our people fully understand from our heritage and our tradition such sacrificial involvements. Our Church has never hesitated to fight, when it felt it must, for the rights of mankind; and many of our Churchmen have been in the forefront of these battles time and time again.

The great poet John Milton said in the closing lines of "Samson Agonistes":

"All is best, though oft we doubt,  
What the invisible dispose of highest  
wisdom brings about."

I would like to believe that these words have deep relevance to the meaning of the tragic and violent

death of the Rev. James Reeb. The ways of God are not always revealed to us, but certainly His choice of this dedicated minister to be the victim of racial hatred and the hero of this struggle to gain unalienable constitutional rights for those American brethren of ours who are denied them, and to die, so to speak, on this battlefield for human dignity and equality, was not accidental or haphazard.

Let us seek out in this tragedy a divine lesson for all of us. The Rev. Reeb felt he could not be outside the arena of this bitter struggle -- and we too must feel that we cannot. Let his martyrdom be an inspiration and a reminder to us that there are times when we must risk everything, including life itself, for those basic American ideals of Freedom, Justice and Equality, without which this land cannot survive.

Our hope and prayer, then, is that we may be given strength to let God know by our acts and deeds, and not only by our words, that like the late Rev. James Reeb, we too are the espousers and the fighters in a struggle for which we must be prepared to risk our all.



“

*The only normalcy  
that we will settle for  
is the normalcy  
that recognizes the  
dignity and worth  
of all of  
God's children.”*

**Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Address at the Conclusion of the  
Selma to Montgomery March



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