

**Fourth Academic Meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism**  
**Ma'aleh HaChamisha, Israel**  
**13 - 16 December 1998**

*“The Encounter of Orthodoxy and Judaism with Modernity”*

**Communiqué**

The theme of the fourth academic meeting between Christian Orthodoxy and Judaism was “The Encounter of Christian Orthodoxy and Judaism with Modernity”. The dialogue took place under the auspices of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations and the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The gathering brought together some forty delegates and a number of observers from Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Greece, Israel, Italy, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the USA, and Yugoslavia. The interreligious consultation was organized by the World Jewish Congress (Israel) in cooperation with the Israel Jewish Council on Interreligious Relations and with the support of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Proceedings were presided over by HE Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreou (Metropolitan of Switzerland) and Dr. Gerhart M. Riegner (Honorary Vice-President of the World Jewish Congress), who led a small delegation to meet the President of the State of Israel, Ezer Weizman, at his official residence in Jerusalem.

At the meeting's opening, a message of support was received from His All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. The Ecumenical Patriarch's written statement offered his support for interreligious consultations, and affirmed that “dialogue is not taking place to convince either of the parties to convert to the religion of the other, but to strengthen the calm and peaceful cooperation between people, so that consciences on both sides may freely select the faith that draws them, on their personal responsibility.” His Beatitude, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Diodoros I, conveyed his blessings and wishes for the success of the conference.

The opening meeting heard from Jakob Finci, president of the Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, of the inspiring example of the Benevolencija during the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. During the war, this Sarajevo Jewish welfare organisation provided essential aid to thousands of people regardless of their beliefs or origins.

The consultation's theme was analyzed by focusing on four subjects, each of which was addressed by a lecturer from the Orthodox and Jewish traditions; in each case, much discussion followed. The first subject was “Nationalism and Religious Fundamentalism in the Secularized Modern Society”, for which Metropolitan Damaskinos (Geneva) and Rabbi David Rosen (Jerusalem) presented lectures. In offering an Orthodox perspective, the Metropolitan proposed two principles that both religions could advocate:

“The full and unconditional constitutional and legislative guarantee of full freedom of religious conscience and the other religious freedoms for all states' subjects, whatever the origin of the majority of the faithful; and

The legislative protection of equality before the law and all the internationally recognized social rights of religious ‘others’ in the constantly expanding pluralist composition of the society in virtually all modern states.”

Jerusalem, December 15, 1998

The orthodox participants prepared a response due on the topic of expressions considered antijewish in certain texts of worship of the Orthodox Church on the basis of the views which were exchanged during our Third Meeting in Athens (1993).

We would, in summary, point out the following

“1. The Orthodox Church’s hymns frequently reflect and describe events from the history of the Old and New Testaments. Hymnographers reproduce the sacred chronicles (histories). Despite an apparently antijewish semiology - in certain cases - the character of these texts remains pedagogical, not polemical, and aims toward the spiritual edification of the faithful. It is evident that poetical texts are often not devoid of elements of rhetorical exaggeration.

2. Within the context of Christian catechism and interpretation of hymnographic texts, any interpretation of an anti-jewish slant is avoided.

3. It should be noted that the hymns in question have not affected the Orthodox mind in the least, have not cultivated a polemical attitude or mentality against Judaism and in no way lessened the Christian universal understanding of salvation.

4. In any case, any liturgical change within the Orthodox Church would be a case for a Panorthodox Council to decide on and, consequently, lies beyond the scope and the competence of an interreligious dialogue.”

That is what we can say for now, without this meaning necessarily that it was our final word on the matter. Even though these texts are of a symbolic nature, the matter remains upper most in our mind and is of concern to us because it is of concern to you. Time may perhaps provide further prospects.