

Eighth Academic Consultation Between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity

Establishing Solidarity: Obstacles and Challenges

By Rabbi Eric J. Greenberg

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Good morning. Boker tov. Kaleemera

I would like to thank the organizers and hosts of the eighth academic meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism for the honor given to me to address this distinguished group of leaders and scholars on the theme: *Establishing Solidarity: Obstacles and Challenges*.

I have worked closely with several Orthodox scholars and leaders in the United States over the past eight years. I am delighted to take part in the work of this conference. I especially welcome the opportunity to participate in efforts to build and deepen respect, cooperation and mutual understanding between the Jewish people and Orthodox Christians, noting that we share common roots and a long history.

I believe it is most appropriate here to recall the words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew from the Third Academic meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism in 1994.

At that meeting he said, “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.”

Our communities have made great strides together since His All Holiness spoke these words some twenty years ago. Nevertheless, challenges remain in our dialogue as they do in all encounters between great religious traditions.

In this paper, my intent is to present an outline of these challenges, in an effort to help chart the future trajectory of our discussions. In order to better understand the obstacles that lie before us, I will first examine the work of noted leaders and scholars from both traditions which have helped bring the dialogue to its present state. I will then attempt, from my particular Jewish perspective, to contextualize this work within the framework of the obstacles which confront the current dialogue.

From here, I will chart a way forward, using the existing scholarship as a guide. I should note at the onset that the scholarship to which I will refer, both within the Jewish and Orthodox Christian contexts, is intended to represent the two faith traditions in the most general sense, and not reflect any particular regional, jurisdictional, or denominational concern. Indeed, it my intent to paint with as broad a brush as possible in an effort to both see “the lay of the land” and identify potential hazards in the road ahead.

There have been five consultations since the aforementioned Third Consultation, and since then, we have discussed a wide variety of topics and issues of mutual theological and pastoral concern.

At a 2010 World Council of Churches consultation on “Christian Self-understanding in the Context of Judaism,” Metropolitan Emmanuel of France helpfully summarized the themes of all our consultations. In his presentation, His Eminence charted the origins of the Orthodox Christian-Jewish dialogue, which dates from 1976, and offered special attention to a lecture given by His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos, before the Swiss Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Zurich.

The theme of Metropolitan Damaskinos’ talk was “the claim for absolutism of both Christianity and Judaism and the necessity for dialogue between them.” In spite of the difficulties associated with such a challenging topic, this groundbreaking meeting nevertheless bore fruit only a year later.

Such initial meetings launched a series of consultations throughout the subsequent decades, and has brought us together today. Over the past thirty-five years we have met in Lucerne and Athens, Jerusalem, and Thessaloniki.

In our discussions we examined:

- * the notion of law in Judaism and Christianity;
- * the role of tradition in both religions;
- * continuity and renewal;
- * the encounter of Christian Orthodoxy and Judaism with modernity;
- * faithfulness to our sources;
- * our commitment to peace and justice; and
- * religious liberty and the relationship between freedom and religion.

Metropolitan Emmanuel offered a nicely concise synthesis of these diverse consultation themes when he remarked that, “the variety of topics addressed during these academic meetings are aimed at promoting the sincere mutual desire among Jews and Orthodox

Christians to get to know each other better. And by doing so, to provide the faithful with the opportunity to understand that cooperation and peaceful coexistence can only be achieved by an open and sincere dialogue.”

Part of “getting to know each other better,” however, also involves an honest examination of the difficulties and challenges associated with the particular interreligious relationship of Jews and Orthodox Christians.

An example of emerging scholarship that wrestles with some of these challenging issues is a recent study by Fr. Demetrios Tonia in which he examined the Orthodox Christian understanding of the church as New Israel. In his paper, “Sharing the Inheritance,” Fr. Tonia dealt with such sensitive topics as supersessionist language and early Christian apologetical discourses. Such open and honest conversation illustrates the way in which our mutual dialogue has matured and the challenges that lie before us. As Fr. Tonia put it, making reference to the Jewish concept of “tikun olam,” (Hebrew for repair the world) the imperative of our dialogue is to engage in the “hard work of repairing the world, as joint claimants, [who] share both the burdens and the blessings of a common inheritance.” Such direct, respectful conversation can only serve to deepen and strengthen our relationship. Honest dialogue, however, means dealing with issues that are both positive and problematic.

Chief among the challenges Jews and Orthodox Christians face in our ongoing dialogue is the manner in which we presently teach about each other and the ways in which we ought to teach about each other. Our consultations have already identified a myriad of relevant topics in which our understanding of the other is formed. Some of these identified topics include educational materials, biblical presentation and interpretation, liturgy, homiletics, Holocaust education, modern racial anti-Semitism, religious anti-Judaism, and contemporary catechetical and Jewish day school curricula.

Insofar as Jewish educational materials about Christian Orthodoxy, if we can extrapolate from Catholicism there is little material to review. In terms of negative traditions about Christians, however, there is much work to do.

In 1992, Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos offered a succinct, but pointed, analysis when he commented that, “the Orthodox tradition is a repository of anti-Jewish polemic deriving from the New Testament and the church fathers, canonical prohibition against interaction with Jews, as well as diverse popular prejudices against the Jewish people.” He concludes that, “a whole range of topics cries out for discussion, chief among them, the positive standing of the religion of Judaism and the Jewish people after the New Testament and the church fathers, and the study of Orthodox liturgical language concerning the Jews.”

In Fr. Stylianopoulos’ analysis, we see that the embedded nature of such “anti-Jewish polemic” and “popular prejudices” within the Orthodox tradition -- a problem also found in Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions -- presents us with serious challenges.

In the opening address at the Fourth Academic Conference in Jerusalem in 1998, Metropolitan Damaskinos elaborated on the tragic consequences resulting from this type

of polemical literature when he remarked that, “the polemic theology of each religion usually linked the credibility of its own message to efforts to project the ill-faith or error of the faithful on the other side. Thus, transferring in this way all the theoretical discussions of their theological disagreements from the question of God to the more tangible question of man, on which it was easier to assign responsibility for man’s different approach to divine revelation.” While such theoretical discourse has a theological function there are, by necessity, practical and pastoral implications.

He went on to note that, “this distinction between the faithful and the faith of the two religions usually became imperceptible in their polemic theology and fed the diverse religious superstitions of the past, which at times stirred up not only the sick phenomena of mutual social exclusion, but also tragic phenomena of the inhuman persecution of the Jews, usually by religious communities in the Christian states.”

Metropolitan Damaskinos aptly demonstrated how this [so-called] “sick phenomenon” has been used in certain historical periods to serve other racial, nationalistic, political or social expediencies.

Certainly Jews are tragically aware of these periods and incidents throughout history when the religious-based teaching of contempt has been joined with a political ideology. The result was the persecution and mass murder of Jews.

Issues related to stereotypes and anti-Semitism were discussed at the Third Academic Consultation in 1994, under the title “*Orthodox Christians and Jews on Continuity and Renewal.*” To the credit of those Orthodox Christian and Jewish participants who attended the consultation, the dialogue was particularly honest and sometimes even painful. Attendees agreed that there are many stereotypes and misconceptions that need our attention, particularly in the matter of anti-Semitism. One of the issues raised at the Third Consultation was the lack of symmetry in these encounters. This lack of symmetry refers to a general Orthodox Christian perception that post-Biblical or Rabbinic Judaism is not a dynamic living religious faith, but rather some strange vestige of the past. Again, this phenomenon is not unique to Christian Orthodoxy, but appears also in other Christian traditions.

Thus, the popular perception of Jews and Judaism appears to derive from the image of the Jewish antagonists of Christ who populate the pages of the New Testament and are ensconced in the whole complex and variegated fabric of the institutions, rites, customs, teachings, values, offices, sacred documents, written rules and oral traditions which express the actual life of the Orthodox Christian communities. However, it is a mistake to see the regularity of negative depictions of Jews and Judaism as an insurmountable obstacle. While such aspects of the Orthodox tradition are vital because they represent the practical faith experience for all Orthodox Christian believers, they are by no means immutable. As Fr. Stylianopoulos noted, “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 God.” Fr. Stylianopoulos argued that Christians ought to relearn 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 St. Paul declared long ago.”

Fr. Stylianopoulos’ dialogue partner at the 1994 conference was Hebrew University professor R. W. Zwi Werblowsky. Professor Werblowsky acknowledged that a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible, as distinct from a purely scholarly and philological reading, must be, by necessity, Christocentric. He explained that “... as a Jewish teacher I must make sure that my fellow Jews understand this ... but I also demand from my Christian friends that they understand that a Jewish reading of the bible cannot possibly contain any reference to Jesus, not because Jews are stubborn or blind, or disobedient, but because their religious and theological perspective is legitimately different. To regard the Jews simply as a community of people who reject Christ is rather like defining Christians as a bunch of people whose main concern is to reject the prophet Muhammad.”

Professor Werblowsky then drew attention to aspects of the Orthodox theological tradition that makes difficult reading for Jews. “St. John Chrysostom is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures of the Orthodox Church. In understanding history, we recognize that during that period Christianity considered Judaism a threat and danger and rendered violent rejection inevitable. But this does not alter the reality that as a Jew in 1994, or in now in 2013, looking to build positive interfaith dialogue, the reading of St. John Chrysostom is a painful task.” The scholarship in this area, such as that of Robert Wilken, who shows that Judaizing Christians were the real targets of his Eight Orations, while not easing such pain nevertheless helps explain the social and historical context within which such polemical discourses were offered. Put another way, as a Jew I might not like it but I can at least begin to understand it. Such is the slow but important work of dialogue.

Our predecessors in this enterprise also discussed the profound role worship, ritual and liturgy play in how we present and teach about each other. Worship, as we know, forms our religious identity in powerful ways. The prayers we say, the psalms we chant, the hymns we sing, the texts we hear, the rituals we perform—all these shape us profoundly. What ritual expresses becomes an integral part of the worshipper. The more central a ritual is to a community’s life, the more formative an influence it exercises. Liturgy is the public, communal and ritual worship of our faiths.

The same idea translates into Jewish worship. In Jewish prayer we are constantly directed to remember the Exodus, and God rescuing the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. As theology embodied in poetry and proclamation, song and gestures, liturgy is the acting out of a script for seeing the world. And one of the primary ways to transmit religious memory for all of us is through liturgy. Thus, liturgy’s importance cannot be exaggerated.

Our predecessors understood the importance and power of liturgy and began to grapple with its profound impact on the Orthodox Christian-Jewish dialogue. In 1994, Professor Werblowsky reminded conference participants of certain passages in the office of the Holy Sufferings on Great Friday. In his commentary on the antiphons of this service, Professor Werblowsky says that, “I am thinking of the first and third ‘Jews sought to kill you’ the sixth, ‘on this day Jews nailed to the cross him,’ the eighth and ninth antiphon ‘repay them according to their deserts.’ The whole Jewish people is reproached and

rejected in the tenth, eleventh ‘they were not satisfied with their treachery but spit at you their mockery’ and twelfth antiphon. A troparion following the sixth reading of the Gospel explicitly calls the Jews ‘deicides, the swarm of deicides, the lawless nation of the Jews furiously shouting at Pilate crucify the innocent Christ.’”

Professor Werblowsky put his concerns squarely on the table when he stated that, “it is certainly not my business to suggest what Orthodox Christians should do with these hymns. But I would be betraying the task laid upon me if with false politeness I did not mention these facts. And facts are stubborn things. The problem is not so much mine, because it is not my form of worship. But I think it should bother those whose form of worship it is. One of the traditions we share, as we inherited it from the biblical prophets, is that of self-criticism. But criticizing oneself and criticizing others are two very different things. Here I wish to draw attention to an important factor that has bedeviled Jewish-Christian relations, and I am doing so at the risk of appearing to criticize Christianity. The prophetic criticism of Israel’s failings and shortcomings has been adopted by Christian polemics, but in a hostile manner. An original auto-criticism has been perverted into a hetero-criticism. Instead of saying ‘let us admire the Jews for their honesty.’ They did not sweep their sinfulness under the carpet. But on the contrary, they even canonized the painful prophetic criticism as part of their holy scriptures so that it should always be present in their minds. Instead these Jewish texts are quoted with the implication, ‘see what an awfully corrupt and sinful bunch these Jews are: God himself says so.’”

Such is the frank nature of our dialogue and such are the obstacles we seek to overcome. I must add that this line of religious argumentation is regularly used in the political arena by both Christians and Muslims to promote animosity to Jews in general and the State of Israel in particular.

Within the Orthodox Christian world, even before our consultations began to flourish, there was an understanding of the concerns which scholars such as Professor Werblowsky expressed.

For example: In a news article published on February 29, 1960—some 53 years ago—the headline read, “Elimination of Anti-Jewish Passages in Greek Orthodox Liturgy Urged.” The article is about a Greek Orthodox theologian who appealed to Greek Orthodox Church authorities to eliminate anti-Jewish passages in the church liturgy. Professor Amilkas Alevizatos, in the ecclesiastical journal, *Nea Zoi*, cited the then recent order by Pope John XXIII for the elimination of anti-Jewish passages from the Roman Catholic Liturgy. He even urged that action be taken before Easter for Easter service material which contained anti-Jewish passages. While nothing ever came of Professor Alevizatos’ call to reform, it is nevertheless important to note that concerns about these issues pre-date these conferences.

Similar concerns were expressed at the 1994 Academic Conference held in Jerusalem. In response to the concerns raised about the teachings of contempt of Jews at the 1994 Consultation, Orthodox Christian participants presented a written statement four years later - at the next consultation in 1998.

It should be noted this statement has never been published. The unnamed Orthodox Christian authors of the 1998 statement wanted to make these four points about the concerns expressed four years earlier.

- 1. Despite an apparently anti-Jewish 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 pan-Orthodox council to decide on and, consequently, lies beyond the scope and the competence of an interreligious dialogue.*

The statement ends as follows:

“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.”

Fifteen years have now passed since that Orthodox statement was issued and we have yet to further explore these issues.

In reading these points there are some questions that occurred to me, and I consider necessary for us to reflect on.

- Point 1: If poetical texts can often have rhetorical exaggeration and are being used for pedagogical purposes, as the authors write, how is it that congregations are not being taught distorted and exaggerated views of Jews and Judaism?
- Point 2: How are any conclusions of an anti-Jewish slant - within the context of Christian catechism and interpretation of hymnographic - being avoided? What are the pedagogical strategies being used that prevent ideas that are on the surface negative from producing negative attitudes? What is the formula used that did not produce the same negative results as in the west?

In the background of my questions is an awareness of studies conducted over the last half century in the United States that show a high correlation between anti-Semitism and devout Christianity.

A major sociological study sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League and released in the 1960s found that the most religious people were the most anti-Semitic. In their book “Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism, Charles Glock, director of the University of California Survey Research Center and co-author Rodney Stark found that a majority of American church members were prejudiced against the Jews; that 60 percent of the Protestants and 40 percent of the Catholics thought that “the Jews can never be forgiven for what they did to Jesus until they accept Him as the True Savior,” and that a majority of observant Christians still considered Jews materialistic, dishonest, and vulgar. In their conclusion, the authors observed that they “were entirely unprepared to find these old religious traditions so potent and so widespread in modern society.”

Succeeding studies in the United States found similar results. I realize that these are studies in America, but it is not clear to me how there can be qualitative differences in other countries.

Others have echoed these concerns. In 2006, Fr. Yves Dubois, a longtime participant in Orthodox Christian-Jewish dialogue who lives in Great Britain and who has participated at these consultations, responded to a question about anti-Jewish language in the liturgy. He commented that, “the urgency of a break away from anti-Judaism in the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church is increased by the presence of anti-Semitism in our church.”

Russian scholar Irina Levinskaya said that “the editing of the liturgy not only is necessary, it is urgent” and noted that “an anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic strand in the Orthodox Church is very deep and visible at all levels.” Levinskaya cited two books still in circulation:

- One describes the Pharisees as “a Jewish sect, whose adherents are marked by pride, hypocrisy, pretended piety and inner uncleanness. In the modern period such language is impossible for Western Christianity, yet it is still quite normal for Orthodox Christians.”
- The second book is titled: “How They Make Anti-Semites” written by a deacon of the Russian Orthodox Church and one of its most widely published modern theologians, Andrej Kuraev. This is what he wrote: “Without Christ, the Old Testament is perhaps the most terrible book in the religious history of mankind. You should not read the Bible as a national chronicle, i.e. through Jewish eyes. One can respect this book only after it is taken away – or rather pulled away – from the Jews.

The reaction against anti-Jewish tracts exists not only in academia but also in the ecclesiastical world. In 2007, a group of twelve Orthodox priests issued a declaration calling on the Orthodox Church to excise anti-Semitic passages from its liturgy and review its long standing theological positions towards Jews and the state of Israel. These

priests, members of the Russian, Greek, Ukrainian, and Georgian Orthodox Churches, said it was high time for the Orthodox Church to correct its attitude toward Jews and Judaism. Their declaration called for the renunciation of replacement theology, the removal of anti-Semitic passages from church liturgical services—the Holy Week services in particular—and endorsed the eternal connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. One of the priests commented to the media that, “in light of rising anti-Semitism and other manifestations of nationalism, our church has to respond to this ugly phenomena and review some of the aspects of its relations with Jews and Judaism.” Since it is also the case in Judaism, I recognize that liturgical traditions, as an expression of the deepest faith and longings of a religious community, are not something to be addressed casually. Liturgy is also an internal matter and not something to be adjudicated in some sort of interreligious “negotiation.” And yet, it does play a critical and undeniable role in helping shape attitudes towards the religious other – attitudes that themselves are certainly fitting subjects for interreligious dialogue.

Why is dealing with these issues so important today?

After more than thirty-five years we cannot afford another period of complacency. This is more than a matter of courtesy. All measures and studies indicate that anti-Semitism is growing exponentially in Europe. Just last week, participants at the Fourth Conference of the Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism, held in Jerusalem, were presented with the most recent distressing data about the alarming rise in anti-Semitism and anti-Israel attitudes around the world. A columnist from the Jerusalem Post wrote that, “defaming Jews has emerged as the greatest global political growth industry—a virtual tsunami. We are witnessing a resurrection of the medieval paranoia which effectively blamed Jews for all the disasters of mankind.”

The economic meltdown and surge in unemployment throughout Europe has greatly accelerated the hatred of Jews and Israel. European countries are witnessing a resurgence of xenophobia and neo-Nazism. The situation in Hungary is especially stark where Jobbik, the Nazi party whose supporters proudly chant “Heil Hitler” and other Nazi slogans, gained 17% of the vote. Here in Greece, its neo-Nazi counterpart “Golden Dawn” recently polled 12% of the vote. We should also note there has been a rise in Islamophobia throughout Europe.

The era of the internet and electronic global communications has been a boon to Jew baiters, enabling them to globally disseminate their hatred instantly and effectively. The new blend of Judeophobia fuses traditional right wing religious, racial and economically inspired hatred of Jews with leftist varieties which now dominate indigenous western anti-Semites. Worse, the greatest outpouring of anti-Jewish hatred emanates from the newly empowered Muslim countries with its combined population of 1.6 billion. They are increasingly employing the ancient deicide charge against Jews in which Palestinians are portrayed as Jesus, crucified by the Jews, as portrayed by the state of Israel. I cite such examples, not to focus on any one church community or ethnic group but to demonstrate a pattern of concern.

While historically anti-Jewish violence was prevalent in Western Europe, there is concern that similar types of events may be on the rise in the Christian East. In 2004, the Orthodox Church in Belorussia published three anti-Semitic books. In January 2005, the U. S. State Department issued a report citing the Greek Orthodox Church in Greece for its complacency toward anti-Semitism. One example cited involved the burning of an effigy of Judas at Easter among some parishes. In December 2009, a Moldavian priest incited a mob to tear down a menorah placed in a public square. The priest declared that, “Stephan the Great [of Moldova] defended our country from all kinds of kikes.” An official statement by the Orthodox Church, called the incident “unfortunate,” but nevertheless added that “we think it inappropriate to put a symbol of the Jewish cult in a public place connected to the history and faith of our people, especially because Chanukah is classified by the cult books of Judaism as a ‘holiday of blessing’ that symbolizes the victory of Jews over non-Jews.” Most of the Orthodox world including churches in the West said nothing. The Russian Orthodox Church continues to have a strong subculture of anti-Semites who speak of a Judeo-Western conspiracy.

What, therefore, can and should we do to begin to address these obstacles and challenges? The fact is, we minorities have to stand together. We are both facing increasing pressures around the world. It is clear from our speakers at prior Academic conferences that they intended for us to continue this work, painful though it is. There are serious and difficult issues that face our two faith communities and we minimize their importance at our own peril.

The progress achieved thus far, however, is indicative of the ways in which our two communities have grown closer together. Indeed, our ability to have such a frank and open discussion of the challenges and obstacles that face the Orthodox Christian-Jewish dialogue is a manifestation of this progress.

There are also other signs which should give us hope for the success of our future consultations. I was honored to be present in Rome, this past March, when Patriarch Bartholomew attended the installation of Pope Francis—the first Ecumenical Patriarch to do so in more than a millennium. I sat only a few feet from both of these two great hierarchs at an interfaith gathering the very next day. Pope Francis called the Patriarch his brother and extending that thought further in doing so suggested that we are all brothers and sisters of the same God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We must look to this example and, motivated by their example, seek to overcome the challenges that confront us.

I respectfully propose today that we take some time in the next few hours left to us to discuss assembling a small working group of Jewish and Orthodox Christian scholars, clerics and interfaith experts that will meet and communicate on a more regular basis — between these consultations — to discuss a range of issues that will help us build and strengthen our dialogue. This should help us gain a better understanding of each other, explore pertinent and timely questions on a regular basis, and build up mutual confidence. Such a group may also be useful in times of crisis that affect our two communities.

My experience in this dialogue has taught me that there is much that Jews need to learn about the Orthodox Christian world. The Jewish community needs to understand the structural composition of the Orthodox Church and its deep relationship with its 2,000-year-old traditions. Jews must appreciate the strength of apostolic and patristic authority in Orthodoxy even as Judaism invokes “*zechut avot v’emot*” - the merits of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

It is uncanny that Jews in North America have paid little attention to the Eastern Orthodox world, even though many of Jewish ancestry came from the heavily Orthodox Christian countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Serbia, Rumania and of course, Greece.

There is also the ancient and ongoing presence of Orthodox Christians in the land of Israel in the form of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem under the spiritual leadership of His Beatitude Theophilos III, who has an important role to play in the dialogue. There is much to discuss regarding attitudes towards Christianity in Israel and improving negative attitudes and providing positive educational materials.

It is my hope that the proposed small working group of Jewish and Orthodox Christian experts will help us advance our discussions in a substantive way that will enhance our next consultation. Indeed, in many ways, such a working group is the natural outcome of our discussions that have already taken place and constitutes the next, logical step in our dialogue. If we look to the example of Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Frances and understand that we are all brothers and sisters of the same family then it is important that our family become even closer and gather more often. In such a way our continued familiarity and honest discussion will help us overcome the obstacles and challenges that confront us, no matter how great they may seem.

May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob grant us the strength and perseverance to accomplish all of our objectives and overcome any and all obstacles, so that working together, we can help establish a more peaceful world.

Rabbi Eric J. Greenberg was a delegate at the Eighth Orthodox Christian-Jewish Academic Consultation representing the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC). He is currently the Director of Outreach, Programs and Interfaith Relations for the Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugee.