

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN

by

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There are three definitions of the term "Judeo-Christian":

- 1) The American Media definition
- 2) The Self-Contradictory definition
- 3) The Orthodox Christian definition

1. *The American Media definition:* This definition may also be termed the "American Melting Pot," or the "American Assimilation" definition. When the vast majority of English speaking people see the words "Judeo-Christian," what probably comes to mind is a vague idea about the moral precepts of the Old and New Testaments all jumbled together, so that they somehow include the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Our Father. This is probably what 99% of the people understand by the term "Judeo-Christian".

2. *The Self-Contradictory definition:* There are a number of people who say that the term "Judeo-Christian" is self-contradictory. The reason for this is, as the rabbi of your local synagogue may find it necessary to explain, is that modern Judaism is not Scriptural; it is *Talmudic*. (This will depend, of course, on how liberal or traditional the rabbi is.)

The *Talmud*, according to the *Oxford University Dictionary*, is "the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial traditional law consisting of the ... binding precepts of the elders, additional to and developed from the Pentateuch" — that is, the first five books of the Old Testament.

There are two versions of the Talmud: the Palestinian Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud.

To put it simply, the Talmud is the composition of rabbis **who, for the most part**, lived *after* the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70. The Talmud is *not* Holy Scripture, nor biblical, in any way. It is purely and clearly *rabbinical* precepts.

The real problem with the Talmud is that many of its passages are vehemently *anti-Christian*. In fact, the venom and the seething hatred found in such passages are so intense, we cannot dare to describe or repeat them here. True, eighty percent of the Jewish people today do not subscribe to these hate-filled axioms found in the Talmud, but twenty per cent, the "observant" Jews do, out of principle, endorse them. Such being the case,

many people rightfully ask, what is the meaning of the term "Judeo-Christian" in such a context? It is, they affirm, self-contradictory.

3. *The Orthodox Christian definition:* In 2002, I wrote an "Encyclical on Peace in the Holy Land," in which I defined what the word "Israel" truly means for Orthodox Christians. This, in part, is what I wrote there:

What does the sacred hymnology of the Church have to say about the term "Israel"? What are the teachings of the holy and God-bearing Fathers regarding this matter?

What — for example — is the significance of the fig tree, which was cursed by our Saviour and which withered away? The following hymns from the Ninth Ode of the Palm Sunday canon for Compline provide us with the proper understanding:

The rod of Moses was turned into a serpent, and the rod of Aaron, which had been withered and fruitless, was changed into a green branch that brought forth leaves; but the lawless synagogue was changed into a fruitless fig tree.

Thou hast cursed the fruitlessness of the law, since it brought forth as leaves the shadow of understanding of the letter, but had no fruit of deeds because of its lawlessness. .

..

On the other hand, what do the ancient patristic texts teach us about the *true* Israel, the *new* Israel, the *new* Jerusalem?

Israel, Thy Church on earth, taken out of the nations. . . .
with a full heart and a willing soul sings [in praise of Thee]
Apostolic Constitutions, VII, 35

Through Christ, Thou hast brought home the nations to Thyself as a people for Thine own possession [Deuteronomy 7:6], the true Israel, beloved of God, and seeing God.
Apostolic Constitutions, VII, 36

For the true spiritual Israel and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations) are we [Christians] who have been led to God through the crucified Christ.

St. Justin the Philosopher,
Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, XI, 5

The word of God speaks to those who believe in Christ as being one soul, and one synagogue, and one church.

St. Justin the Philosopher,
Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, LXIII, 5

Even so we [the nations], who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelitic race.

St. Justin the Philosopher,
Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, CXXXV, 3

All who through Christ have fled for refuge to the Father, constitute the blessed Israel.

St. Justin the Philosopher,
Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, CXXXV, 5

[God], through Jesus Christ, introduces to the Kingdom of Heaven both Abraham and his seed, that is, the Church, upon which also is conferred the adoption and the inheritance promised to Abraham.

St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 8

The patriarchs and prophets sowed the word concerning Christ, but the Church reaped, that is, received the fruit.

St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 25.

What the prophets have, according to the aspect of their message, sometimes called Jerusalem, sometimes the Bride, sometimes Mount Sion, and sometimes the Temple and God's Tabernacle, is the Church.

St. Methodius of Olympus,
The Symposium, VIII, 5

In his commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaias, Saint Basil the Great writes the following:

Indeed, though few from Israel were found to be of the elect, the portion of those that believed in Christ was saved. Wherefore [that portion] became like yeast among the nations, drawing all to its own likeness, so that thereby it might become both Israel and the People of the Lord, and so that he that was of the nations who believed might

become a Jew mystically and also an heir of the spiritual promises.

PG 30:160c-161a.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria, in his exegesis of the same prophetic book, tells us that when the Prophet speaks of "the spiritual Jerusalem," "the spiritual Judea," or "the spiritual Sion," he is proclaiming them as types of the Church of Christ, and as the true Sion (*PG, 70:65d, 68c, d, 781d*).

Elsewhere, in his commentary on the same book, Saint Cyril writes:

As for those that are the remnant, that is, the saved who have believed in Christ, though they be a remnant of Israel, they shall become, it says, a great multitude.

PG, 70:188c.

In his interpretation of Isaias 45:25 ("and in God shall all the seed of the sons of Israel be glorified" *Septuagint*), the same Saint has this to say:

Those who are called the sons of Israel among them, we affirm, are the holy Apostles and Evangelists; for they were Jews according to the flesh. And their sons, in turn, are those who are called through them to the knowledge of Christ

PG, 70:988c.

In the Paschal Megalynarion, we Orthodox Christians chant, "Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord hath arisen upon thee." What is this "new Jerusalem," but the spiritual city of God that presides over the "new Israel," that is, the true followers and disciples of the Messiah and God of Israel? Orthodox Christians are, as the Saints teach us, the New Israel, the true Israel, God's Chosen People, a People for His own possession (Titus 2:14).

In his commentary on the Heirmos of the Ninth Ode of the Pascal Canon, Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain writes:

O New Jerusalem, the catholic Church of Christ, shine, shine ...for the glory of the Lord, that is, the Cross of Christ (John 13:31), the divinity of Christ (Ephesians 1:17), and the divine radiance of Christ's countenance [at Christ's transfiguration on Mt. Tabor] have arisen upon thee, the Church from among the nations.

The people that sat in darkness (that is, the nations) have seen the great light of divine knowledge; but for the unbelieving Jews, Christ the Sun of Righteousness, has hidden [His light], whereas for us who are from the nations and have believed He dawned forth, because we acknowledged the dawn of His divinity, and we have been illumined with the light of piety and virtue. Furthermore, the hymnographer tells the New Sion to dance spiritually and to rejoice over the resurrection of Christ her Bridegroom.

St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain
Eortodrómium, p. 448

Of course, this is only a small selection of what the Church Fathers have to say about who is the true Israel today. Many more sources could be quoted (for example, Saint John Chrysostom's eighteenth Homily on the Epistle to the Romans speaks eloquently and comprehensively about "the remnant" of Israel); the citations mentioned above suffice to show us the spiritual insights of the Saints on this particular subject.

This, then, is what the Orthodox Christian definition of the term "Judeo-Christian" should be.

We should be clear: it is *not* a patristic term, and you should know that what we have said above is the only acceptable sense an Orthodox Christian can attribute to that term.

We are the New Israel. Our very beliefs, the attire of our clergy, and our manner of worship reflect our undeniable Hebraic roots.

If you want to get a good taste of what Jewish worship was like in our Saviour's day, come to an Orthodox Christian vespers service. There, you will truly understand the term "Judeo-Christian."