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STATEMENT BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM

This first national colloquium involving scholars and representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church and various branches of American Judaism is of historic importance for several reasons.

First, it marks the resumption of perhaps one of the oldest dialogues in civilization between bearers of two of the most ancient and productive religious and cultural civilizations. In the fourth century before the present era, Alexander of Macedon and Jedua, the High Priest of Israel, began one of the first Greek-Jewish dialogues which resulted in the growth of great mutual respect between Greeks and Jews and the assurance of religious freedom for Judaism in the Hellenistic Empire for more than a century. Such was the reverence that the Greeks and Jews developed for one another under Alexander that Jewish parents named their first-born sons "Alexander" and, from 312 BCE to the eleventh century, Jews in Palestine called their period "The Era of Alexander." The restoration of that quality of mutual respect and reciprocal solidarity between the Greek Orthodox Church's adherents and those of Judaism is one of the goals of this renewed dialogue.

Second, both Hellenism and Judaism had profound and frequently positive intellectual and spiritual influences on each other, a fact which has been obscured by the classic statement, but not an altogether accurate one, that Hellenism and Hebraism are fundamentally opposed to each other. Scholars attest to the fact that Greek Christianity is unthinkable without its profound indebtedness and rootedness in Judaism. At the same time, Pharisaism—Rabbinic Judaism—is in many ways unthinkable without its absorption of certain basic Hellenistic institutions, legal categories, modes of thought, and styles of language. The outcome of that creative synthesis was a distinctive form of Judaism, not a Jewish form of Hellenism. Thus the overcoming of the false mythologies and stereotypes and the uncovering of the deep values which have nourished both communities is one of the goals of this colloquium. Such a rediscovery will hopefully lead to a greater appreciation of the legitimacy of both religious communities, and the permanent values of each faith as an ultimate source of value and truth to their adherents.

Third, in a world still haunted by hatred, prejudice, and suspicion, the uncovering of the sources of mutual antagonism in religious and cultural traditions will hopefully lead to a process of establishing correctives against such alienating forces. The Greek Orthodox Church has a notable record of helping to save Jewish lives under the Nazis, for which we give thanks to God. At the same time certain traditions of anti-Jewish teaching and prayers continue to obtain in certain aspects of Greek Orthodox life and liturgy, even as certain anti-Christian tendencies continue to disfigure the features of some quarters in Jewry. It is the sponsors' hope that

together we will confront these sources of anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward Christians and will work together to overcome their lingering, baneful influences.

And, finally, the turmoil in the world today has undermined the meaning of the individual and his or her identity and freedom, and has made much of social living precarious and empty of purpose. As custodians of great cultures and ideals, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Jewish community can help bring about some amelioration of this crisis of the individual and society in light of the spiritual heritages that they carry in both the West and the East. But the first step in that healing process must begin within and between the Greek Orthodox Christians and the Jews, and we trust that this colloquium will be a significant contribution in starting that journey to building authentic human community.