

Antisemitism is a Sin*

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I am writing this article as a private individual and not as a representative of the patriarch. I cannot begin, however, without first asking forgiveness for anything that people calling themselves Orthodox may have done to the Jews. Only when I have done this can I present my own opinion on the subject.

I have three points to make.

The first is that hatred is a source of joy to those who hate. This joy devastates the soul, leaving it empty and icy cold, but it is joy nevertheless and if we want to fight it we have to put another joy in its place. It is wrong simply to forbid something which gives delight. We should seek instead to replace it with something deeper and more humane and therefore the task of fighting antisemitism is not in any way a negative, destructive task but a creative one, building a realm of genuine spiritual wholeness and light in the human soul.

The second point follows on from the first. It is unfortunately much easier for religion to become an instrument of social destruction than an instrument of creation. Destructive xenophobic and nationalistic initiatives can too easily, frighteningly easily, become tinted with a religious tone. On the other hand it is very difficult to do anything constructive in the religious sphere. That is why I would like to warn everyone that the Orthodox Church will never be able to wipe out antisemitism just like that, simply by having the top men in the hierarchy speak out against it – after all, the antisemites try to promote their views by putting on Orthodox voices. And here the problem we face is the need for decades of education and re-education. This is a process which cannot be achieved instantaneously by one-off intervention: it can only be a gradual process of transforming the human soul.

The third point is this: antisemitism is nothing other than a sin and hence there can be no justifiable reason for it. There is never any justification for sinning, and hence there is no reason for antisemitism. We cannot even seek reasons for it because if we find them we justify it and there can be no justification. There are causes for antisemitism, however, inasmuch as it is a sin, a passionate and strong emotion which subdues and governs one's judgment. Passion comes into its own when it finds a cause. One of the causes for antisemitism in Russia, although not the main one, is the difficult cultural situation in which we live. Throughout the centuries the

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intelligentsia and the ordinary people have been divided. Especially at the present time, when European culture is coming at us in so many different forms and unfortunately more often than not in its most debased manifestations, our people are feeling alienated from the culture passed on to them by the intelligentsia. This alienation can take on an antisemitic colouring. The question of the future of antisemitism in Russia is going to have to be resolved by the Russian intelligentsia. If the Russian intelligentsia would talk to the people about national values and offer them the bread of spiritual values rather than the stone of pop culture, then I think that dialogue between the intelligentsia and the people would be easier to initiate and would, in the end, lead to the extirpation of antisemitism.

(Translated from the Russian by Emma Watkins.)