

Archbishop Damaskinos and Greek Intellectuals Protest Persecution of Greek Jewry

VIRTUE AND COURAGE

The Greek Orthodox Church and the Academic World of the Greek People Protest against the Persecution

The letter that was sent by Archbishop Damaskinos to Prime Minister K. Logothetopoulos is a monument of courage, national dignity and respect for human ideals.

This historical document, unique in the annals of occupied Europe, was signed by representatives of the major cultural institutions and organizations on behalf of the Greek people. It required "virtue and courage" to sign such a document in those dark times.

To
The Prime Minister
Mr. K. Logothetopoulos
ATHENS

Mr. Prime Minister

The Greek people were rightfully surprised and deeply grieved to learn that the German Occupation Authorities have already started to put into effect a program of gradual deportation of the Greek Jewish community of Salonika to places beyond our national borders, and that the first groups of deportees are already on their way to Poland. The grief of the Greek people is particularly deep because of the following:

According to the terms of the armistice, all Greek citizens, without distinction of race or religion, were to be treated equally by the Occupation Authorities.

The Greek Jews have proven themselves not only valuable contributors to the economic growth of the country but also law-abiding citizens who fully understand their duties as Greeks. They made sacrifices for the Greek country and were always on the front line in the struggles of the Greek nation to defend its inalienable historical rights.

The law-abiding nature of the Jewish community in Greece refutes a priori any charge that it may be involved in actions or acts that might even slightly endanger the safety of the Military Occupation Authorities.

In our national consciousness, all the children of Mother Greece are an inseparable unity: they are equal members of the national body irrespective of religion or dogmatic differences.

Our Holy Religion does not recognize superior or inferior qualities based on race or religion, as it is stated: "There is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28) and thus condemns any attempt to discriminate or create racial or religious differences.

Our common fate, both in days of glory and in periods of national misfortune, forged inseparable bonds between all Greek citizens, without exemption, irrespective of race.

Certainly, we are not unaware of the deep conflict between the new Germany and the Jewish community, nor do we intend to become defenders or judges of world Jewry in the great sphere of world politics and economic affairs. Today we are interested in and deeply concerned with the fate of 60,000 of our fellow citizens, who are Jews. For a long time, we have lived together in both slavery and freedom, and we have come to appreciate their feelings, their brotherly attitude, their economic activity and, most important, their indefectible patriotism. Evidence of this patriotism is the great number of victims sacrificed by the Greek Jewish community without regret and without hesitation on the altar of duty when our country was in peril.

Mr. Prime Minister,

We are certain that the thoughts and feelings of the Government on this matter are in agreement with those of the rest of the Greek nation. We also trust that you have already taken the necessary steps and applied to the Occupation Authorities to rescind the grievous and futile measure to deport the members of the Jewish community of Greece.

We hope, indeed, that you have clarified to those in power that such harsh treatment of Jews of other nationalities in Greece makes the instituted measure even more unjustifiable and therefore morally unacceptable. If security reasons underlie it, we think it possible to suggest alternatives. Other measures can be taken, such as detaining the active male population (not including children and old people) in a specific place on Greek territory under the surveillance of the Occupation Authorities, thereby guaranteeing safety in face of any alleged danger and saving the Greek Jewish community from the impending deportation. Moreover, we would like to point out that, if asked, the rest of the Greek people will be willing to vouch for their brothers in need without hesitation.

We hope that the Occupation Authorities will realize in due time the futility of the persecution of Greek Jews, who are among the most peaceful and productive elements of the country.

If, however, they insist on this policy of deportation, we believe that the Government, as the bearer of whatever political authority is left in the country, should take a clear stance against these events and let the foreigners bear the full responsibility of committing this obvious injustice. Let no one forget that all actions done during these difficult times, even those actions that lie beyond our will and power, will be assessed some day by the nation and will be subjected to historical investigation. In that time of judgement, the responsibility of the leaders will weigh heavily upon the conscience of the nation if today the leaders fail to protest boldly in the name of the nation against such unjust measures as the deportation of the Greek Jews, which are an insult to our national unity and honor.

Respectfully,
Damaskinos
Archbishop of Athens and Greece

Following are the signatures of the heads of the major cultural institutions and organizations:

President of the Academy of Athens, Rector of the University of Athens, Rector of the Polytechnical School of Athens, Rector of the High School of Economic Studies, President of the Medical Association of Attica, President of the Roll of Barristers of Attica, President of the Union of Notaries of Athens and Aegean, President of the Journalists Union, President of the Association of Greek Authors, President of the Culture Association, President of the Piraeus Chamber of Commerce, President of the Athens Professional Chamber, President of the Greek Association of Chemists, President of the Athens Association of Pharmacists, President of the Dentists Association, President of the Athens Craftsman Chamber, President of the Piraeus Association of Pharmacists, President of the Greeks Actors, President of the Greek Association of Pharmacists, President of the Medical Association of Piraeus, President of the Athens Association of Commercants, President of the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vice-President of the Greek Union of Theatrical and Musical Critics, President of the Medical Association of Callithea, Secretary General of the Panhellenic Association of Dentists, President of the Greek Industrialists Union, General Director of the Refugees Organization, General Director of Social Health Organization.

Source: "Chronika," the newspaper of Greek Jewry, 1984.

Yad Vashem