

Clergy and Rabbis Sign Jerusalem Declaration and Bury the Cross

Sunhak Institute of History USA
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May 18, 2003, was a momentous day of the first Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) Holy Land Peace Pilgrimage. U.S. clergy awoke early and left their hotel in busses at 5:30 a.m. to go to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It was fortunate they left at this time because at 6:00 a.m. a suicide bomber set off a blast two blocks from the hotel, killing seven people and injuring 22. All traffic was stopped and had the clergy left any later, they would not have been able to pass. From there, they offered a 30-minute service at the site of Golgotha and then traveled a mile or so to the Potter's Field, also referred to as the Field of Blood, which, according to Matthew 27, the chief priests purchased with the 30 pieces of silver Judas got for betraying Jesus.

Pastors lifted a wooden cross, about six feet high, as they marched down a winding road to the Potter's Field. At the site, ministers placed the cross in a hole previously dug to its exact dimensions by Israeli FFWPU members. They placed a FFWPU flag, "dated and signed by representative leaders," on top. The ceremony concluded with participants putting "soil on the cross one-by-one, repenting for the false faith" that was "preventing Christianity and Judaism from achieving reconciliation." On that foundation, the 135 U.S. clergy met with a similar number of Israeli rabbis as well as ten imams for a day-long "Conference for Jewish and Christian Reconciliation and Harmony." The highlight of this was the Jerusalem Declaration in which the clergy and rabbis repented "for the dark parts of our past" and sought "a bright future together."

In reality, it was not easy to obtain the signatures. According to one report, "the main rabbi strongly rejected...signing his name." In addition, "Some rabbis were upset that the declaration would even be considered." However, in an unscripted moment, a key rabbi stated, "I will sign it if my Moslem brother will sign it with me." A leading sheik marched forward and "the three brothers collapsed into an embrace." One observer recounted, "This opened the floodgates and everyone rushed to the front to sign."