

Alexandru Ioniță/Stefan Tobler (eds.)

Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism

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Anti-Jewish sentiment in the Orthodox liturgy was and still is one of the main stumbling blocks for the Jewish–Orthodox Christian encounter. In the last five decades, this subject has often been mentioned during official dialogues between the two religious communities, but very few concrete steps have been made in academic or religious contexts on either side. This volume offers a selected anthology of contributions delivered at the conference “Byzantine Liturgy and the Jews”, held in Sibiu in 2019. The collection covers the post-Byzantine, modern and contemporary periods of the Orthodox liturgy, considering both liturgical texts and artifacts. The work explores the reverberations of the much-debated anti-Jewish elements into the twentieth century and their reception by present-day believers. This volume intends to foster a more in-depth discussion on this subject within the academic context and to offer a foundation for further debates involving the religious institutions.

Text

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Introduction

1. Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism—Opening a Discussion

The Orthodox Church mainly functions and lives through its Liturgy. During periods of intense political and regional turmoil, especially after the Middle Ages, the Liturgy and the Byzantine rite were the most important means of expression by which Orthodox Christianity survived. Therefore, it could be said that the way the Orthodox Church acts in society is largely determined by the way the Liturgy is presented and vice versa.

In the Catholic and Protestant churches, especially in Western Europe, an important reconsideration has taken place in the post- World War II period regarding the relationship with the Jewish faith. The liturgical and catechetical texts were examined to see if they could not give rise to anti-Semitic attitudes. Such a search for a possible and necessary revision of the liturgical texts did not take place in the Orthodox churches. Official and explicit documents about the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and the world in which it lives are a very recent initiative. The separation between the Orthodox Church and political power or civil society is also a recent and ongoing reality for Eastern Europe. Therefore, if we want to know the traditional attitude, formed over many centuries, of the Orthodox Church towards a subject such as Judaism, the liturgy with all its textual, artistic, performative expressions, it is an invaluable resource. This is why this volume directly addresses the Orthodox Liturgy. In addition, beyond the venerable Byzantine liturgical tradition, attempts at Jewish-Christian dialogue in recent decades have shown that it is precisely in this liturgical heritage that anti-Jewish elements hinder a honest discussion between Jews and Orthodox Christians today.¹

It is within the authority of the churches to conduct official interfaith and interconfessional dialogues. Only the churches can decide to what extent they want to face the discussion about their liturgical tradition. To do so in a reasoned

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1 Alexandru Ioniță, “Byzantine Liturgical Hymnography: a Stumbling Stone for the Jewish-Orthodox Christian Dialogue?,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 13 (2/2019), 253–267.

way, however, requires a foundation that can be provided by historical and theological research.

We are glad that we were able to contribute to such issues through the conference that produced these papers and through our entire research project.² We know that the anti-Jewish liturgical inheritance can be a delicate topic, but at the same time we are convinced that difficult discussions are necessary. The present volume is a reflection of such research and reflects quite different positions. We hope that the official representatives of the Orthodox Church as an institution, as well as representatives of today's Judaism, will perceive and receive the results of our project as a catalyst for further discussion.

2. An International Conference on “Byzantine Liturgy and the Jews”

This volume is the partial result of a research project that includes contributions originally written for the conference organized in Sibiu, Romania on July 9–11, 2019, entitled “The Byzantine Liturgy and the Jews”. Since then, the texts have gone through a long process of evaluation and improvement. The main conference brought together over forty qualified researchers, and we are thankful to all those who collaborated. They presented research papers while others from the local academic community participated in the discussion groups.

The conference was organized in different areas of interest. The main interest was the philological analysis of the liturgical texts and the historical context of anti-Jewish elements in Byzantine hymnography preserved from the medieval period. The Byzantine tradition was compared with other Oriental traditions such as the Syriac, Armenian or Georgian liturgy. It should be noted that some sections have treated historical liturgical texts strictly historically and philologically, while other groups of scholars have dealt with modern and current times, including new post-Byzantine and even contemporary liturgical creations. However, we could not avoid addressing more recent issues and reflecting on the questions needed today. The conference was attended by researchers from both the Jewish and Christian community, and the Christians came from several denominations. The conference led us to pursue two separate volumes: the present one covering the modern period and current issues related to the theme of anti-Judaism in

2 “Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Twentieth Century between Religious Tolerance and Anti-Semitism: Documents, Interpretations and Perspectives in the Christian Orthodox Context”, Code: PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016- 0699, funded by UEFISCDI, Romanian Government.

the Byzantine liturgy, and another volume to include the earlier period strictly related to hymnography and the historical context of the Byzantine liturgy on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.³

3. Conference Proceedings “Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism”

This volume offers a collection of contributions related to the modern and current period. We divided the titles in this volume into three groups: one dedicated to comparative studies on the relationship between Bible and Liturgy, one on trends observed in the post-Byzantine period, and one on very recent subjects and comparisons with other Christian traditions such as the Catholic Church. Before all these sections, the volume opens with a comparative exercise of “looking through the eyes of the other”, a joint contribution, written by a Jewish Rabbi and Scholar, Ruth Langer, and an Orthodox Priest and Scholar Demetrios Tonias.

Biblical Texts and the Liturgy. The first section contains contributions mostly from Orthodox authors, but with very different perspectives. Alexandru Mihăilă actually advocates for the preservation of the anti-Jewish polemic texts in the Liturgy. He distinguishes between four categories of texts: “(1) straightforward quotations of anti-Judaic material, excerpted mainly from the Gospel of John; (2) neutral biblical texts which receive an anti-Judaic twist in the liturgical hymns; (3) neutral biblical texts which are recontextualized as anti-Judaic; (4) biblical allusions embedded in an anti-Judaic context.” For the author, the presence of these texts in the Orthodox Liturgy is legitimate and “is not inherently problematic, as long as it remains at the ideological and literary level.” Moreover, for Mihăilă, these texts “play a significant part in shaping the identity of a community”. Looking at the same biblical texts and their liturgical usage, Sandrine Caneri reaches totally different conclusions. Caneri draws attention to the growing number of Orthodox Christians who live in Western Europe and the United States that are in direct contact with believers of the Jewish community. From this perspective, Caneri argues that the anti-Jewish liturgical texts “wound Christians’ consciousness and offend the faithful, then they are no longer ‘prayers’ and cannot continue to be kept in our prayer books.” She further states

3 See the second volume of the conference: Alexandru Ioniță & Harald Buchinger (eds), *Byzantine Liturgy and the Jews*, Studies in Eastern Christian Liturgies, Aschendorff Verlag, ISBN 978-3-402-21768-9 (forthcoming).

that these texts “can be seen as incitation to violence against Jews” and today is no longer necessary “to establish a Christian identity in opposition to Jewish identity” as in the Medieval time. This would not diminish the reverence to the patristic heritage usual among Christian Orthodox. Instead, she recommends reconsideration of this rich tradition. For Caneri, the anti-Jewish use of the biblical texts in the Byzantine Liturgy is “incongruent with the message of the Gospel”. Vadim Wittkovsky’s contribution, biblical-philological but also theological at the same time, invites us to reflect on the relationship between the “anti-Jewish” texts of the New Testament and their connections with the liturgical context. He demonstrates that some places in the New Testament—such as 1 Thess. 2:14, or John 8:44—received an anti-Jewish meaning especially in the period following the original writing. Wittkovsky concludes that the texts underwent a clear “anti-Jewish Wirkungsgeschichte” before reaching a “canonical edition” and for an eventual evaluation today we should grasp the Jewish-Christian inner conflict which conducted to such affirmations towards “the Jews”. Bogdan Bucur is looking at another dissonance between the patristic literature and the patristic scholarship, which today often overlooks the traditional “theophanic” understanding of Christian biblical exegesis. This “missing theophanies” in the modern scholarly account can have serious consequences, which “hampers our understanding of the theological intentions of some hymns and leaves us ill-prepared to carry out nuanced and informed liturgical reform”. If we could deepen today a proper understanding of the Christian Biblical exegesis that “would allow us to discern between the inalienable texts and the numerous but theologically dispensable anti-Jewish invectives.” The difficulty of the our topic and the positive potential residing in the Byzantine liturgy is underlined by Basilius Groen. On the one side, he states that it is a “glaring contrast” between the Roman Rite and the Byzantine Rite regarding the veneration of “Old Testament saints” and on the other side he is convinced that “the prominent place the Old Testament saints hold in the Byzantine tradition may also contribute towards a positive answer to the issue of reform of the anti-Jewish hymns.”

Post-Byzantine Tendencies. The second part of the volume exemplarily shows how the anti-Jewish polemic developed in the Eastern Christianity after the medieval period. Working on the post-byzantine literature, Charalampos Minaoglou shows how “the anti-Jewish writers of the period were motivated less by Orthodox theological motivations and more by economic motivations to displace the Jews as the preferred minority within the Ottoman Empire.” While the books created during the post-byzantine period were not very accessible to church

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congregants, another medium of dissemination still played a considerable role: the church paintings. Vapheides examined the reception of anti-Jewish animus in the late and post Byzantine painting manuals. He states that these influent writings “were not just a collection of technical and detailed advice on iconography, but mainly a corpus of theoretical knowledge necessary for artists’ theological and historical instruction.” The next two contributions are changing the field of study from the Greek speaking area to the Slavic geographical context. Agnieszka Gronek underlines the fact that starting with the 17th century, several Western influences are visible in the Eastern Church art. She accurately demonstrates how the post- byzantine church art incorporated some Western details and new representations containing a negative image of the Jews in provincial churches: “the presence of this topic in provincial, artistically weak environments proves its broad influence as well as its readability and comprehensibility.” With the contribution of Nadieszda Kizenko, we return to the written sources. She speaks about an extraordinary case of Christian anti-Jewish topos, mainly about the old medieval subject of child ritual murder conducted by Jewish believers. The history of the liturgical service dedicated to the “Martyr Gavriil of Białystok”, its emergence as a local phenomenon inside the “Uniate/ Orthodox/ Jewish tensions in the Polish- Lithuanian Commonwealth” and the “flowering of the cult of Gavriil” during the 19th century late imperial Russia, contributed massively to the “articulation of modern, antisemitic nationalism”. The problem raised by such modern liturgical hymnography is far from being discussed, while this service exists until today and it “gives antisemitism the legitimation of liturgy”.

20th Century and the Striving for Liturgical Renewal. The third part of the volume touches the last century and the contemporary situation. It is clear from all five contributions that continued discussion is needed on this topic. This is shown in the article written by Stefanos Alexopoulos, who underlines that in the Greek-American context the orthodox liturgical hymnography regarding the Jews already was revised by “translating or omitting” problematical texts. This concrete reality of the lived liturgical life of the Greek Orthodox Church in USA shows that even without an official approach to the delicate discussion the people, the priests and their parishes already showed sensitivity towards the anti-Jewish liturgical elements and acted accordingly. “As we await official changes from the church, we see liturgy evolving in real time as editors and translators of bilingual Greek-American Holy Week editions each choose their own methodology when translating the hymns into English.” His concrete observation and proposal would be that the editors and translators of the Byzantine hymnography may intervene by “softening phrases that can carry an anti-Jewish bias” and “omitting

such hymns, when possible, from current liturgical practice”. The need of such practical suggestions for the liturgical practice is supported by the next two contributions, which clarify some details of the historical background in the concrete context of the 20th century in Romania. Marian Pătru’s contribution “evaluates how sermons delivered by the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) contributed to anti-Semitic and nationalist discourse between the two World Wars”. If the inter-war period was marked by a generally negative attitude towards the Jews, and this is a well-known fact for the majority of Europe, we discover through Ionuț Biliuță’s contribution how the anti-Semitic animus survived after this period by being part of the new hymnographical creation dedicated to the “saints of the Communist Prisons in Post-Communist Romania”. His article shows how new religious and political phenomena in the last decades have received and instrumentalized medieval liturgical hymnography so that “ultra-nationalism and antisemitism were hidden in plain sight under the strata of Byzantine rhetoric, hagiographic details, and whitewashed biographical details.” Also, the next contribution deals with the reception of Byzantine hymnography, but not in modern liturgical creation. The contribution of Alina Pătru looks directly at the church attenders and their approach to the discussed liturgical topic. She considers the anti-Jewish hymnographical elements in their broader context of liturgical performance. For Pătru, the liturgical performance is, first of all, a form of communication and she is interested in what and how this message is transmitted and received. Her conclusion is that anti-Jewish hymns “can be used to increase the antisemitic attitude of believers if they are taken up in sermons or other forms of speech that involve an analytic focus, without a helpful interpretation guide”. Observing the fluid form and the local diversity of editions of liturgical hymnography—like the Lamentation on the Grave for instance—her plea is not for a simply exclusion like the Lamentations Service, for instance, states that “it is not enough to take the problematic texts out, because others can put them in again. We also need a more problematizing theological education, so that priests and church singers understand when to apply the principle of completeness and when not.”

This problematization and even a reform were already initiated in the Catholic context by the second Vatican Council in 1965 through the *Nostra aetate* declaration. That is why we considered very relevant for this discussion to include perspectives from the Catholic milieu. Peter Ebenbauer compares the Byzantine with the Latin anti-Jewish hymnography and proposes very clear solutions for approaching the difficult task of reconsidering the old liturgical text corpus. His proposal is not to simply exclude the anti-Jewish texts, because the entire group of *Impropria* texts is important for the theological and dramatic performance of

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the Byzantine liturgy. ~~But a fine distinction between blatant anti-Judaism and a soft anti-Jewish rhetoric should be done.~~ He means that the general damnation of the entire Jewish people—for example—should be reworked and those hymns should be modified, because the abundance of anti-Jewish animus at several key moments of the Byzantine liturgy could feed a violent Christian attitude. Of course, this is a process that needs not only a liturgical approach but an entire theological reconsideration. From the experience of the Catholic Church, we can learn how difficult the same process would be for the Eastern Orthodox Church. An early indicator for this direction is the Greek-Catholic Church, which is using the same Byzantine liturgical corpus, but is at the same time a part of the Catholic Church. The last contribution of Simona Zetea underlines “the necessity to receive the Second Vatican Council among an Oriental Catholic Church”. She is putting the light on the fact that the Greek-Catholic Church officially accepted the reforming *Nostra aetate* declaration but only at the theological level, while the liturgy remained unchanged until now. The reason invoked by many supporters of “liturgical immobilism” would be precisely the intimate connection of the “valuable heritage we have in common with the Orthodox Church and to avoid adding new burdens to the unity desideratum”. But she goes beyond this and proposes exactly the opposite: “since anti-Judaism is not an intrinsic constituent of Byzantine Christianity and tradition... a reflection on the place of anti-Jewish elements in the Byzantine tradition could become the subject of dialogue with the Orthodox brothers and the implementation of a liturgical reform—a place of collaboration”.

4. The Context: A Research Project on Jewish-Orthodox Christian Dialogue

Despite the title referring to “dialogue”, the reader of this volume and the persons interested in our research project⁴ would immediately recognize the fact that we never organized a dialogue session between members of the two faith communities. Rather, we have done research at the level of the premises of the interfaith dialogue. It is a very well-known fact that the dialogue between members of the Jewish community and Orthodox Christians started in the 70s of the last **Century**. During several meetings, the Jewish **position** underlined that the need of sincere dialogue supposes a change in the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Liturgy, especially those performed during the Lent and Easter period.

century

partners
participants

4 See more details on www.ddic.ecum.ro.

This request, although it was demanded earlier by Orthodox theologians and then supported by other Orthodox voices, could not be approached officially as a subject of discussion inside a national Orthodox Church or at an inter-orthodox council or gathering. During the 3-year research project, we came across many different attitudes regarding the topic of anti-Jewish liturgical texts. **One on side**, this was a challenging subject brought before the Orthodox churches, but **on the other side**, we could perceive the need to discuss such a delicate topic. For this discussion to take place it needs to be founded on scientific research—this is the driving reason behind our conference and proceedings volume. **On the one hand ... on the other hand**.

We are glad that we could open the discussion with qualified researchers and theologians, who accepted the challenge proposed by our project. The results of the broader research project are contained in other several publications which prepared the conference. For example, the research team previously published a special issue of the *Review of Ecumenical Studies* with contributions on the *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Orthodox Churches*.⁵ For the Romanian context, a special collection of contributions on the same topic was translated to spark the discussion inside the Romanian language milieu.⁶ The research project team also developed a rich selection of official documents containing the dialogue between Jews and Christians. The selected documents will be translated into Romanian and published in two separate volumes; the same texts will be freely available on the project's website. Since we are convinced that our work on Jewish-Christian Orthodox relations needs to continue, we developed a special page on the website that contains the relevant bibliography on the topic for those who want to build upon our work.⁷

5. Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those who were involved in this project. First, we would like to thank those who appreciated our conference and contributed to this volume, including those who could not be physically present at the conference like Prof. Stefanos Alexopoulos. Others encouraged our project and conference, although they were unable to attend, but helped to disseminate information

5 “Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Orthodox Churches” in *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (2/2019), online available: <https://sciendo.com/issue/RESS/11/2>.

6 See Alexandru Ioniță (ed.), *Imnografia liturgica bizantina. Perspective critice*, Studia Oecumenica 13, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2019, available also as open access e-book on the website of the publisher: <https://biblioteca.ubbcluj.ro/categorie-produs/ebooks/>.

7 See *Instrumenta* on <http://ddic.ecum.ro/en/bibliography/>.

about our project. We are especially grateful to the team at the Institute for Ecumenical Research at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. Special thanks are due to Antoaneta Sabău, who consistently contributed from the project's inception to completion. We would also like to thank Hannah Sophie Kehrein, a student at *Ökumene-Semester Hermannstadt*, and our colleague Dr. Florin-George Călian, who volunteered to organize the conference. At the same time, we want to warmly thank to all members of the staff of the *Orthodox Theological Faculty* in Sibiu and other cities who attended and contributed to the vivid discussions of our conference.

Alexandru Ioniță & Stefan Tobler