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CONTENTS

ESSAYS

BOOK REVIEWS

Nicholas DE LANGE, Elena NARINSKAYA, Sybil SHERIDAN (eds.), *Elonei Mamre: The Encounter of Judaism and Orthodox Christianity*, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, Lanham-Boulder-New York - London, 2023, i-xviii + 188 p., ISBN: 9781978713987

The literature devoted to encounters between Judaism and Christianity is almost impossible to inventory. But when it comes to encounters between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity, the truth is that very little has been written. The reasons for this discrepancy are numerous and difficult to list here. In this context, the appearance of the volume on *Encounter between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity* edited by Nicholas de Lange, Elena Narinskaya and Sybil Sheridan is most welcome. Anyone interested in the relationship between Judaism and Christianity will be interested in this volume, and those particularly interested in the relationship between Judaism and *Orthodox* Christianity will use this volume as a valuable tool.

The importance of the volume is evident from the simple fact that it mirrors the work of more than two decades of an informal dialogue. We learn from the *Introduction* provided by Rabbi Nicholas de Lange that "this book grew out of the work of a group of Jewish and Orthodox Christian theologians which has been meeting regularly over many years for the purpose of encounter and dialogue." (p. x) The mere fact that this dialogue exists, and that it began as early as 1997, is very good news for all those interested in the subject; Especially since before this period and the Second World War "genuine dialogue – in which both sides listen – was rare or nonexistent." The contributions in this volume are papers given by members of this dialogue group over a long period of time, which is why on the one side some authors are present with two (Elena Narinskaya) or even three articles (Fr. Andrew Louth). On the other side, some other members of the group, Christian and Jewish alike, passed to the Lord (e.g., Archpriest Sergei Hackel, Bishop Kallistos Ware).

As a collection of papers collected over many years of meetings and discussions, the volume addresses from both Christian and Jewish perspective a variety of topics extremely relevant to the Jewish-Christian dialogue, including mysticism based on Jewish scriptures, monotheism, the concept of love, the issue of religious identity as a reaction to the "other", the veneration of icons and other objects of worship, the concept of tradition, elements of common worship, the theme of "blood libel" and, as expected, the theme of anti-Judaism present in the Orthodox liturgy. The interest of the group, and which is implicit from this volume's papers, is "to explore, through a plurality of voices, both the glue and the barriers." (p. x)

Here I must point out that the academic world, especially in the case of the dialogue between Judaism and Orthodox Christianity, rarely has access to such volumes which simultaneously deal with the above themes from both a Christian

and a Jewish perspective. Personally, I am most interested in the topic of anti-Judaism of Orthodox *liturgical* texts, and I am pleased to find in this volume three contributions relevant to the important discussion surrounding this theme. That is why I would like to devote some more space here to these contributions, because of the urgency and necessity of continuing this debate, but also because the volume proposes themes of a depth and variety that are difficult to summarize and appreciate in a short review. Another important reason why I want to read and discuss here the references related to Orthodox liturgical anti-Judaism is the fact that in Sibiu in 2019, together with colleagues from the *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu*, I organized a conference on a topic very close to the theme of the volume, entitled "Byzantine Liturgy and the Jews"[1]. The conference is part of a larger research project[2] dedicated to the theme of Jewish-Christian dialogue and we discussed it then in very similar terms, confirming the need for ongoing discussion and the complementarity of efforts.

At the lively discussions in Sibiu, some Orthodox Christian colleagues argued for the need to preserve anti-Jewish elements in Byzantine or Orthodox liturgy because they play a vital role in defining and delimiting the *identity* of the community that uses them. They would not instigate hatred and violence, but since they are performed within churches, addressed to Christian communities, their purpose is actually to strengthen Christian identity, and dropping these elements would cause greater problems. The volumes[3] that follow that conference do not discuss or give an explicit answer to this identity issue, but Elena Narinskaya's paper in *Elonei Mamre* addresses this issue directly, which is why I would start my review ("The Journey to Oneself: Anti-Judaism in the Search for Christian Identity" pp. 65-75). Narinskaya is a specialist in St. Ephrem the Syrian's writings, a patristic author as influential in the Eastern tradition as he is controversial in some works regarding Judaism. After a thorough analysis reflected in a doctoral thesis and several studies, Narinskaya manages to distinguish exemplarily between the historical and the actual context, between the author's intentions and secondary literature often determined by preconceptions and other politico-religious factors.

[1] See details on the mentioned conference here: https://ddic.ecum.ro/the-byzantine-liturgy-and-the-jews-conference-program-9-11-july-2019/.

[2] "Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Twentieth Century between Religious Tolerance and Anti-Semitism: Documents, Interpretations and Perspectives in the Christian Orthodox Context" Research project PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0699, funded by UEFISCDI, Romanian Government. Details on http://ddic.ecum.ro/en/.

[3] See Alexandru IONIȚĂ & Harald BUCHINGER, *Byzantine Liturgy and the Jews*, Studies in Eastern Christian Liturgies, Aschendorff Verlag, 2023, ISBN: 978-3-402-21768-9, forthcoming, and Alexandru IONIȚĂ & Stefan TOBLER (eds.), *Orthodox Liturgy and Anti-Judaism*, Edition Israelogie, Peter Lang, 2023, ISBN 978-3-631-81169-6, forthcoming.

Her conclusion and suggestion for Orthodox Christianity, of which she is also a member, is couched in very trenchant terms:

> Orthodox Christianity perhaps always was and still is the closest to Judaism in its biblical, theological and liturgical expressions. This closeness in the early days perhaps determined the appearance of anti-Jewish tendencies. However, there is no explanation or justification for the church keeping its anti-Jewish remarks in the liturgical cycle without revision until today. There is no reason for the church withholding its continuous repentance and apologies for the Holocaust, for the painful history which took place within the Christian era and in Christian Europe. The fact that anti-Jewish elements in the liturgy and antisemitism in popular expressions remain permissible is a clear sign of stagnation. Rejection of the previously existing religion is regrettably understandable at the early stages of religious development. However, when the rejection and nonappreciation of the previous religion continue through the centuries, then it is a worrying sign which needs immediate attention and work. (pp. 74-75)

I very much agree that the topic requires "immediate attention and work" and I would like such discussions to take place, but thinking about the debate at the aforementioned conference in Sibiu and especially the waves of criticism that followed, I realize how few Orthodox Christians, but also Orthodox theologians (not to mention clergy and hierarchy), are willing to discuss such topics. The distinguished group of Orthodox theologians in the UK, of which the author of this paper is a member (Bishop Kallistos Ware, Bishop Basil of Sergievo, Fr. Andrew Louth, Fr. Sergei Hackel, Fr. Yves Dubois and others), find free-flowing discussions in the presence of rabbis and lectures on the same topic from both perspectives are regrettably still impossible in Eastern Europe. Oddly enough, Orthodox authors mentioned here are nevertheless known and publicized in Orthodox Christian circles in Romania, for example, where they have attended conferences and other church and academic events. While many of their publications have been translated into Eastern European languages and are used widely during theological studies, their concern with anti-Judaism or their interest in the relationship with Judaism is not yet reflected in translations or other Romanian publications. If a theologian like Fr. Andrew Louth spoke clearly against anti-Jewish hymnography in a volume that appeared in Romania more than a decade ago, that text remained untranslated, accessible only to the academic world.

Narinskaya catalogues this situation as "a clear sign of stagnation. Rejection of the previously existing religion is regrettably understandable at the early stages of religious development." While such words certainly cause animosity within Eastern Orthodoxy, she proposes a model attitude towards Judaism that can be very useful in these debates about identity:

> The complexity of religious development could be compared to a child's development. Young children are totally dependent on their parents, while in their teenage years

> they go through the process of adolescent rebellion as a necessary phase of their search for self-identity and as part of their process of building character. As an unfortunate and extreme side effect of this process children may even reject their parents or distance themselves from them. As children develop further, and as a sign of maturity, they grow into appreciating their parents, learn to make amends and show gratitude. Further along children might even start caring for their parents and switch the roles by adopting parenting roles themselves, not only to their growing children, but also to their aging parents. (p. 65)

Narinskaya also considers it a sign of spiritual and theological maturity that the Holy Fathers, much invoked in the sermons of Orthodox priests, can make mistakes: "in considering a sanctified person as a whole one has to bear in mind that there were instances in their lives when they made mistakes. […] There is a danger in misunderstanding the fathers, which could be seen in singling out anti-Jewish remarks." (p. 67-68)

If I mentioned already several times Fr. Andrew Louth's name in this short review, I would now like to turn my attention to his text, one of the three accessible papers in this volume, entitled "The Christian Church as the New Israel" (pp. 55-63). He does not specifically target liturgical hymnody and the topic of Orthodox liturgical anti-Judaism, but all that he offers in his more biblical and patristic paper is very relevant to the discussion focused on liturgical texts, since liturgical texts have their origin and inspiration in biblical and patristic writings. He begins by pointing out that "it is well known that in the New Testament there is no idea as such of the 'new Israel,' applied to the Church, but the same is true, so far as I can see, for the patristic period." (p. 55) Using Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* and his own skill in patristic literature, A. Louth concludes that the patristic period "records nothing," but rather "what we do find in the Fathers are claims that the Christian Church is Israel, as such, or the true Israel, *ho alethinos Israel*..." (p. 55)

Although A. Louth's analysis is pertinent and the examples in the patristic literature instructive, it is not very useful for those interested in anti-Jewish hymnography if we stop the analysis at the 8th century, looking only at the famous and much invoked 'patristic period'. The problem is that the broad masses of Orthodox believers have not read and do not read these patristic works, but instead they hear in churches the hymnographic texts, which were written largely after the 8th century. I would venture to say that after this period, and especially in the patristic-liturgical texts, what A. Louth says regarding the *new Israel* is no longer valid. For at key moments on the eve of the great feasts of the Church, we hear homilies and hymns such as the following one, in which not only is the Church explicitly called new Israel, but it is also clearly added that the Church of the *Gentiles* is new Israel: "Let us also come today, all the new Israel, the *Church of*

the Gentiles, and let us cry with the prophet Zechariah: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion..."[4] The closer we get to Palm Sunday, the more obvious the tension between the *pananomoi judaioi* and *we*, the Christian community. The hymnography around the Feast of Lazarus also reveals who these *we* really are. Andrew of Crete says that salvation is reserved for "...the Church, that He has redeemed from among the *nations*."[5] The church is therefore clearly called "new Israel" and "new Zion" in the later patristic literature.[6] Particularly this new Israel from among the *Gentiles* is the *beloved Israel*[7] and only for this Israel "He has found out every righteous way and given it to Israel His beloved."[8] The new and beloved Israel from the Gentiles is now married by God, while the Synagogue of the Jews is repudiated, rejected and condemned: "...O unbelieving and adulterous generation of the Jews, draw near and look on Him whom Isaiah saw: He is come for our sakes in the flesh. See how He weds the New Zion, for she is chaste, and rejects the Synagogue that is condemned..."[9]

With these examples taken from *liturgical* texts, I do not wish and cannot contradict A. Louth in his argument regarding *patristic* texts. But I would like to point out that these liturgical texts are much better known to the faithful than the patristic texts mentioned by A. Louth. The author's proposed analysis of the patristic texts can only explain *why* in the first eight centuries of patristic writings, there are no explicit mentions of the new Israel as the Church, but the issue of the liturgical texts, which are really a great stumbling block in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, remains open[10]. In fact, liturgical hymns are also part of the patristic legacy, especially since some Fathers wrote homilies, biblical commentaries or dogmatic treatises, as well hymnography, as in the case of St. John Damascene, quoted by A. Louth in his article.

The other two contributions by A. Louth, "The Unity of God: Christians and the Trinity" (pp. 23-32) and "Love: An Orthodox Perspective" (pp. 45-54) are of exceptional richness, and their relevance increases when one reads the articles written on the same topics from a Jewish perspective (see Norman Solomon, "Law and Love in Judaism", pp. 33-44). In fact, almost all of the topics discussed in the volume are analyzed from both the Christian Orthodox and Jewish perspectives. As an Eastern Orthodox theologian, I can say briefly here that the Orthodox reader

4 3rd Stichiron, Vesper of Palm Sunday.

5 Andrew of Crete, 7th Troparion of the 3rd Ode, Compline on Lazarus' Saturday.

6 1st Apostichon, Vesper Palm Sunday.

7 4th Apostichon, Vesper Palm Sunday. And Cosma, 3rd Troparion of the 9th Ode, Orthros of Palm Sunday.

8 Cosma, 3rd Troparion of the 9th Ode, Orthros of Palm Sunday.

9 3rd Stichiron of Laudes, Palm Sunday.

10 Alexandru IONIȚĂ, "Byzantine Liturgical Hymnography: a Stumbling Stone for the Jewish-Orthodox Christian Dialogue?", *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (2/2019), 253–267.

will certainly be disturbed by the discrepancy between what he or she may have learned in theological seminary or during the theological training about Judaism, and what the Rabbis themselves articulate here about their own tradition. A good example for this situation is the issue of icons or images in Christian and Jewish worship. About this E. Narinskaya comes to the conclusion that: "...there is no contradiction between the Old Testament prohibition, the contemporary Protestant arguments about worshiping one God, and the Orthodox Christian expression through icon veneration." (p. 86) On the same theme we learn from Daniel H. Weiss regarding the Jewish perspective that:

> upon closer inspection it turns out that the texts of classical rabbinic Judaism contain a strongly 'iconic' understanding of the human being's relation to God, which parallels many of the theological dynamics put forth by Orthodox writers in their arguments against iconoclasts. Exploration of this rabbinic theological understanding can contribute to new paths of Jewish-Orthodox dialogue in the present. Likewise, engagement with Orthodox theologies of icons can help Jews today to reengage with classical rabbinic traditions that have sometimes been overshadowed by later anti-iconic streams of medieval Jewish thought. (p. 89)

How the authors came to such conclusions can be ruminated in their historically well-argued texts. As one of the volume's editors rightly says, "historical research can serve as an antidote to theological generalization." (p. xvi) This is what is very much needed not only in the Jewish-Christian dialogue, but in all Orthodox theology, because without historical research on biblical, patristic and liturgical texts, we easily fall into generalizations and prejudices. I stop at this point, inviting those interested in Jewish-Christian dialogue to benefit fully from this volume; I also share more great news announced by this volume's editors: a "companion volume" is to be published very soon this year, under the title *Tois Pasin ho Kairos: Judaism and Orthodox Christianity Facing the Future*, which continues "to lay foundations for continuing dialogue" (p. xvii).

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