

Christian M. Rutishauser, Barbara Schmitz, Jan Woppowa (eds.),
Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog. Ein Studienhandbuch für Lehre und Praxis,
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For anyone interested in the multifaceted relationship between Judaism and Christianity the “Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog. Ein Studienhandbuch für Lehre und Praxis” stands out as an indispensable guide. This comprehensive handbook moves beyond a mere historical recounting of the dialogue between these two faith traditions, instead actively engaging readers in an ongoing, evolving conversation. It is crafted for a broad audience – students, educators, clergy, and practitioners – all seeking to deepen their understanding and effectively apply the principles of respectful dialogue in educational, religious, and community settings.

The effort of theologians from the German-speaking world to reshape theology regarding Christianity’s relationship with Judaism is truly admirable. In the volume edited by Rutishauser, Schmitz, and Woppowa, we find a collection of fourteen highly substantial and relevant contributions intended to serve as a tool for those tasked with preaching, teaching, giving religious instruction, or applying Catholic Christian doctrine in any practical way. This study handbook, published by the prestigious Mohr Siebeck publishing house in Tübingen, presents itself in a very attractive and indeed handy form at just 248 pages, yet the content is extremely dense, arranged in two columns of no more and no less than fifty lines each – without footnotes – making it readable, in truth, only by the youngest students with perfectly healthy eyesight. Holding this manual, you get the impression of holding a fascicle from the great encyclopedias, such as RGG or TRE. And this impression is not only due to the aesthetic aspect of the volume but also its content. The carefully selected authors contributing to this handbook make considerable efforts to provide readers with access to the most relevant literature – cited at the end of each contribution – and to the most up-to-date stage of discussion.

The first part of the volume offers “fundamental perspectives” on Jewish-Christian dialogue (pp. 7–106). Three contributions address the state of discussions on the dialogue from Catholic (C. Rutishauser), Evangelical (B. Schroeder), and Jewish (S. Talabardon) perspectives. It is remarkable to include the Evangelical perspective in a “Catholic project,”

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but even more valuable is the inclusion of the Jewish perspective, which synthesises decades of efforts and responses from Judaism regarding the dialogue. What is regrettable, however, is the absence of the Orthodox perspective from this collection of contributions. I mention this especially as I am encouraged by another recent publication, among the French-speaking world – also predominantly Catholic – of a similar volume¹, which does not hesitate to include the contribution of an Orthodox theologian² on Jewish-Christian dialogue. But this limitation is acknowledged by the editors in the introduction to the volume (p. 2), and they recognize that “the ecumenical expansion” represents a goal for future projects.

What I can say here as an Orthodox theologian is not a criticism of the project itself for what has not yet been accomplished, but rather appreciation for what has been achieved with this volume. Since there are indeed very few Orthodox theologians concerned with this topic of Jewish-Christian dialogue, and given the official agendas of Orthodox church forums worldwide, we can say without undue pessimism that such concerns will not be found any time soon. The Orthodox theologian, who is only slightly familiar with Roman Catholic church structures, but especially with the related institutions, special commissions, and bodies created to address topics such as dialogue with today’s representatives of Judaism, can only admire the exemplary mobilization and concrete results of the discussions initiated especially by the renowned document *Nostra aetate* from the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

The following three contributions in the first part of the volume offer welcome insights into decisive topics for approaching Jewish-Christian dialogue: the terminology and necessary distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism (C. Spăti), the role of the papacy in the Roman Catholic Church’s relationship with Jews over time (T. Brechenmacher), and the delicate subject of Zionism and the State of Israel – a topic from which Christians cannot irresponsibly distance themselves (T. Avraham).

The second part of the volume provides meticulous explorations across eight chapters of Christian theology regarding Israel. Each author demonstrates, in the most competent manner, the extent to which their field is impacted by the profound changes of a “theology after Auschwitz.” This includes Old Testament exegesis (B. Schmitz, p. 107ff), New Testament

¹ Thérèse Andrevon, Beate Bengard, Luc Forestier, William Krisel, Anne Marie Reijnen, and Olivier Rota, eds., *Manuel de théologie d’Israël: l’alliance jamais révoquée* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2025), 426.

² Geoffrey Ready, “Christianisme Orthodoxe et Israël: Renouveler un héritage commun,” in *Manuel de théologie*, 217–36.

exegesis (Th. Schumacher, p. 124ff), church history (J. Heil, p. 140ff), systematic theology (G. M. Hof, p. 155ff), liturgy (A. Gerhards and S. Wahle, p. 169ff), spirituality (C. Rutishauser, p. 187ff), homiletics (H.-G. Schöttler, p. 205ff), and Christian pedagogy (J. Woppowa, p. 221ff). The editors acknowledge that this set could have been completed, for example, with canon law or other fields (p. 2), but for now these could be covered, and it remains the task of future projects to complete the current truly remarkable project.

It is impossible in a simple review to assess all the contributions, not only because they are numerous and highly substantial, but also because they cover very different fields. The great merit of this volume lies precisely in its ability to bring together all these contributions and all the authors, each a specialist in their own domain, providing a very useful tool. For this reason, I will focus first on the chapter dedicated to liturgy, as I am personally very interested in this area, and also because, in fact, liturgy is the most concrete and direct expression of Christian teachings. Major changes were first made in the field of liturgy within the Roman Catholic Church, and later the impact of these changes on other theological domains, such as systematic theology or ethics, was intensely discussed and recognized. As an Orthodox theologian, I am particularly interested in this contribution of the volume, also because the Judeo-Christian-Orthodox dialogue has remained somewhat stalled in discussions concerning the liturgical reform necessary to develop this dialogue. Already in the 1970s, from the first official sessions of dialogue between Orthodox theologians and representatives of contemporary Judaism, the issue of liturgical anti-Judaism in Orthodoxy proved to be a real stumbling block. To this day, the situation has remained unchanged at the church level, although some voices of Orthodox theologians have highlighted the need to discuss these topics and have offered concrete solutions for liturgical renewal.

In addition to the more theoretical part related to the concrete implications of the principles of *Nostra aetate* in the liturgical context, the contribution by A. Gerhards and S. Wahle is especially admirable for the highly practical and concrete level reached with their set of suggestions. If for decades there has already been discussion about the prayers, litanies, and reproaches from Holy Week in the Roman rite, here our authors make concrete suggestions regarding the calendar of the Roman Catholic Church (p. 180) and the hymnbooks used by all laypeople in a Catholic church ("Gesangbuch Gotteslob," p. 181). They point out that, despite major and officially implemented changes in the Roman Catholic Church

regarding its relationship and Christian theology concerning Israel, the concrete devotion of practicing Christians is greatly influenced by the veneration of saints and the hymnbook that each person holds during services. The authors “point the finger” even at popes of the Catholic Church who are saints in their calendar but who were regrettable actors in anti-Semitic actions in the 19th century, for example. Additionally, the authors of this contribution clearly cite and analyze stanzas and verses from liturgical hymns that are unacceptable today (p. 181). As an Orthodox theologian, I find the authors’ call for the renewal of the celebration of the Circumcision of Jesus, on January 1, very relevant. Their advocacy for rediscovering this liturgical feast (p. 185) and the concrete example implemented at the Monastery of Bose, Italy, are certainly applicable to the Eastern Orthodox setting, which is in exactly the same situation.

A major strength of this volume is the inclusion of a chapter on the “current challenges” facing each theological field. All the contributions in this handbook do not end with a summary, but rather with the challenges that the relationship with Judaism brings to every aspect of Christian life and theology. In the case of the liturgy, the authors state that the great challenge for Christian liturgy is: “to formulate the Christological claim in such a way that it does not block the Jewish path.” (p. 185) Could something like this even be uttered in the Orthodox context? Indeed, this statement poses a challenge not only for the liturgical field, but for the entirety of Christian life. In the Orthodox liturgical context, it seems almost unimaginable to have a Christology detached from anti-Judaism. Apparently, the anti-Judaic layer in Orthodox liturgy and theology appears to be an indispensable vehicle for affirming Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology. But by learning from the Catholic brothers’ handbook and other similar projects, we notice that this theologically toxic marriage is in fact a later development that arose in a context of conflict and identity crisis.

C. Rutishauser’s contribution on Christian spirituality and the importance of becoming familiar with Jewish spirituality rightly draws attention to the overwhelming presence of Oriental spiritualities among Christians, while the Jewish tradition remains largely unknown (p. 203). Equally relevant for Orthodox Christians is G. M. Hoff’s contribution, which highlights the theology of the Incarnation (“Inkarnationstheologie”) that is consistently separated from all its Jewish content and Judaism, even though Jesus himself and the first Christians were born and lived as Jews faithful to their religious tradition (p. 164). Furthermore, Th. Schumacher speaks in the clearest terms about how much the Christian interpretation

of certain New Testament texts regarding Israel and Judaism has been distorted, underscoring the enormous need for Christians – especially Orthodox Christians, I would say – to know and reflect on the texts of St. Paul himself in Romans 9–11 (p. 136ff).

We can say that the volume “Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog. Ein Studienhandbuch für Lehre und Praxis” is a significant and timely addition to the field of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Serving as both a practical toolkit and a model for constructive engagement, the handbook is highly recommended for seminaries, universities, and faith communities. This project can be characterized by both academic rigor and accessibility: the contributors are recognized experts who write with both authority and clarity. Their analysis of historical and contemporary relations is presented in an inviting and accessible manner. At the same time, the volume aims for high practical relevance: the handbook is designed for active engagement that bridge theory and practice. These can only be an example to be followed by other Christian denominations, but especially by the Orthodox Church and theologians.