

Thérèse M. Andrevon, Beate Bengard, Luc Forestier, William Krisel, Anne Marie Reijnen, Olivier Rota (eds.), *Manuel de théologie d'Israël: l'alliance jamais révoquée*, Genève: Labor et Fides 2025, 426 p., ISBN 9782830918625

Alexandru Ioniță*

This “Manuel de théologie d'Israël” (hereinafter referred to as the *Manuel*) can be described as the current culmination of the ecumenical effort to approach Christian theology “facing Israel.” It is a culminating point for at least three reasons. First, the volume truly brings together a team of twenty Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox theologians, among whom are also Jewish theologians who respond to what Christians have written. The second reason this volume surpasses previously known standards is that each chapter is written by several authors, offering different perspectives – something not at all easy to achieve. The third reason is the content of the volume itself: the chosen themes, the academically competent approach, and, at the same time, the project’s realisation as a handbook that targets not only academic discourse but also ecclesial, pastoral, and educational conversation. Last year, another manual (*Studienhandbuch*).¹ A dedicated Judeo-Christian dialogue appeared in the German-speaking area, but that is rather a Catholic project, with a somewhat weaker ecumenical openness. In contrast to the *Studienhandbuch*, this very recent French *Manuel* is the result of a longer ecumenical collaboration. Behind this *Manuel* lies a veritable *laboratoire* of Judeo-Christian dialogue, in which, for years, Christian theologians from the three confessions, as well as Jewish theologians, have been involved. Only in this way was it possible for a chapter dedicated to a particular theme to be treated by several authors in parallel, each from their own perspective.

The most important detail from my perspective, which is immediately noticeable when comparing the two manuals, is that in the *Manuel*, Orthodox theologians are not only present but also have a significant say and do so with the highest competence. Their participation in this volume is neither spontaneous nor surprising. In France, Sandrine Caneri acts for longer than a decade as the president of the association “Orthodox

* Dr. Alexandru Ioniță, Research Center for Cultural Heritage and Socio-Cultural History, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, alexandru.ionita@ulbsibiu.ro.

¹ Christian M. Rutishauser, Barbara Schmitz, Jan Woppowa (eds), *Jüdisch-christlicher Dialog. Ein Studienhandbuch für Lehre und Praxis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2024), 248.

Christians in Dialogue with Jews” (CODJ),² while Geoffrey Ready leads, in the North American context, the dialogue group “Orthodox Christians in Dialogue with Jews” (OCDJ)³. Both authors, as well as the editors who included their contributions, should be congratulated for both the ecumenical openness and the content they provided.

The participation of Orthodox authors in this volume is encouraging, given that publications by Orthodox voices on Judeo-Christian dialogue have been scarce until now. Moreover, the Judeo-Christian-Orthodox dialogue itself, although initiated at least five decades ago, has stalled due to significant discrepancies between academic and ecclesial discourse, between what is discussed in dialogue sessions and what actually happens at home in Orthodox Christian communities and within the Eastern Orthodox liturgical framework. Jewish interlocutors have even explicitly named the regrettable reason for the lack of interest in dialogue: liturgical and patristic anti-Judaism in Orthodoxy. The two Orthodox authors address precisely these extremely sensitive strings of dialogue and do so as well as possible, being both deeply involved academic theologians and practical church people, engaged in the liturgical and pastoral ministry of the Orthodox Church.

Fr. Geoffrey Ready admits that a theology facing Israel requires, from an Orthodox perspective, “a sincere reflection and a theological renewal” (p. 218). This means a *critical* approach to the patristic literary heritage, which is so rich and diverse, enabling us to distinguish what is truly essential from what is contextual. The author proposes a distinction, even at the level of typology, in the method of interpreting Holy Scripture so beloved by the Church Fathers, between “good and bad” typology. Bad typology is that which continually sought to dispossess the Hebrew Scripture of its direct meanings, without reference to Christian or Christological realities. He proposes an approach to the Church Fathers similar to that used in the Rabbinic Talmud. Although this may frighten some Orthodox readers today, I consider his proposal both acceptable and useful. Instead of sanctifying every person from the “golden age” of Christianity and every patristic voice or writing, the author proposes that we look at the Church Fathers as Jews do at Rabbis, accepting their limitations and sometimes even their mistakes, which we should be able to observe and distinguish from the generally valid content. He suggests that we must avoid both

² “Chrétiens orthodoxes en Dialogue avec les Juifs”, <https://codj.fr>, accessed on 20.06.2025.

³ “Orthodox Christians in Dialogue with Jews. A Project of the Orthodox Theological Society in America” <https://ocdj.net>, accessed on 20.06.2025.

patrophilia and *patophobia* (p. 235), and that this “would not mean a denial of tradition, but a sign of respect” (p. 234). His proposal as an Orthodox author is all the more welcome as it was very recently similarly suggested by a contemporary Jewish author, a specialist in biblical studies, named Amy-Jill Levine.⁴ I take this reaction from Fr. G. Ready as a first echo of the suggestion made by a Jewish author and as a real, honest, and concrete dialogue between the two and the theological traditions they represent.

Equally relevant is the contribution of the same author on the subject of the State of Israel. He acknowledges that there is still no Orthodox theological reflection on this extremely delicate subject, especially in these regrettable years (p. 131), marked by conflict and bloodshed on both sides. Still, he offers us an insight into a little-known official document of the Orthodox Church of Crete regarding relations with the State of Israel and Judaism in general. We learn that already in 2011, the Orthodox Church of Crete officially rejected the long-standing label of “deicide” attributed to the Jewish people and affirmed the need for inter-religious dialogue based on mutual respect (p. 128). The document rejects the traditional anti-Judaic accusations so familiar in the Orthodox liturgical and patristic context, to the point that G. Ready claims it could almost be compared to the *Nostra Aetate* document from the Catholic context. The significant disadvantage, however, I would add, is that such an Orthodox document has remained almost unknown even after more than a decade. Moreover, its authority is greatly undermined by today’s inter-Orthodox difficulties and by the traditional lack of communication and even rivalry among the various autocephalous Orthodox churches.

Another very relevant chapter of this *Manuel* is the one on concrete ecclesial life in relation to Judaism. Here, several authors contribute, of whom, for me, the most important is Sandrine Caneri, probably the most active member of an Orthodox Church in dialogue not only academically but also practically with Jews. She draws our attention to the fact that supersessionism is “only a theory,” “not a theology of the replacement” of Israel by the Church. Despite the fact that it is a theory almost two millennia old, the “replacement theory” it is a debatable theory and can be challenged when we no longer view the Church as a museum or archive preserving the works of tradition (p. 359). S. Caneri further offers a very valuable collection of opinions of Russian authors regarding Judaism,

⁴ Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler. “Antisemitism in Biblical Interpretation: Causes, Examples, Suggestions,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 79, no. 3 (2025): 233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643251328262>.

the result of work that was by no means easy, but which constitutes a highly relevant result in the hands of all Orthodox theologians interested in the Judeo-Christian dialogue. She examines the works of V. Soloviev, S. Bulgakov, A. Schmemmann, as well as those of Olivier Clément and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, to offer the reader engaged in the Judeo-Christian dialogue a solid, yet underappreciated, theological foundation (p. 360-3).

Among the multitude of contributions in this substantial volume, I would like to mention the importance of the tenth chapter on the Apostle Paul and Judaism, written by Jean-Noël Aletti. Once again, after his many highly pertinent publications on this subject, the author here emphasises the importance of the text from Romans 9-11 for the entire Christian theology regarding Israel and the need for a re-reading and proper interpretation of these inestimable Pauline texts (p. 303).

Because we are in the jubilee year dedicated to the Council of Nicaea, I would also like to underline the admirable plea signed by Chr. Rutishauser “pour une théologie chrétienne face à Israël.” Here, the author suggests, for example, the need to “enrich” the Christological discourse with a greater dose of “messianic theology” or “messianology” (p. 43). By this, the author suggests that speculative, transcendental Christian Christology should be doubled by a theology of history, one that no longer ignores the messianity of Jesus. “Christ as the incarnation of the Torah,” or as the “personification of Israel”, are still insufficiently addressed theological debate topics in the Christian world.

We can say without hesitation that this *Manuel* stands as a highly relevant instrument. The fact that it goes beyond the *Studienhandbuch* through more intensive ecumenical collaboration among authors and the involvement of two Orthodox authors among the twenty signatories of the volume represents an essential step. But beyond these technical details, we can say that now the Orthodox vision of the Judeo-Christian dialogue begins to take shape through concrete, courageous, and valuable voices and attitudes, for which we are very grateful both to the authors and to the editors of this volume, which remains an indispensable source for any theologian interested in the Judeo-Christian dialogue.