Forsaken or Not? Patristic Argumentation on the Forsakenness of Jews Revisited

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After the Shoah, the Catholic-Jewish dialogue has reached considerable intellectual depth, existential honesty, theological advancement and thematic width. The Orthodox Church, however, has hardly started its process of reconciliation. At the heart of the problem is the patristic argumentation on the forsakenness of the Jews, which in the Early Church was organically connected with the truth of Christianity. The patristic authors, however, were largely ignorant of the theological developments of Rabbinic Judaism and thus based their reasoning on mistaken presuppositions. In our times, this is especially clear with the patristic argument that it is perpetually impossible for the Jews to return to rule their Holy Land and Jerusalem.

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The dialogue of Catholics and Jews has produced some amazing results in last decades, ever since the pioneering document *Nostra Aetate* (1965).¹ In particular, the recent document, “Orthodox Rabbinic statement on Christianity” (ORSC)² is not only ground-breaking but even radical in some of its formulations. Not surprisingly, it has not been accepted by all rabbinic authorities (very few statements are), but eighty Orthodox rabbis have indeed signed it, and obviously it has much more support among the more liberal sectors of Judaism.

In this paper, I focus on the patristic argumentation related to the most challenging and most difficult aspect of the statement, which basically is about recognition of the positive spiritual status of the other religion. I discuss this complex problem by focusing on the question of forsakenness of Jews and Judaism in the light of patristic evidence, aiming to outline the

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¹ *Nostra aetate*, in www.vatican.va/archive/hist.../ii.../vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, viewed on February 8, 2019. For Orthodox reflections on *Nostra aetate*, see: Alexandru Ioniță, “The Increasing Social Relevance of the Catholic Liturgical and Theological Reform Regarding Judaism (Nostra aetate 4): An Orthodox Point of View”, in: *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (2/2017), p. 258-269.

² “Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity” (Decembre 3, 2015) in: <http://cjcuc.org/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity/>, viewed on January 1, 2019.

problem and even some approximate solutions from the Orthodox point of view. First, however, it is necessary to present a short introductory overview on the ORSC and a few observations on its key points in relation to the Orthodox standpoint.

Background: from *Shoah* to recognition of the other

The two millennia of mutual hostility and alienation of Christians and Jews reached its ultimate climax in the horrendous *Shoah* (holocaust) of Jewish people. In many ways, the Catholic-Jewish dialogue process has been a welcome counter-reaction to the aftermath of *Shoah*: the course and attitudes had to be changed thoroughly, and the Catholic Church has been very active and dynamic in this respect, especially after Vatican II. In turn, the rabbis behind ORSC now recognize that “official teachings of the Catholic Church about Judaism have changed fundamentally and irrevocably”.

Attempts for Jewish–Orthodox dialogue, however, have been sparse and sporadic, and often hosted by other institutions than the Orthodox Church. Representatives of the Orthodox have typically been academic laymen or bishops from the Western diaspora.³ Compared with the Catholics, the Orthodox are practically outsiders in these developments,⁴ which is an outcome of several different factors:

1. In most of her traditional strongholds, the Orthodox Church was oppressed under the Socialist regimes that restricted her practical and theoretical abilities until the 1980's, and thereafter the Church has been fully occupied with re-establishment of her activities.
2. The Orthodox Church has no effective central leadership who could act as the voice of the Church with similar all-inclusive authority and dynamism as the pope and Vatican in the Catholic

³ E.g. metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland and metropolitan Emmanuel of France.

⁴ Compared with the Jewish-Catholic dialogue, the discussion has been restricted to rather “diplomatic” level, and the most difficult questions (such as the Jewish state in relation to the biblical prophecies and their patristic interpretation) have been avoided or only lightly touched upon. See: *Orthodox Christians and Jews on Continuity and Renewal: The Third Academic Meeting between Orthodoxy and Judaism Including a History and Bibliography of Dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Jews*, Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, Jerusalem 1994. For proceedings of the dialogue in its initiative stages, see: “Proceedings of the Christian Orthodox-Jewish Encounter, Lucerne, Switzerland 1977”, in: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 24 (1979), p. 265-327. For an example of recent and authoritative but little-saying talk, see: Patriarch Bartholomew, “Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity”, a speech in honor of 40 Years of Dialogue in Jerusalem, December 5, 2017, in: <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/address-by-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-jerusalem-in-judaism-and-christianity-ecumenical-patriarchate-ijcic-celebrating-40-years->, viewed on February 13, 2019.

Church.⁵ However, the situation is even more complex on the Jewish side, and for that reason alone, it is evident that the dialogue by necessity must take place on various levels.

3. Regardless of centuries of shameful pogroms and disrespect for Jewry, the actual *Shoah* was not a matter of inner reflection and repentance for the Orthodox Church in the same way as it was to Western Churches, the Nazis being the archenemy of Soviet peoples, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania etc. Many Orthodox Church leaders, especially in Greece and Bulgaria, opposed and condemned the anti-Jewish policy of Nazis, saving Jews and risking their lives.⁶
4. The Orthodox theology and overall ethos is so organically connected with the patristic thinking and patristic authority that any updating of attitudes and teachings is much more problematic and painstaking than in the Catholic Church, not to mention Protestant ones.

In our times, however, the first problem is becoming history, and the second one may be overcome at least on the level of local Churches.⁷ The third factor is something that the Orthodox Church should discuss and promote more, preferably in co-operation with Jewish scholars and communities. The fourth factor will be considered below.

The Catholic-Jewish dialogue⁸ has taken place in many levels and in many ways, and one has to admit that it has reached considerable intellectual depth, existential honesty, theological advancement and thematic width.⁹

⁵ A related problem is that, unlike in the early patristic era, the most influential Orthodox voices of our times seem to come not from among bishops but from monasteries. The monastic elders may be masters in their own field, but when they move on to pronounce thoughts about Judaism (or Armenians etc.), the result may be embarrassing.

⁶ For an overview on these figures, see: "Orthodox Christians Who Saved Jews In The Holocaust", in: *Orthodox Christianity*, 2016, <http://orthochristian.com/90082.html>. For Greece, see: Steven Barrie Bowman, "Greek Jews and Christians during World War II", in: Yehuda Bauer (ed.), *Remembering for the Future: Jews and Christians during and after the Holocaust Vol. 1.*, Oxford, Pergamon Press 1989, p. 215-222. For Russia, see: Mikhail Agursky, "Russian Orthodox Christians and the Holocaust", in: *Immanuel* 17 (1983-1984), p. 88-93.

⁷ In principle, there is still some hope of having ecumenical synods in time to come, but given their structure and character, these are unlikely to take dynamic steps forward in Orthodox-Jewish relations.

⁸ For basic documents and reflections, see: Eugene J. Fisher et al. (eds.), *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, New York, Paulist Press 1986; Joseph Bernardin, *A Blessing to Each Other: Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Jewish Catholic Dialogue*, Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications 1996.

⁹ There is a plenty of interesting sub-topics and genres, such as rediscovery of Jewish roots of Catholic faith, e.g. Roy H. Schoeman, *Salvation is from the Jews*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press 2003; discussion on the post-Holocaust perspectives to the liturgical procedure of Great

This all is in many ways connected with wider intellectual developments in post-holocaust theology, arts and philosophy. The width and depth of the discussion makes it even more difficult for the Orthodox to find their place at the table.

To define the core of present reality briefly, it is essential to note that the rabbis behind ORSC recognize that the Roman Catholic Church

1. unequivocally rejects any form of anti-Semitism,
2. affirms the “eternal Covenant between G-d and the Jewish people”,
3. rejects deicide (murder of God)
4. stresses the unique relationship between Christians and Jews.¹⁰

In general terms, the first point should be self-evident for the Orthodox Church as well. The third one has some practical issues regarding the Great Week hymnography and interpretation of patristic texts, but it *should* be acceptable in the sense of confirming that Jews of later times are in no way responsible of what the first century Jews (or, rather, Romans) did. The fourth point is a historical fact that merely needs deeper recognition and reflection; it will become consequentially evident whenever the second issue is solved. The second one, however, is thoroughly problematic from the patristic point of view, and patristic writings are Orthodox theology par excellence.

Nevertheless, ORSC takes a brave step by acknowledging that the “emergence of Christianity in human history is neither an accident nor an error, but the willed divine outcome and gift to the nations”. The rabbis acknowledge the “constructive validity of Christianity” and they even acknowledge Christianity as their “partner in world redemption”. Finally, Jews and Christians even are said to have a “common covenantal mission to perfect the world”.¹¹ And in spite of the differences – the existence of which is confirmed¹² – both “will remain dedicated to the Covenant by playing an

week, e.g. Theresa Sanders, *Holy Week after the Holocaust*, New York, Orbis Books 2006; emergence of actual dialogical books, the most famous one being *On Heaven and Earth* by rabbi Abraham Skorka and Jorge Mario Bergoglio, aka. pope Franciscus (Spanish original in 2010, English version 2013). There are profound reflections by the leading Catholic philosophers; one may start from Robert Royal (ed.), *Jacques Maritain and the Jews*, Notre Dame, American Maritain Association & University of Notre Dame Press 1994. Moreover, the dialogue has led to brand new fields such as bioethics. See: Edmund D. Pellegrino, Alan I. Faden (eds.), *Jewish and Catholic Bioethics: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, Washington, Georgetown University Press 1999. For a Jewish perspective to the dialogue, see: David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: a Jewish Justification*, New York, Oxford University Press 1989. For a more protestant-based academic discussion, see e.g.: Richard Harris, *After the Evil: Christianity and Judaism in the Shadow of the Holocaust*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2003.

¹⁰ ORSC, §2.

¹¹ ORSC, §3-4.

¹² “Our partnership in no way minimizes the ongoing differences between the two communities and two religions.” ORSC, §6.

active role together in redeeming the world”.¹³ The covenantal language is striking, for it is the Jewish way to indicate the divine truth of religion.

In other words, the Rabbis who have signed the document seem to acknowledge that Christianity represents a covenant of its own, or somehow belongs to the same covenant with God; Judaism and Christianity function together for the same aim, ultimately constituting two covenants, or one covenant with two varieties.¹⁴ For the Orthodox, it may be embarrassing that the Catholic Church appears to be acknowledged as the solemn representative of Christianity, but this is a kind of practical necessity in the present reality. If the Orthodox Church wants to be a representative of “Christianity” in the future, she should react to this discussion in open and clear terms, in spite of the anti-Jewish sentiments in many of her circles.

Having said that, I must acknowledge that if I was a Jewish rabbi, perhaps I would not dare to sign this document, for it rather clearly admits Christianity as true religion in the eyes of God and thus relativizes the Jewish truth. In effect, it even seems to implicitly affirm the status of Jesus Christ as universal Messiah¹⁵ and therefore leads to several dead-ends. For this very reason, however, it does represent unprecedented trust and understanding of the other. And of God.

After these introductory remarks, it is evident why it is essential to deal with the question of the forsakenness of Jews, and the spiritual status of Judaism, on patristic grounds. For the Orthodox theology, this indubitably is in the heart of the problem.

Forsakenness of Jews and Judaism in early Patristic literature

Evidently, the painful separation of Judaism and Christianity into two religions, and the subsequent construction of Christian self-formation in relation to the Other, contributed to very negative estimation on the spiritual value of Judaism in the early patristic literature. It is good to clarify a few points on this matter, however.

Firstly, Christianity from the earliest times developed around the ideas of divine Messiah, incarnation, atonement and resurrection, which Judaism could not accept, and therefore disagreements in many fundamental issues were unavoidable and inevitable, and still are. “Judaism is Judaism because it rejects Christianity, and Christianity is Christianity because it re-

¹³ ORSC, §7.

¹⁴ Basically, the document is open for both readings.

¹⁵ Of course, this does not read in the document (and the concepts of Messiah are not identical in the two religions etc.), but it is difficult to imagine what *else* it could mean to recognize that the Christians are a participant in the covenant – i.e. they do have a covenant – with the God of patriarchs and prophets.

jects Judaism”,¹⁶ as Eliezer Berkovits noted in his somewhat cynical essay at an early phase of the dialogue. Likewise, even ORSC confirms the existence of substantial differences.

Secondly, most of the negative views on Jews in the patristic literature are part of biblical hermeneutics and have very little to do with actual Jews¹⁷ or Rabbinic Judaism of post-biblical times. The flow of endless patristic remarks on the “literal understanding” of Jews carries on the tradition of the first century conflicts and constitutes a caricature that does not correspond with the reality of Rabbinic Judaism. It is evident for anyone who opens any book on Rabbinic exegesis that it is, by and large, more imaginative and visionary – and in any case, more multi-layered – than any Christian allegorical interpretation. Thus, even the basic patristic statements and remarks about Jewishness are simply not reliable.

Some of the most authoritative patristic authors, such as Athanasius the Great, repeatedly drew parallels between Jews and those Christians who had too low Christology. Especially Arians were “the present Jews” for Athanasius,¹⁸ and the persistence of the heresy kept Jews as a component of the Christological rhetoric. Even the most disturbing remarks may be a part of theological apologetic rhetoric that deals with biblical interpretation, not with actual contemporary Jews:

Thus the Jews, race hostile to truth, when they find themselves pressed, act like beasts enraged against man, who roar at the bars of their cage and show the cruelty and the ferocity of their nature, without being able to assuage their fury. God, they say, addresses Himself to several persons; it is to the angels before Him that He says, “Let us make man.” Jewish fiction! A fable whose frivolity shows whence it has come. To reject one person, they admit many.¹⁹

If we set aside the disagreements in biblical interpretation and turn to the patristic estimation of the Jewish religion of their time, there is in fact very little to be discussed. Most references to Jews and Judaism do not refer to actual Jews or Rabbinic Judaism, but to the Christian doctrine and its constituents, interpretative traditions and theological malfunctions. Therefore, they should not be read as definite evaluations of Judaism at all.

¹⁶ Eliezer Berkovits, “Judaism in the Post-Christian Era”, in: Frank Ephraim Talmage (ed.), *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter*, New York, Ktav Publishing House 1975, p. 291.

¹⁷ “The phrase «a Jew», or «some Jews», is almost unknown in patristic literature,” as noted by James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*, New York, Atheneum 1969, p. 160.

¹⁸ E.g. Athanasius, *Ar.* 1.3.8, 1.11.38, 2.14.2, *PG* 26.

¹⁹ Bas., *hex.* 9, 6, *SC* 26; trans. NPNF (Second Series) 8, p. 106.

Yet what we do have about Jews and Judaism in the patristic literature, seems to be thoroughly negative. The question is whether these negative views are *theologoumena* that can be updated or reconsidered, or do they constitute a case of *consensus patrum*²⁰ that should be seen irremovable from the Orthodox faith? Indeed, they are often presented in organic connection with the fundamental truth of Christianity.

Here it is essential to make one methodological observation. There are also fathers whose writings are free of anti-Jewish sentiments, but it is technically more demanding to realise this (one should master the entire corpus) than to pick up anti-Jewish verses from the others, and thus the argument is not very handy. Among the early, pre-Constantine fathers, such cases include Gregory Thaumaturgos (excluding his spurious homilies),²¹ Theophilus of Antioch and one should also mention Clement of Alexandria.²² At least one early author, Aristides of Athens even had an explicitly positive view on post-biblical Judaism.²³ On the other hand, the argument from silence cannot be fully used with any second century father due to the great number of lost works.

However, the early patristic judgement on the forsakenness of Jews is rather unambiguous and very early, for it was deeply connected with the fundamentals of the emerging new religion. The man who boasted to be an heir of apostles, Irenaeus was very clear about it: the Jews have “rejected the Son of God, and cast Him out of the vineyard when they slew Him”, and therefore, “God has rejected them”.²⁴

Even an early canonical document, *Apostolic Constitutions* states that God has taken away from Jews the Holy Spirit and the “prophetic rain”. Thus, “the wicked synagogue is now cast off by the Lord God, and His house is rejected by Him”.²⁵ Evidently, it was taken for granted that if Christianity is the new truth, the old one must be utterly rejected by God.

²⁰ Of course, the criteria for defining the *consensus partum* are seldom precise.

²¹ For discussion, see: S. Mark Veldt, *Christian Attitudes toward the Jews in the Earliest Centuries A.D.*, Kalamazoo, Western Michigan University (diss.) 2007, p. 269-270.

²² “His attitude, though at times critical, is in general more positive towards Jews, and certainly more understated, than other early Christian author”, as noted by Stuart Rowley Thomson, *The Barbarian Sophist: Clement of Alexandria's Stromateis and the Second Sophistic*, thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Oxford, University of Oxford 2014, p. 208. See also: James Carleton Paget, “Clement of Alexandria and the Jews”, in: *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1/1998), p. 86-97.

²³ Arist., *apol.* 14, 3, SC 470.

²⁴ Iren., *haer.* IV, 36, 2, SC 100; trans. ANF 1, p. 515.

²⁵ *Apostolic Constitutions* 6, 5, SC 329, p. 304-305; trans. ANF 7, p. 451. The same claim was emphatically used by Chrys., *adv. Jud.*, 6, 4, 1, PG 48; translation by Paul W. Harkins, *John Chrysostom, Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, FC 68, Washington, The Catholic University of America Press 1979.

Some fathers took one step further by declaring and confirming that this state of affairs is permanent and unending. Origen explicitly stated that “they will never be restored to their former condition (οὐδ ἀποκατασταθήσονται)”, due to “the most unholy” crime they committed.²⁶ The remainder of Jews was perhaps to be saved in the end, as envisioned by Paul,²⁷ and admitted also by Origen,²⁸ but this was to take place by their submission to Jesus, and even this possibility was not much discussed after the earliest Christian times.

For John Chrysostom, who dealt with the matter in detail, the basic theological argument was that Judaism is based on the Temple Cult and the Law functions fully in the Holy Land alone, and therefore without the Temple and the Land the whole religion is baseless.²⁹ Unfortunately, it did not occur to Chrysostom, or any other patristic author, that just as Christianity had *developed* out of ancient Judaism based on the Temple cult, similarly Judaism could go through evolution towards a more spiritual reality (or, different, in any case). Chrysostom could not see any other kind of Judaism except that of the biblical Temple cult.

Obviously, when any thinker assesses the character of another religion, he should not estimate his own caricature about it but the actual religion as it defines itself. This once more shows that the fourth century fathers were unable to grasp what Rabbinic Judaism is and how it differs from the Judaism of biblical times, and therefore their attacks repeatedly stroke against the biblical enemy and not the Rabbinic Judaism of their time. However, belief in the forsakenness of Jews was as exhaustive as it can be. The patristic material, however, does offer one interesting loophole of a kind.

Loss of the Holy Land in early fathers' eyes

The rejection and forsakenness of Jews was often strongly connected with their loss of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and the loss was presented as proof for the former. The idea emerged in a natural way after the Temple had been demolished (70) and Bar Kokhba rebellions overthrown (136),³⁰

²⁶ Or., *Cels.*, 4, 22, SC 136; trans. ANF 4, p. 506.

²⁷ Rom. 11.26.

²⁸ Or., *Cels.*, 6, 80, SC 147; trans. ANF 4, p. 610.

²⁹ E.g. “the whole ritual of the Jews is useless and unavailing” [...] they will never return to their old commonwealth and way of life [...] they are forbidden to fulfil, except in Jerusalem, what the old life demanded.” *adv. Jud.*, 8, 5, 4.

³⁰ See, for instance, Justin the Martyr's remarks on the “devastation of the land of the Jews” in *1 Apol.* 47 and 53. For discussion, see: Harold Remus, “Justin Martyr's Argument with Judaism”, in: Stephen G. Wilson (ed.), *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, Vol. 2, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1986, p. 59-80.

and continued within the tradition.³¹ Understandably, the early Christians interpreted the destruction of Jews' land, diaspora and their apparent lowly status as consequences of their disbelief. Hippolytos (d. 235) expressed this boldly and prophetically, speaking as Christ himself:

For they are scattered throughout the whole earth, in servitude everywhere, and engaging in the lowest and most servile occupations, and doing any unseemly work for hunger's sake. For if they were destroyed from among men, and remained nowhere among the living, they could not see my people, he means, nor know my Church in its prosperity. Therefore, "scatter" them everywhere on earth, where my Church is to be established, in order that when they see the Church founded by me, they may be roused to emulate it in piety.³²

In this rhetoric, the desolation and non-Jewish rule of the land was connected with, and ultimately caused by, the rejection and crucifixion of Christ:

Are not the things announced by you fulfilled? Is not their country, Judea, desolate? Is not the holy place burned with fire? Are not their walls cast down? Are not their cities destroyed? Their land, do not strangers devour it? Do not the Romans rule the country? And indeed these impious people hated you, and did saw you asunder, and they crucified Christ.³³

Even more explicitly, Tertullian (d. 220) presented the "national ruin" of Jews as sufficient proof for their having left the way of God:

But how deeply they have sinned, puffed up to their fall with a false trust in their noble ancestors, turning from God's way into a way of sheer impiety, though they themselves should refuse to admit it, their present national ruin would afford sufficient proof. Scattered abroad, a race of wanderers (*dispersi, palabundi*), exiles from their own land and clime, they roam over the whole world without either a human or a heavenly king, not possessing so much as a simple footstep in their native country.³⁴

Along these lines, the Jewish setbacks were finally taken to prove the divinity of Jesus, as Origen did in his apology to Celsus: "One fact, then, which proves that Jesus was something divine and sacred, is this, that Jews should

³¹ For early Christian and patristic views on the Holy Land and Holy City, see: Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History & Thought*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press 1992, p. 65-172.

³² Hipp., *fr. in Pss.* 59, 11, 5; trans. ANF 5, p. 202.

³³ Idem, *antichr.*, 30; trans. ANF 5, p. 210.

³⁴ Tertullian, *Apol.* 21:5; trans. ANF 3, p. 34.

have suffered on His account now for a lengthened time calamities of such severity.”³⁵ Thus, the Jews’ abandonment and killing of Christ was seen to have brought forth the wrath of God, which manifested itself in the destruction of the land and dispersion of its people.

For Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), the fact that Jews were to “lose Jerusalem, and leave the land which they had received” was one of the fundamental claims in his work against the Jews.³⁶ This all was, of course, easy to pepper with biblical prophecies, which in turn served to cement the thinking. Tertullian made his anti-Jewish writing (*Adversus Iudaeos, Answer to the Jews*) a collage of biblical expressions.

For thenceforth God’s grace desisted (from working) among them. [...] And because they had committed these crimes, and had failed to understand that Christ “was to be found” in “the time of their visitation,” their land has been made “desert, and their cities utterly burnt with fire”.³⁷

Curiously, the punishment argument was in fact compatible with Jewish argumentation in which the diaspora and loss of Jerusalem were often explained with Jews’ own sins.³⁸

Many commentators and even historians have not paid sufficient attention to the fact that these lines of thought were well defined long before the fourth century, in times when the Church was still a small and weak minority – they are not a powerful majority’s rulings or oppressive rhetoric against a minority, as sometimes carelessly supposed. Rather, the ideas are deeply connected with the emergence of the new religion, its fundamental doctrines, and the constituents of Christian identity. (The later practical applications of a discriminatory nature are another problem, and they should not be equated with the theological argumentation as such.) It is also noteworthy that the early Christian authors had to discuss all this without a Christian theory of society, philosophy of history, or even history writing.

³⁵ Or., *Cels.*, 4, 22, SC 136; trans. ANF 4, p. 506.

³⁶ Cyp., *Testimonies Against the Jews*, 1, 6; trans. ANF 5, p. 507.

³⁷ Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos*, 13; trans. ANF 3, p. 171. For further discussion on Tertullian’s rhetoric against the Jews, see: Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian’s Adversus Iudaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press 2008.

³⁸ This is, of course, a traditional monotheistic basic answer to the problem of suffering. It was used in Judaism already in the Second temple era to explain the devastation of the Temple (e.g. *Psalms of Solomon* 2.3, 8.26), and further applied throughout the history in Rabbinic Judaism. The most famous Talmudic discussions and arguments are in *Yoma* 9b and *Shabbat* 119b, in which sins leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple are enumerated. John Chrysostom (*adv. Jud.*, 6, 2, 4.) seems to have been aware of their using this argument.

The first theories about the relation of spiritual truth and politics were developed by Eusebius in the early fourth century.³⁹

The generations changed and circumstances turned around, but the argumentation remained the same. In the beginning of fourth century, the creator of Christian historiography, Eusebius, a rather rationalist thinker, presented the devastation of Jerusalem Zion as a result of Jews' impieties, in accordance with biblical prophecies.

And who could deny that this was fulfilled after the time of our Savior Jesus Christ, when he sees all these things not only shaken, but abolished? And the valleys even now melting are the Jewish synagogues established in all cities instead of Jerusalem and Mount Sion, which are full of lamentation and wailing, and melting as wax at the fire with grief and extreme sorrow for the desolation of their homes and their long and lasting slavery. [...] we have seen in our own time Zion once so famous ploughed with yokes of oxen by the Romans and utterly devastated, and Jerusalem, as the oracle says, deserted like a lodge. And this has come to pass precisely because of their impieties for the sake of which the Heavenly Word has come forth from his own place.⁴⁰

Athanasius the Great, voice of the Church after Nicaea, explicitly defined the fate of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as proof of the fact that the era of the Jewish religion had passed:

that city, since the coming of our Savior, has had an end, and all the land of the Jews has been laid waste; so that from the testimony of these things (and we need no further proof, being assured by our own eyes of the fact) there must, of necessity, be an end of the shadow.⁴¹

For Athanasius, the fate of Jerusalem was "the penal award of their denial" of Christ.⁴² Athanasius seems to have taken it for granted that this state of affairs was to last and never to return: "For they shall no more go to that which is

³⁹ For discussion, see also: Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine*, Chicago – London, The University of Chicago Press 1987, p. 31-40. Eusebius made a sharp semantic distinction between "Hebrews", the most ancient people on earth, and "Jews", a religious term covering the temporary period from Moses to incarnation. For Eusebius, Abraham led Christian life, not Jewish, and so it was the Christians who represented the real continuity with Hebrews.

⁴⁰ Eus., *d.e.*, 6, 3; trans. W.J. Ferrar, SPCK 1920, reprint: Grand Rapids, Baker 1981.

⁴¹ Ath., *ep. fest.*, 1, 8; trans. NPNF (Second Series) 4.

⁴² "The Jews then have the penal award of their denial; for their city as well as their reasoning came to nought." Athanasius the Great, *Four discourses against the Arians*, 2, 18/42 (158); trans. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Select treatises of St. Athanasius in controversy with the Arians*, London, Pickering and Co 1881.

old; it is finished; it is taken away.”⁴³ This belief seems to appear as the flip side of the truth of Christianity. For Athanasius, “it is a sign, and an important proof, of the coming of the Word of God, that Jerusalem no longer stands”.⁴⁴

The basic view on the forsakenness of Jews was universal; it existed even beyond the boundaries of Rome.⁴⁵ Rather early, it ossified to indicate a permanent and unchanging state of affairs: the Jews are destined to live in the desolation of diaspora. This in effect means that the argument turned ontological: the Jewish way of being is characterized by scatteredness and forsakenness, and this is unchangeable. And when we add to the basket the biblical prophecies of doom, the Jews indeed appeared to be “predicted as destined to suffer”,⁴⁶ as Tertullian had it. The prophecies of return and restitution, on the other hand, were read to refer to the Church alone. This was a natural and logical development, given the circumstances, but whether it was a *necessary* conclusion in all respects, is another question.

John Chrysostom, in his (in)famous eight speeches against the Jews and Judaizers,⁴⁷ discussed the forsakenness of Jews in length. Even he revealed very few things about the actual Jews or Jewish cult of his time.⁴⁸ Instead, he repeatedly referred to the Old Testament and argued that the power was taken from Jews and given to their enemies, and everything had taken place according to the prophecies. More specifically, the long-lasting desolation of the Temple Mount proved that the Jews were forsaken by God:

If God had not abandoned you, the ruin of desolation would not have lasted so long a time, nor would your frequent efforts to rebuild the temple have been in vain.⁴⁹

In Chrysostom's times, Christians remembered well how Jews had aimed to rebuild the Temple during Julian the Apostate's era (361-363),⁵⁰ and failed

⁴³ Ath., *ep. fest.*, 1, 8; trans. NPNF (Second Series) 4.

⁴⁴ Idem, *inc.*, 40, 1, SC 199; trans. NPNF (Second Series) 4.

⁴⁵ Aphrahat, the “Persian sage”, who was not aware of the contemporary problems (such as Arianism) in the West, discussed this in his Syriac discourses in 340's (*Demonstrations*, chapter 16, *Patrologia Syriaca* 1, Paris 1907). For discussion and Jewish perspectives, see J. Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity*, p. 85-93. For discussion on anti-Judaism in Byzantine homilies, see: Mary Cunningham, “Polemic and Exegesis: anti-Judaic invective in Byzantine homiletics”, in: *Sobornost* 21 (2/1999), p. 46-68.

⁴⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos*, 13; trans. ANF 3, p. 171.

⁴⁷ I analyse these homilies in a different study, “The Three Enemies in John Chrysostom's *Adversus Iudaeos*” (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ “It is evident that Chrysostom's Jew was a theological necessity rather than a living person.” J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church*, p. 166.

⁴⁹ Chrys., *adv. Jud.*, 6, 3, 7.

⁵⁰ See: Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land Palestine in the Fourth Century*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark 2000, p. 185-226. Chrysostom saw the failure as proof for the

miserably. In other words, the spiritual quality of Judaism was estimated on the basis of their political and national failures. This was not illogical, given that Jewish national and political aims were religiously motivated and argued, and these focused on the Temple Mount. The Holy Land, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount were still the *synchronic* centre of Judaism.

In synchronic terms, Chrysostom built his refutation of Judaism on the observation that Judaism itself (law, cult) was Jerusalem-centred and the full practice of Torah was impossible to fulfil elsewhere. For Chrysostom, and practically for all early Christians who said something on the subject, the destruction of the Temple and the fact that it shall never be rebuilt were important arguments and witnesses for the truth of Christianity.⁵¹

We may sum up the patristic logic as follows:

Premise 1. The Jewish interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is literal only.

Premise 2. Without the Temple, Jerusalem and Holy Land, it is impossible to follow the Scriptures literally.

Conclusion. Judaism is baseless and worthless.

The problem is that the first premise was completely mistaken, and thus the reasoning is of no value.

Furthermore, Chrysostom took a step further and declared that Jews shall never rule Jerusalem: “Jews will recover neither *their city* nor their temple in days to come”.⁵² Jerusalem was the keystone on which the whole Jewish rite and religion was based,⁵³ and thus the validity of religion was dependent on their historical position in relation to the City. It was clear for Chrysostom that the “temple will not be rebuilt” and consequently the “Jews will not return to their former way of life”.⁵⁴ It was from this ground that he estimated the religious situation of the Jews of his time: “the Jews of today have no hope of recovering their forefathers’ way of life”, and the Holy City “will not be restored nor will they get back their old commonwealth and way of life”.⁵⁵

Yet the Jewish faith in the future regaining of and returning to Jerusalem was common knowledge. “They never stop whispering in every-

rejectedness of Jews: “If God had not abandoned you, the ruin of desolation would not have lasted so long a time, nor would your frequent efforts to rebuild the temple have been in vain.” Chrys., *adv. Jud.*, 6, 3, 7.

⁵¹ This was all the more so because of the words of Christ, “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.” (Mt. 24.2, NIV).

⁵² Chrys., *adv. Jud.*, 5, 4, 1.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 4, 6, 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 5, 1, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 4, 4, 9 and 7, 1, 4.

body's ear and bragging that they will get their city back again", Chrysostom wailed.⁵⁶ However, "there is no longer any hope that they will recover Jerusalem", Chrysostom argued, "for that city shall not rise up again in the future, nor will they return to their prior form of worship".⁵⁷

The argumentation related to loss of Land applies not only to Chrysostom, but to the patristic thinking more widely. Didymus the Blind (d. c. 398), a remarkable authority at his time,⁵⁸ explicitly stated that the Lord fights against the Jews "not for a brief time, but for every age to come, even to the consummation of the world"; and this is so because "they wander as fugitives and captives among all nations, having neither a city nor their own region".⁵⁹ Jews were never to get their land back, and this proved their being forsaken; in other words, their religion was basically worthless.

The argumentation makes an amazing reading in the present situation. The Jews have been ruling the Holy Land since 1948 and the Holy City since 1967, and their presence is fully established. One weighty patristic argument has clearly proven to be false. This should encourage even the extreme supporters of *consensus patrum* to consider the option of re-orientation and reinterpretation. On the other hand, it is all the more fascinating that even though Chrysostom and other fathers were mistaken in the political aspect (recovery of Jerusalem and Holy Land), the more spiritual point regarding the impossibility of recovering the Temple cult still holds on.

In the times of Jewish Jerusalem, the argument concerning the loss of land and the city of Jerusalem is empirically proven mistaken, whether one likes that or not. Logically speaking, this must mean that either the Jews have recovered the Land in spite of God willing them not to do so,⁶⁰ or that they have recovered it in accordance with God's will. The first point is a (theo)logical dead end, so the second option is to be taken most seriously. It of course implies that the fathers were mistaken in this very point. However, it should naturally be interpreted and analysed separately from the question of truth of Christianity, which was not the case in the early patristic era. The fathers made

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 7, 1, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, *Fragm.* 42. Similar statements in 7, 2, 2-3. and 7, 4, 3.

⁵⁸ Didymus was praised by Palladios and Jerome, but in the sixth century he was condemned together with the Origenists.

⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Didymus continues that God, kind and merciful, "grants them an opportunity for repentance, if they want to be converted for the better". Didym., *On the Holy Spirit*, 217, SC 386; translation in: *Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind, Works on the Spirit*, Yonkers, St Vladimir's Seminary Press 2011, p. 210.

⁶⁰ This cannot be dealt with by arguing that people do act against the will of God, and the establishment of the state of Israel is merely one of that kind of acts. Namely, the patristic argument is that it is *impossible* for Jews, being forsaken, to return to rule the Holy Land, and this is due to divine *oikonomia*.

a serious – but fully understandable – mistake in declaring the impossibility of Jews' return to rule the land of Israel and the Holy City, and subsequently, they made another mistake in using this view as proof for the truth of Christianity and a certain valuelessness of Judaism. In other words, from this perspective one might conclude that Christians' covenant with God in Christ should not be seen to depend on how the providence of God functions with his firstly-chosen people, nor on the amount of knowledge about this providence.

Having said that, the argument on the temple obviously still remains valid. The situation is in fact totally unanticipated and unpredicted. Even among the Jewish rabbis there probably was never anyone who would seriously have expected a situation in which there is a Jewish Jerusalem with no access to the Temple Mount, as the case has been since 1967. To see no hand of God in such an implausible and unprecedented arrangement in the Holy City is, ironically, also a serious deviation from the patristic approach. Namely, the relationship between God and the Temple Mount was in any case a very *relevant* question for the fathers. (Nowadays, most Orthodox theologians, monastics and authorities simply are not interested on the matter.) Curiously, the present setting seems to indicate that both are right: Christians because of their basic argument that God allows no Temple after Christ, and Jews because God has led them to their promised land and Holy City, even if in a most unexpected way.⁶¹

At this point, we may note that patristic eschatology was no exception to anti-Jewish views. After the second century Chiliasts (Justin, Irenaeus), there was no Temple, Kingdom or Jerusalem to be expected on earth. For example, Basil the Great ridiculed (Apollinarian) eschatological fantasies in which Christians would be circumcised, “offer sacrifices to God, worship in the Temple at Jerusalem” in a Jewish manner, stating this to be more ridiculous and more contrary to the Gospel than anything else.⁶² For Christians, the ancient Temple cult was a prefigure to which there is no reason to return – but so it is to many Jews as well.

⁶¹ The fact that it was leftist, atheist Zionists who led the process is, from the traditional Rabbinic point of view, even more miraculous than having been led by Messiah himself! The most profound analysis of this process is still Rabbi Kook's “impersonal Messianism”. Kook discussed in poetical beauty and profoundness on the deepest inner spiritual streams that even the atheists were part of in the Messianic spirit.

⁶² Apollinarius “has discussions of theology based not on Scriptural proofs, but on human argumentation. He also has books concerning the resurrection, composed like a legend, or rather, like a Jewish story, in which he says that we shall again turn back to the form of worship according to the Law, and that we shall again be circumcised, and observe the Sabbath, and refrain from meats, and offer burnt sacrifices to God, and adore in Jerusalem at the Temple, and from Christians become wholly Jews. What could be more ridiculous than these statements, or, rather, more foreign to the teaching of the Gospel?” Bas., *ep.* 263; translation by Agnes Clare, *Way in Saint Basil, Letters, Volume 2 (186-368)*, The Fathers of the Church Volume 28, Washington, The Catholic University of America Press 2007.

Positive remarks on Jews or Judaism?

If one looks for positive views on Judaism from the patristic authors, there is not much to gather. The praise of Jews by Aristide of Athens is very early, most probably 120's, and was forgotten in history until modern times. There are occasional hopes of their salvation,⁶³ but since this implies conversion to Christianity, it is not at all a positive option from the Jewish point of view. Nevertheless, the ascetic desert fathers did have a more positive approach to Jews. They explicitly opposed negative views and hostile attitudes against Jews, but for practical reasons, they very seldom dealt with the topic.⁶⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to consider all patristic authors as Jew-haters, even if they oppose what they call the "Jewish" way of understanding the Scriptures. Generally speaking, the Cappadocian fathers were more sophisticated in this regard. In the words of Christine Shepardson, the three Cappadocian fathers "strictly declare their opponents to be not Jews, but worse than Jews", namely those who pretend to be Christians but maintain Jewish beliefs.⁶⁵ The remark is important for showing the synchronic effects of the diachronic development. The Cappadocians, especially Gregory the Theologian, understood that the confrontation with Judaism belonged to the past and was of less relevance in the fourth century. To admit that "the times they are a-changing", and that it is possible to move forward from previous positions, is an essential prerequisite for any reconciliation with Jews and Judaism.

The logic seems to be that the Jews are less dangerous because they are more distant.⁶⁶ Therefore, Gregory the Theologian, when discussing the relation between language and spirituality, shows a flexible attitude with Jews and their tradition. If the Jews wanted to join the Christians and call Jesus "Messiah" instead of Christ, Gregory would welcome them:

For our salvation is not so much a matter of words as of actions;
for we would not reject the Jews, if they desired to unite with us,
and yet for a while sought to use the term "Anointed" instead of
"Christ:" while the community would suffer a very serious injury,
if the church were seized upon by the heretics.⁶⁷

⁶³ Veldt concluded that "Irenaeus can think of no better picture to describe the eschatological kingdom than that of a restored and perfected Israel, bringing together a people of God which unifies Jew and Gentile." S. M. Veldt, *Christian Attitudes*, p. 171.

⁶⁴ I discuss this in detail in "Portrayal of Jews in Syriac and Early Byzantine Mystical Literature" (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ Christine Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press 2008, p. 148.

⁶⁶ i.e. less dangerous than the contemporary enemies such as Arians or Eunomians.

⁶⁷ Gr. Naz., *or.* 43, 68 (Funeral oration on St. Basil the Great), SC 384; trans. NPNF (Second Series) 7, p. 418.

In other words, Gregory understood that Judaism of his time was no longer the closest enemy, as it had been in the first and early second century, and therefore it was no longer that dangerous. All the more so in the 21st century.

Of the few somehow positive remarks on the spiritual status of post-biblical Judaism, however, perhaps the most interesting one is from Origen who presented an attractive option in his discussion on the judgements of God. His idea was that all shall be judged through their own laws: Jews through the law of Moses, and Christians through the law of Christ, Gentiles through natural and civil law, and angels through their natural law.⁶⁸ This is a rare patristic statement that admits the original function of Torah as still valid, and valid for Jews only. Of course, Origen is not an actual *de jure* authority for the Orthodox Church, but still his views do represent the orthodoxy of his time. However, this theme is of course a *theologoumenon* by definition, for the principles of salvation and judgement cannot be decided by theologians or their consensus.

What should we think about this today?

Orthodox voices for the reconciliation with Jews, not to mention with Judaism, have been sparse, and have been more about practical love and tolerance than theological reflection. Perhaps the most important voice of Orthodoxy in the West, metropolitan Kallistos Ware has spoken warmly for the continuity of relationship between God and Israel, asking for repentance because of the Orthodox antisemitism. It is telling, however, he did this in a personal essay rather than in a theological treatise and that he based his reflections on Paul, without a single patristic quotation. Nevertheless, Ware from his part did confirm that the Jews are still God's chosen ones:

Let us long, as Paul does, for the ending of that separation, and let us keep steadfastly in view his confident expectation that, willingly and by their own free choice, the Jewish people as a whole will eventually accept Christ as God and Saviour. And, until that happens, let us never by deed or word show the slightest disrespect or hatred for the people of Israel. They are still God's Chosen People.⁶⁹

Orthodox Christians and Jews have lived together for two millennia, and in spite of differences and disagreements, the practical relations in recent centuries have in fact been rather good in many places (Greece, Bulgaria).

⁶⁸ Or., *hom. in Ezech.*, 4, 1; *comm. in Rom.*, 2, 8; 3, 6. See also: John A. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, Louisville – London, Westminster John Knox Press 2004, p. 140.

⁶⁹ Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, "Has God rejected his people? Reflections on the people of Israel", in: *Communion* 6, October 1996. Reprinted by Orthodox research institute in http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/misc/kallistos_ware_rejected_his_people.htm, viewed on February 8, 2019.

There has been a plenty of mutual respect and co-operation when needed, even during the Nazi occupation.

Any *theological* reconciliation of Orthodox Christianity and Judaism, however, is so demanding an aim that even a tiny movement forward demands ground-breaking argumentation. To reach this aim, it seems that it would be necessary for the Orthodox to acknowledge that

1. After the *Shoah*, something has essentially changed. The direction of hatred, mistrust and condemnation has been followed until its very end, and therefore the direction as a whole must be revalued in fundamental terms. In short, there has to be a post-holocaust theological vision.
2. For better or worse, most of the patristic views on Jews and Judaism have accomplished their mission. They did serve to protect Christian identity formation in the first centuries, but today one may safely admit that the views were essentially one-sided, too strict, not free of hatred, and they did not correspond at all to the inner character of Judaism for which the fathers usually show no knowledge or understanding, or even interest. Their most evident mistake, however, is the categorical denial of possibility for Jews to return to their land and Jerusalem.
3. The return of Jews to their Holy Land and Holy City, and the emergence of the state of Israel is an extremely extraordinary process that no patristic author deemed possible. If one believes in God that is in relationship with the world in any Biblical/patristic/Orthodox sense, there is no honest way of seeing the post-holocaust exodus as an ordinary series of random events and political processes only. In short, one should admit that God has not forsaken his people and He is still the God of Israel, in some mysterious sense.⁷⁰

In brief, Judaism as a religion is not what the patristic authors claimed and supposed it to be, and the Jews of the 20th century achieved what the patristic authors declared impossible. Therefore, there is an evident need for a thorough reassessment of Orthodox views based on patristic legacy. The fact that the Judaism of the patristic writings does not correspond to the actuality of Rabbinic Judaism, sets a shadow of doubt on the patristic views on Jews in general. And since our present situation is something that the fathers of

⁷⁰ Of course, one could – and perhaps should – make the same conclusion directly from the character and attributes of God: since he is not unfaithful or passionate, he does not forsake his chosen ones. However, an evident concrete mistake in patristic argumentation may be a more effective tool for any serious reconsideration.

the first centuries did not expect or even consider possible, it is high time to put their remarks on Jews into brackets and leave them to their places in the pages of history. The truth of Christianity can be shown in ways other than claiming that God has forsaken his chosen people into wretchedness and scatteredness.

Of course, the practical reality of Orthodox churches is that no definitive steps in this matter are to be expected in decades, perhaps centuries. The development will be frustratingly slow and, for some, painful. Meanwhile, I challenge every Orthodox theologian to read ten books by/about the spiritual masters of Judaism and to see whether or not they are worthy of our deep theological and spiritual respect.