

Facing Anti-Judaism in the Romanian Orthodox Church: Why the Need to Accommodate the Biblical and the Liturgical Texts?

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The modern problem of political correctness appeared recently in the Romanian Orthodox Church too and produced different reactions. In this paper I want to discuss the anti-Judaic language that can be encountered in the cult, particularly during the Holy Week, and the solutions to treat these expressions. In the Catholic and Protestant world, the anti-Judaic speech was abandoned,¹ so it seems that only the Orthodox churches have kept the texts that might be deemed as offensive for the Jewish people. As we shall observe, the Romanian Orthodox Church offers an interesting case on this issue. Beside the liturgical texts, I will also approach the problem of the accommodation of the biblical texts in the Orthodox Church, since some modern translations have pushed the modification so far.

Keywords: anti-Judaism, Holy Week, Enkomia, Byzantine liturgy, Romanian Orthodox Church

The accommodation of the liturgical text

The liturgical texts of the Romanian Orthodox Church were only partly modified by the church authorities in order to avoid anti-Judaic expressions. To understand the nature of the modification, we need to take the cases under closer examination.

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¹ Andrea Nicolotti, “*Perfidia Iudaica*. Le tormentate vicende di un’orazione liturgica prima e dopo Erik Peterson”, in: Giancarlo Caronello (ed.), *Erik Peterson. La presenza teologica di un outsider*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2012, p. 477-514. German version: “*Perfidia iudaica*. Die schwierige Geschichte eines liturgischen Gebets vor und nach Erik Peterson”, in: G. Caronello (ed.), *Erik Peterson. Die theologische Präsenz eines Outsiders*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot 2012, p. 511-554. See also: Alexander Deeg, Irene Mildemberger (eds.), “... dass er euch auch erwählet hat”. *Liturgie feiern im Horizont des Judentums*, Beiträge zu Liturgie und Spiritualität 16, Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2006; Walter Homolka, Erich Zenger (eds.), “... damit sie Jesus Christus erkennen”. *Die neue Karfreitagsfürbitte für die Juden*, Theologie Kontrovers, Freiburg, Herder 2008; Basilius J. Groen, “Antijudaismus in der christlichen Liturgie und Versuche seiner Überwindung” https://static.uni-graz.at/fileadmin/kath-institute/Liturgiewissenschaft/Antijudaismus_in_der_christlichen_Liturgie_WS2008.pdf, viewed on May 5, 2019.

I begin with the Resurrectional troparion (apolytikion) in first tone, that runs as follows: “When the stone had been sealed by the Jews...” (Τοῦ λίθου σφραγισθέντος ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων...) and so on. The Romanian printed editions of Octoechos and Horologion preserved the original wording (“Piatra fiind pecetluită de iudei”² or in the old version “Piatra fiind pecetluită de jidovi”),³ but the service of the vespers in an edition with musical notation dropped off “by the Jews” (Piatra fiind pecetluită).⁴ It must be stressed that, due to the singing practice, this abridged form is currently widespread in the Romanian churches, so that the complete form is virtually non-existent.

But the most interesting examples of modified texts could be found in the lamentations of Great Saturday matins, chanted on Great Friday evening. The lamentations are called in Greek Enkomia (Praises), being sung interleaved between the verses of Psalm 118 LXX (119). Ten stanzas of the Enkomia, present for example in the edition of the Triodion from 1946,⁵ were suppressed in the Romanian Triodion during the communist period.⁶ They reappeared in the revised edition of 2010,⁷ but with substantial modifications: all the offending references to the Jews or Hebrews were replaced by generalizing expressions. This edition of the Triodion from 2010 was preceded by a pilot separate edition of the Enkomia in 2009 (reprinted in 2010), which was revised according to the metrics for chanting (with separate editions of the Enkomia in 2011 and 2018).

In the following table,⁸ we can observe the most important modifications (with English translation by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos,⁹ slightly different sometimes from the Romanian version because of the metrics, style and word order).

² *Catavasier sau Octoih mic*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (IBMBOR) 2005, p. 25; *Ceaslov*, București, IBMBOR 2001, p. 233.

³ *Octoih ce se zice elinește Paraclitichi*, Sibiu, Tipografia Diecezană 1912, p. 12.

⁴ Nicolae C. Lungu, *Vecernierul*, 3rd ed., București, IBMBOR 2002, p. 66.

⁵ *Triodul*, 5th ed., București, IBMBOR 1946.

⁶ See, for example: *Triodul*, 8th ed., București, IBMBOR 1986.

⁷ *Triodul*, București, IBMBOR 2010.

⁸ <http://www.teologie.net/2011/05/02/cenzura-prohod-bor/>. With commentaries <http://forum.teologie.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=867>, viewed on May 5, 2019.

⁹ *The Lenten Triodion*, translated from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, The Service Books of the Orthodox Church, London–Boston, Faber and Faber 1978 (reprinted by St Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, 2002). See also: David Anderson, John Erickson (eds.), *Matins of Holy Sunday. With the Praises and Psalm 119*, New York, Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1982. I thank Roxana Ilinca for helping me gain access to these resources.

Romanian Triodion (1946) with English translation by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware	Romanian Triodion (2010) with my adapted translation
<p>I.56. Urmaşii lui Iuda, din izvor adăpaţi şi cu mană săturaţi demult, în pustiu, în mormânt Îl pun pe Hrănitorul lor.//</p> <p>Offspring from a bitter source, the children of the tribe of Judah (τῆς Ἰουδα φυλῆς) have cast into a pit Jesus who fed them with manna.</p>	<p>I.56. Cei ce au fost demult din izvor adăpaţi şi cu mana în pustie s-au săturat în mormânt Îl pun pe Hrănitorul lor.//</p> <p>Offspring from a bitter source, those of ancient times have cast into a pit Jesus who fed them with manna.</p>
<p>I.58. Îngâmfat Israel, ucigaşe popor! Pentru ce pe Varava, pătimăş, slobozi, iar pe Domnul pentru ce Îl răstigneşti?//</p> <p>O arrogant Israel, O people guilty of blood (Αλαζών Ἰσραήλ, μαιφόνε λαέ), why hast you set free Barabas but delivered the Saviour to be crucified.</p>	<p>I.58. O, vicleni farisei! O, popor pătimăş! Pentru ce ai ales mai bine pe Varava, iar pe Domnul pentru ce L-ai răstignit?//</p> <p>O sly Pharisees, O guilty people, why hast you set free Barabas but delivered the Saviour to be crucified.</p>
<p>I.62. Pizmăreţ popor, ucigaş blestemat! Ruşinează-te măcar, înviind Hristos, de mahrama şi de giulgiurile Lui.//</p> <p>O bloodthirsty people, jealous and vengeful (Φθονουργέ, φονουργέ, καὶ ἀλάστορ λαέ)! May the very graveclothes and the napkin put you to shame at Christ's Resurrection!</p>	<p>I.62. Ceata celor pizmaşi, care L-au răstignit, ruşinează-se măcar, înviind Hristos, de mahrama şi de giulgiurile Lui.//</p> <p>O envious mob, that crucified Him! May the very graveclothes and the napkin put you to shame at Christ's Resurrection!</p>
<p>II.33. Tu, ca Cel ce eşti, de viaţă dătător, Cuvinte, pe iudei nu i-ai ucis, fiind răstignit; ba chiar şi pe morţii lor îi înviezi.//</p> <p>Since Thou art Life-giver, O Word, when stretched out upon the Cross, Thou hast not slain the Jews (τοὺς Ἰουδαίους) but raised their forefathers from the dead.</p>	<p>II.33. Tu, ca Cel ce eşti de viaţă dătător, Cuvinte, n-ai ucis pe cei ce Te-au răstignit acum, ci-mpreună şi pe-ai lor morţi înviezi.//</p> <p>Since Thou art Life-giver, O Word, when stretched out upon the Cross, Thou hast not slain those who crucified Thou but raised their forefathers from the dead.</p>

<p>II.42. O, neam jidovesc, îndărătnic, ce-ai primit arvuna! Cunoscut-ai ridicarea Bisericii; pentru ce dar pe Hristos L-ai osândit?//</p> <p>Perverse and crooked people of the Hebrews (σκολιώτατον γένος Ἑβραίων), ye knew how the temple would be raised again: why then did ye condemn Christ?</p>	<p>II.42. O, neam păcătos și îndărătnic, ce-ai primit arvuna! Cunoscut-ai ridicarea bisericii; pentru ce, dar, pe Hristos L-ai osândit?//</p> <p>Perverse and crooked people, ye knew how the temple would be raised again: why then did ye condemn Christ?</p>
<p>II.51. O, iudeilor! Rușinați-vă măcar de morții înviați de Dătătorul vieții lor, Cel pe Care, plini de pizmă, L-ați ucis.//</p> <p>Be ashamed, O Jews (ὦ Ἰουδαῖοι), for the Life-giver raised your dead, yet ye slew Him out of envy.</p>	<p>II.51. Fariseilor! Rușinați-vă măcar de morții înviați de Dătătorul vieții lor, Cel pe Care, plini de pizmă, L-ați ucis.//</p> <p>Be ashamed, O Pharisees, for the Life-giver raised your dead, yet ye slew Him out of envy.</p>
<p>III.12. Zis-a înțeleptul: „Groap-adâncă este gâtlejul jidovilor”./</p> <p>As Solomon said, the mouth of the transgressing Hebrews (Ἑβραίων παρανόμων) is a deep pit.</p>	<p>III.12. Zis-a înțeleptul: „Groap-adâncă este pornirea inimii lor”./</p> <p>As Solomon said, the urge of their heart is a deep pit.</p>
<p>III.13. La viclenii jidovi, căilor lor strâmbe curse și ciulini sunt.//</p> <p>In the crooked paths of the transgressing Hebrews (Ἑβραίων παρανόμων) there are thorns and snares.</p>	<p>III.13. La cei fără de lege, căilor lor strâmbe le sunt ciulini și curse.//</p> <p>In the crooked paths of the transgressing people there are thorns and snares.</p>

Remaining anti-Judaic expressions

Nevertheless, other fierce expressions survived in Triodion. The preservation of these expressions is all the more surprising, as they are extremely ruthless regarding the Jewish people. I do not intend to make a complete catalog of all these phrases, but only to give the most telling examples.¹⁰

On Great Thursday, the sixth antiphon from Great Friday matins says: “Astăzi au pironit pe Cruce iudeii pe Domnul, Care a tăiat marea cu toiagul și i-a povățuit în pustie. Astăzi au împuns cu sulia coasta Celui ce a rănit

¹⁰ For elaborate surveys, see: Bert Groen, “Anti-Judaism in the Present-Day Byzantine Liturgy”, in: *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60 (1-4/2008), p. 369-387; Michael G. Azar, “Prophetic Matrix and Theological Paradox: Jews and Judaism in the Holy Week and Pascha Observances of the Greek Orthodox Church”, in: *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 10 (1/2015), p. 1-27 (especially p. 12-21).

Egiptul cu băți pentru ei, și au adăpat cu fiere pe Cel ce le-a plouat mană de mâncare”¹¹ // “Today the Jews nailed to the Cross the Lord who divided the sea with a rod and led them through the wilderness. Today they pierced with a lance the side of Him who for their sake smote Egypt with plagues. They gave Him gall to drink, who rained down manna on them for food”.¹²

The eleventh antiphon of the same service moves to calling for revenge upon the Jews: “Pentru binele pe care l-ai făcut, Hristoase, poporului evreu, Te-au osândit să Te răstignească, adăpându-Te cu oțet și fiere. Ci le dă lor, Doamne, după faptele lor, că n-au cunoscut milostivirea Ta”¹³ // “In return for the blessing which Thou hast granted, O Christ, to the people of the Hebrews, they condemned Thee to be crucified, giving Thee vinegar and gall to drink. But render unto them, O Lord, according to their works, for they have not understood Thy loving self-abasement.”¹⁴

The twelfth antiphon resembles much with the *improperia* (“reproaches”) of the Catholic Church: “Acestea zice Domnul către iudei: Poporul Meu, ce am făcut vouă? Sau cu ce v-am supărat? [...] Poporul Meu, ce am făcut vouă? Și cu ce Mi-ați răsplătit? În loc de mană, cu fiere; în loc de apă, cu oțet; în loc să Mă iubiți, pe Cruce M-ați pironit”¹⁵ // “Thus says the Lord to the Jews: O My people, what have I done unto thee? Or wherein have I wearied thee? [...] O My people, what have I done unto thee, and how hast thou repaid Me? Instead of manna thou hast given Me gall, instead of water vinegar; instead of loving Me, thou hast nailed Me to the Cross.”¹⁶

The third sticheron among the stichera chanted with the Beatitudes in the service of Great Friday matins uses even the term θεόκτονος (“murderer of God”): “Mulțimea ucigătorilor de Dumnezeu, neamul iudeilor cel fără de lege”¹⁷ // “The murderers of God, the lawless nation of the Jews”¹⁸ (Τῶν θεοκτόνων ὁ ἔσμός, Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος τὸ ἄνομον). Finally, the sticheron idiomelon at the Lauds in the same service during the Great Thursday, proclaimed the destruction of the Jewish people: “Răstignindu-Te Tu, Hristoase [...] înălțându-Te astăzi se pierde neamul evreiesc”¹⁹ // “For when Thou wast raised up today, the people of the Hebrews was destroyed”²⁰ (γένος Ἑβραίων ἀπώλετο).

¹¹ *Triodul*, 2010, p. 609.

¹² *The Lenten Triodion*, p. 577.

¹³ *Triodul*, 2010, p. 611.

¹⁴ *The Lenten Triodion*, p. 582-583.

¹⁵ *Triodul*, 2010, p. 611; cf. p. 631.

¹⁶ *The Lenten Triodion*, p. 583.

¹⁷ *Triodul*, 2010, p. 613.

¹⁸ *The Lenten Triodion*, p. 589.

¹⁹ *Triodul*, 2010, p. 619.

²⁰ *The Lenten Triodion*, p. 597.

A farther example might be found sometimes in the normal service of the vespers. Although not included in the printed liturgical books, sometimes one can hear the hymn “Acum liberează pe robul Tău, Stăpâne” // “Lord, now let your servant depart” (cf. Lk. 2.29-32)²¹ without the explicit reference to the people of Israel at the end. Instead of “și slavă poporului Tău Israel” // “the Glory of Your people Israel” some cantors sing “și slavă poporului Tău credincios” // “the Glory of Your faithful people”.²² This elusion reflects without any doubt a supersessionist theology.

A short evaluation regarding the liturgical texts

Indeed, it is obvious that the text of the Enkomia from Good Friday evening was censored, while, just a day before, during the service of Good Thursday evening, although more hostile against the Jews, remained untouched. Why such a difference? The explanation could be found in the fact that the Enkomia were sung by the whole community, as in the case of the Resurrectional troparion on musical notes. Pocket editions meant to be looked through by the participants are commonly at the disposal of the congregants. Instead the texts of Good Thursday are sung by the choirs or the church singers, so are easily overlooked by the community.

This censorship of the Enkomia was made by the liturgical commission of the Romanian Patriarchy and assumed by the Holy Synod. Certainly, both the reintroduction of the verses from the Enkomia that were missing during the communist era, but also their modification was supervised through the blessing of the Romanian Patriarch.

To evaluate such a change, we must overcome the fundamentalist rhetoric, which sees in this change a betrayal of the Orthodox tradition. Rather, the censorship of the Enkomia demonstrates pastoral care towards the community of the faithful. We can say that already in the Romanian Orthodox Church a partial reform of the cult has been undertaken since 2010, using as a principle the censorship of the texts that are directly accessed by the congregants, while the texts used by the choirs remained untouched.

In order to understand the inherent limitation of this small, silent reform, we must bear in mind that, although the Orthodox Churches are

²¹ “Acum liberează pe robul Tău, Stăpâne, după cuvântul Tău, în pace; că văzură ochii mei mântuirea Ta, pe care ai gătit-o înaintea feței tuturor popoarelor: luminează spre descoperirea neamurilor și slavă poporului Tău Israel” // “Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, a Light to lighten the Gentiles, the Glory of Your people Israel”.

²² Alexandru Mihăilă, “Poporul Israel și vremea de a face: două popasuri liturgice”, in: <https://almihaila.wordpress.com/2018/10/15/poporul-israel-si-vremea-de-a-face-doua-popasuri-liturgice/>, viewed on May 5, 2019.

autocephalous, and although there are small liturgical differences between them, general consensus towards the liturgical texts is expected from all Orthodox Churches, a consensus that might only be obtained in a Pan-Orthodox synod. Due to the political tensions between the Russian Church and Ecumenical Patriarchate such an agenda for a Pan-Orthodox synod seems to be beyond the expectations at least for the present time.

Are there modifications in the biblical text?

As already mentioned at the beginning of this study, it is worth noting that some modern Bible translations even integrated in their text the tendency to avoid anti-Judaic expressions. To give two important examples, the New English Translation (2007) and the new edition of Traduction Œcumenique de la Bible (2010) opted for rendering “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) through “the Jewish leaders” and “les autorités juives”, respectively.²³ NET translation is a new one, but in TOB one can see the new direction: in previous editions of the translation, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is plainly rendered through “les juifs”.

Did the Romanian Bible translation adopt such accommodations? As far as I know, the Synodal Romanian Bible edition doesn't have such modifications that aim to avoid the anti-Judaic bias. I only want to briefly discuss an allegedly problematic verse in 3 Kings (1 Kings) 10.14. For this, the table below shows the difference (in bold letters).

Romanian Bible 1914 with English translation from the Orthodox Study Bible	Romanian Synodal Bible 2018
<p>Și eră cumpănitura aurului ce venea lui Solomon într'un an, șase sute șasezeci și șase de talanți de aur//</p> <p>The weight of gold that came to Solomon in a year was six hundred sixty-six talents of gold</p>	<p>Greutatea aurului care i se aducea pe fiecare an lui Solomon era de șase sute șaizeci de talanți de aur//</p> <p>The weight of gold that came to Solomon in a year was six hundred sixty talents of gold</p>

The amount of Solomon's tribute, 666 talents of gold, was related by some commentators beginning with the middle ages to the number of the

²³ 32 verses in NET: Jn. 1.19; 2.18,20; 5.10,15,16,18; 7.1,11,13,15,35; 8.22; 9.18,22; 10.24,31,33; 11.8; 13.33; 18.12,14,31,38; 19.4,7,12,14,31,38; 20.19. 29 verses in TOB 2010: “les autorités juives”: Jn. 1.19; 2.18; 5.10,15,18; 7.1,11,13,15,35; 8.22; 9.18,22; 10.19,24; 11.8,54; 13.33; 18.12,14,31,36,38; 19.4,7,12,31,38; 20.19. TOB renders “ces Juifs” in Jn. 2.20; 5.16; 10.31; 19.14. I could find a single omission, a proof of the inconsistency, in Jn. 10.33 (“les juifs”).

beast, 666 (Rev. 13.18).²⁴ Supporters of the conspiracy theory interpreted the error from the Romanian Synodal Bible as a deliberate modification in order to avoid a negative attitude against the Jews.²⁵ There are, indeed, other cases that might suggest correcting the mathematics of the inspired biblical author. In Numbers 3:28, the Romanian Synodal Bible corrects (following the Lucian recension of the Septuagint) the numbers of the Kohathites from 8,600 to 8,300 in order to keep the right sum of the Levites to 22,000 (Num. 3.39). In 3 Kings 10:14, some interpreters saw also a sum that should be corrected: “It’s futile to connect the number 666 with Revelation 13:18. When you add Hiram’s loan of 120 talents of gold (9.14) with the 420 talents brought in by the navy (9.28) and the 120 talents given by the queen of Sheba (10.10), you have a total of 660 talents of gold”.²⁶

So did the Romanian Synodal Bible, probably using an exegetical suggestion to correct the sum of 666 talents of gold, deliberately modify the biblical text of 3 Kings 10.14 in a pro-Jewish direction? There are substantial clues that the answer is no. The sum offered in 3 Kings 10.14 could not be made up from the context, because the Romanian Bible has also an error in 3 Kings 9.14 (100 talents instead of 120). On the other hand, if a pro-Jewish attitude supporter changed the biblical text of 3 Kings 10.14, he obviously didn’t do a good job, as the parallel text of 2 Chron 9.13 remained unchanged. I could not find a suitable explanation for the 660 talents in the Romanian Bible, but to see here a proof of modifying the Scripture on behalf of a positive approach toward the Jews is seemingly out of the question.

Regarding the opportunity to insert into the biblical text the result of the exegetical discussions, as NET and TOB have done with the expression οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, I believe that the translators should respect the options of the biblical author, who might have referred to the Jewish religious leaders, but chose instead to generalize as a strategy to communicate the Christian message. On the other hand, footnotes such as those already used in the Synodal Biblical editions are necessary to explain the actual meaning of the term to a reader unacquainted with the historical context.

²⁴ Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, vol. II: *Trezire duhovnicească*, București, Evanghelistos 2003, p. 195; Already Bede the Venerable, “Explanation of the Apocalypse 13:18”, in: William C. Weinrich (ed.), *Revelation*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament XII, Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press 2005, p. 213.

²⁵ <https://saccsiv.wordpress.com/2015/08/18/de-ce-au-modificat-in-editiile-noi-ale-bibliiei-cei-666-de-talanti-cu-660-de-talanti-comparatie-cu-ce-scria-in-biblia-din-1688/>, viewed on May 5, 2019.

²⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, Colorado Springs, David Cook 2007 p. 636.

Desires for reforming the liturgical texts

I will now turn to the views expressed by some Orthodox theologians, especially Romanians, on the topic regarding the modification of the liturgical text.

Let's start, chronologically, with the supporters of the fundamentalist view. Danion Vasile, a successful theologian from Romania, condemned the modification: "This non-unitary censorship [...] cannot bring any useful fruit. The moment we start censoring the cult, we no longer believe it has divine inspiration and deny the grace of the Holy Fathers and the priests who made the holy service."²⁷ He represents many unvoiced Orthodox believers, who stress the unchangeability of the liturgical text, viewed on the same level as the biblical one.

In an excellent monograph published in Oxford (2014) about the position of the Old Testament in the Orthodox Church, Father Eugen Pentiuc also deals at one point with the hot subject of anti-Jewish statements. His opinion deserves to be quoted entirely:

A concrete step in this direction can be taken in the area of liturgical life. The Orthodox Church, as a whole, and especially and more effectively the hierarchs, should revise and discard anti-Judaic statements and allusions from hymnography and from liturgy itself, as a matter of fact. The poetry of Eastern Orthodox hymns is too sublime to be marred by such low sentiments echoing from a past dominated by religious quarrels and controversies. Just a frugal look at the Orthros service on Good Friday will make any honest believer wonder if some of the hymns are appropriate for such a holy day, or indeed for any day of the liturgical year [...] Having said this, I am not calling here on a quick and in toto revision of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, but rather for an ongoing serious reflection and congenial discussion on those anti-Judaic statements in hymnography, which are not and should not be part of such a sophisticated and Christ-centered tradition as is the Orthodox. I am deeply cognizant of the fact that there are strong and passionate voices on each end of the spectrum. On the one hand, there are folks urging for immediate individual | or group-based actions. Unfortunately, such a drastic and brusque move will lead to an unnecessary division within the Church with regrettable consequences hard even to imagine. On the other hand, there are stark defenders of the status quo: Liturgy is the *lex orandi*, higher even than the *lex credenda* (theology), so there must be no liturgical revision at all. Painfully enough, such a position continues to convey a wrong message to the

²⁷ Danion Vasile, *Evangelia versus Iuda*, București, Sophia 2006, p. 104 (my translation).

non-Orthodox. Both extremes, as life may prove it, are perilous and should be avoided. However, the significant number of believers, even among theologically educated folks, who support the “conservative” view, worries me because it shows an increased level of insensitivity toward Jews who suffered also due to this kind of “soft” and “inoffensive” anti-Judaic rhetoric encountered in hymns or homilies (see Chrysostom’s *Eight Homilies Against the Jews*). It is my strong conviction that theologians and clergy have a duty to cultivate the basic human values among believers. Doing so, we can hope that one day, the Church as a whole, starting with the grass-roots level, will reach that stage of maturity and sensitivity so needed for a serious, well balanced, peace building, and sustainable revision.²⁸

Father Pentiuc militates totally for the suppression of anti-Jewish passages, but he is aware that this task belongs to the hierarchy (Holy Synod). The suppression of these passages by believers could not be effective, because it might lead to divisions within the Church. Interestingly, Father Pentiuc refers to the anti-Judaic hymns of the Good Friday matins, which are the harshest.

In the same year, the biblical scholar Alexandru Ioniță from Sibiu spoke of such changes in a liturgical renewal within the Church.

Currently, two extremes are fighting for primacy: some want to eliminate anti-Judaic texts, following the Protestant [and the Catholic – my note] example, while others cling to the liturgical texts [...]. Few Orthodox theologians and faithful have the desire to find a middle road, which means living the ritual in a meaningful, consciously assumed way. I believe that the Eastern Church needs to revise the ritual in the primary meaning of the word *before* eliminating hymns from the ritual order. In this way, we can examine liturgical texts not only in the context of the liturgy, but also within a scientific framework [...] The elimination of ten verses from the Enkomion shows that certain sensitivity towards these issues has existed before, but the furtive nature of their removal indicates that it did not happen as part of a larger movement. The fact that the revision was made by the hierarchical forum of the Orthodox Church suggests the need for increased consideration for the relationship between biblical and liturgical texts.²⁹

In his contribution, A. Ioniță focused on the necessity to engage in a careful revision of the Orthodox liturgical service.

²⁸ Eugen J. Pentiuc, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, Oxford–New York, Oxford University Press 2014, p. 40–41.

²⁹ Alexandru Ioniță, “Byzantine Liturgical Texts and Modern Israelology: Opportunities for Liturgical Renewal in the Orthodox Church”, in: *Studia Liturgica* 44 (2014), p. 151–162.

In 2017 Bogdan Bucur, a Romanian scholar who teaches at Dukes University, specializing in biblical studies and early Christian exegesis, argued vividly for the elimination of the anti-Judaic texts:

It is unconscionable today and unnecessary to continue singing that by Christ's lifting up on the Cross "the Hebrew race (γένος Ἑβραίων) was destroyed". Whatever we can say about the theological intention of this statement, pastoral sensitivity to the sufferings inflicted, not long ago, upon millions of people simply for belonging to the "Hebrew race" by dictatorial states whose inhabitants claimed allegiance to the Christian faith, should guide the way in which the Church proclaims its doxological theology. By the same token, we must have the necessary sensitivity for Orthodox Christians whose relations with Judaism are shaped by the experience of being marginalized and oppressed within the State of Israel.³⁰

Bucur is more sensitive towards the political issues: the post-Holocaust international context and the marginalization feelings of the Palestinian Christians. For him, there are serious grounds for eliminating such anti-Judaic expression from the Orthodox cult.

In March 2018 Father Lawrence Farley wrote in his blog on the same topic: "I suggest therefore that some of the verses be altered. For example, the stich which reads, "O blood-guilty people, faithless Israel, the murderer Barabbas you set free, but delivered the Saviour to the cross" could be altered to "O blood-guilty and faithless Sanhedrin, the murderer Barabbas you set free..." One need not approach such revision legalistically, taking care to alter every single hymn. Personally, I would leave the hymn, "Today the Jews nailed to the Cross the Lord who divided the sea" just as it is. It is the hymnography in general that concerns us. By altering a few stichs to make clear that the Jewish responsibility for Christ's death is not a generalized racial one, we make clear the intent of all the hymns. This is not a matter of political correctness, but of simply making ourselves clear".³¹ He maintained a more balanced position, recommending the elimination only of the hardest expressions, while suggesting the maintenance of the reference to the Jews in other hymns.

The impetus for me to discuss the present theme came a couple of years ago, when I read in *The Jerusalem Post*, that a group of twelve priests

³⁰ Bogdan G. Bucur, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric in Byzantine Hymnography: Exegetical and Theological Contextualization", in: *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 61 (1/2017), p. 39-60. A shorter version appeared under the title "«The Murderers of God, the Lawless Nation of the Jews...»: Coming to Grips with Some of Our Holy Week Hymns" in: *The Word* 61 (3/2017), p. 13-18.

³¹ <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/nootherfoundation/holy-week-anti-semitism/>, viewed on May 5, 2019.

from five different Orthodox churches (Russian, Greek, Ukrainian, Georgian and Ecumenical) signed a petition in April 2017 for excising anti-Judaic passages from the liturgy.³² As expected, the Anti-Defamation League of New York endorsed their claim.³³ I do not know the reactions that their petition aroused in the churches at home, but it seems that the Orthodox cult faced recent challenges.

The actuality of the topic is obvious, although I noticed that the discussion took place especially among biblical scholars, aware of the important role played by the people of Israel for the history of salvation, and not among liturgists. On the other hand, none of the theologians quoted above did go further, proposing the modification of the biblical text, but limiting the accommodation to the liturgical text.

The language of the Scripture (Old Testament)

In my opinion, a short insight into the biblical way of speaking might be instructive and could offer a solution to the question of whether to modify the liturgical (and biblical) texts, removing or tempering anti-Judaic elements.

First of all, we can observe the anti-Canaanite polemics within the Hebrew Bible.³⁴ A few instances, that can be fully quoted, may suffice. “When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you – the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you – and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. [...] For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deut. 7.1-2,6). The urge to annihilate the Canaanite population could be found outside the Pentateuch as well. “Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Sam. 15.3). A text that describes the practicing of the divine command marks the beginning of the Israelite conquest of the land, the fall of the city of Jericho: “The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction [...]

³² <https://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Priests-Remove-anti-Semitic-liturgy>, viewed on May 5, 2019.

³³ <https://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/ADL-Excise-anti-Semitic-liturgy-from-Orthodox-Church>, viewed on May 5, 2019.

³⁴ A. Mihăilă, “Limitele comunității în provincial persană Yehud”, in: Eugen Munteanu et al. (eds.), *Receptarea Sfintei Scripturi: între filologie, hermeneutică și traductologie*, vol. 2: *Lucrările simpozionului Național “Explorări în tradiția biblică românească și europeană”*, 2th ed., Iași, 2011, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” 2012, p. 281-297.

Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys” (Josh. 6.17,21).

Nonetheless, from the historical point of view, there was no holy war waged against the Canaanites. The holy war was a literary and ideological construct, not a reality, “philosophy, not history”. It developed during the Persian period, when the returnees from the Babylonian exile felt themselves a politically and economically weak community, found under the spectre of dissolution into the population of the province of Yehud called the “people of the land” (Hebrew *‘am ha’aretz*) (Ezra 4.4; with the variations “peoples of the land” cf. Ezra 10.2,11; Neh. 9.24; 10.31-32 and “peoples of the lands” cf. Ezra 9.1-2,11; Neh. 9.30; 10.29). Canaanite became a scornful word, as can be noticed in an address by the prophet Daniel to one of the two elders who accused Susanna: “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah” (Susanna 1.56). The anti-Canaanite polemics prove an endangered community that struggles to keep its religious identity and therefore needs a fundamentalist language.

Studying the Holy Week hymns, Azar argued for an interesting influence from the prophets and the Psalms on the style of the liturgic texts, “including the sometimes hyperbolic accusation that *all* of God’s people had rejected him and his prophets”.³⁵ As the Canaanites were ideological opponents to the community of the people of Israel, in the same way the Church constructed the separation from the Jewish synagogue. It is not a xenophobic feeling, but an identity marker that needs delimitation from the others.

The language of the Scripture (New Testament)

This anti-Canaanite polemics continued in the New Testament with the anti-Judaic polemics of the early Church, which appear mostly in the Gospel according to John.³⁶ The wording in Greek could of course hurt the modern concepts.

Just to give some examples, quoted from the literal NRSV (1989) and when necessarily from ESV (2001): “Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath” (Jn. 5.16); “For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not

³⁵ M.G. Azar, “Prophetic Matrix”, p. 11.

³⁶ Tom Thatcher, “John and the Jews: Recent Research and Future Questions”, in: R. Alan Culpepper, Paul N. Anderson (eds.), *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context*, Resources for Biblical Study 87, Atlanta, SBL Press 2017, p. 3-38; Alicia D. Myers, “Just Opponents? Ambiguity, Empathy, and the Jews in the Gospel of John”, in: Sherri Brown, Christopher W. Skinner (eds.), *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press 2017, p. 159-176; Cornelis Bennema, “«The Jews»: Jesus’s Opponents Par Excellence”, in: idem, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press 2nd ed. 2014, p. 87-100; Cornelis Bennema, “The Identity and Composition of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John”, in: *Tyndale Bulletin* 60 (1/2009), p. 239-263.

only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God" (5.18); "After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him" (7.1); "Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews" (7.13); "His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue" (9.22); "The Jews took up stones again to stone him" (10.31); "The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God'" (10.33); "The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you'" (11.8); "So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him" (18.12 ESV); "Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people" (18.14); "The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God'" (19.7); "Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews" (19.38); "the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews" (20.19).

Similarly, Jesus said about the Jews (10.24) that they "do not belong to my sheep" (10.26). Discussing John 10.32 and the relation with the *improperia* ("reproaches") from the twelfth Antiphon, Great Friday matins, Azar observes: "the Holy Week hymns simply follow in that tradition".³⁷

A well-known passage, that generated much debate³⁸, is 1 Thess. 2.14-16: "For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews (ὕπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων), who killed both the Lord Jesus (τῶν καὶ τὸν Κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν) and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God (καὶ Θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων) and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins (εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας πάντοτε); but God's wrath has overtaken them at last (ἐφθασε δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος)". It is not important whether the text is authentic Pauline – and so Jewish –

³⁷ M.G. Azar, "Prophetic Matrix", p. 17.

³⁸ Rob van Houwelingen, "«They Displease God and Are Hostile to Everyone» – Antisemitism in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16", in: *Sárospataki Füzetek* 22 (2/2018), p. 115-129; Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Is Paul Anti-Jewish? Testament of Levi 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16", in: *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (3/2003), p. 408-427; Frank D. Gilliard, "The Problem of the Antisemitic Comma between 1 Thessalonians 2.14 and 15", in: *New Testament Studies* 35 (4/1989), p. 481-502; idem, "Paul and the Killing of the Prophets in 1 Thess. 2:15", in: *Novum Testamentum* 36 (3/1994), p. 259-270.

or a late insertion. The polemic is not ethnically intended, but stresses the ideological difference between the Church and the Synagogue.

I would suggest that understanding the function of the biblical language could provide a solution to the issue of changing liturgical texts.

A possible solution

After reviewing other opinions on the anti-Judaic expressions in the liturgical service of the Orthodox Church, now I can formulate a proposal.

First of all, we can approach the question of the possibility to change the liturgical texts. Would such modifications be un-Orthodox? We can observe a difference between the biblical text and the liturgical one. While the biblical text is sacrosanct and impossible to change for the Orthodox, the liturgical text was in fact transformed during the centuries. In the Byzantine liturgy, we don't pray now for the basileus, but the Great litany in Romanian has a modified prayer for "pentru binecredinciosul popor roman de pretutindeni, pentru conducătorii țării noastre, pentru mai marii orașelor și ai satelor și iubitoarea de Hristos oaste"³⁹ // "the faithful Romanian people from everywhere, for the leaders of our country, for the officials of the cities and villages and for the Christ-loving army"⁴⁰. Also, as a suitable update we now pray for "pentru cei ce călătoresc pe uscat, pe ape și prin aer"⁴¹ // "those who travel on the ground, by sea and by air"⁴². Another example is the Synodikon of Orthodoxy proclaimed in the first Sunday of Lent, that was completely removed in the Romanian liturgical tradition and is censured in the Greek speaking churches (eluding the imprecation against "the Greeks" [Ἕλληνες]). So, modifying the liturgical texts wouldn't be so problematic as stressed by some fundamentalist authors.⁴³

Secondly, the other extreme, to change all the hymns and to remove every single reference to the Jews will separate the biblical narrative from its his-

³⁹ Great Litany of St John Chrysostom's Liturgy, see: *Liturghierul*, 2012, p. 136.

⁴⁰ My translation.

⁴¹ *Liturghierul*, 2012, p. 137.

⁴² My translation.

⁴³ See, for example, the intervention of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Peristerion, "Christian Orthodoxy and Judaism in the Modern World: Discussion", in: *Immanuel* 26-27 (1994), p. 125-126: "As to hymns of Holy Thursday and Holy Friday, I do not consider it possible to change them because they are a subject of this same Testament. All hymns of the Holy Week are almost a copy of the stories of the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel. As a Church we do not have the right to rewrite the Gospel, and as a consequence we cannot erase the contents of the hymns. On the other hand, we should not forget that these hymns express the scheme of divine economy, not only as it was expressed by the authors of the New Testament, but also as it was expressed by the Prophets of the Old Testament, for instance the prophet Isaiah. We cannot, therefore, change the scheme of the divine economy by removing one element or the other. It is absurd in the Christological and the soteriological field".

torical context. In Azar's words: "To *completely* dehistoricize the texts in such a way that Jews become entirely uninvolved in Christ's ultimate demise would lose what is a tremendously essential element of the hymns: that the Creator and Redeemer from the Books of Moses is rejected by the same people whom he created and redeemed. To completely dehistoricize would lose the stark juxtaposition, the marvel of paradox, that so underscores the way Orthodoxy understands the mystery of the God-Man who was voluntarily crucified on a tree that he created".⁴⁴ For Azar the real problem consists in the fact that sometimes the community identifies itself exclusively with the Gentiles.⁴⁵

Between these two extremes, my proposal will be much conservative. I believe we should maintain the anti-Judaic statements as religious rhetoric and as elements defining the community identity, but they must be carefully explained. Since footnotes are not appropriate for the liturgic books, introductions signed by ecclesiastical authority or sermons held by the local clergy could support the friendship toward the Jewish community and a suitable interpretation of the anti-Judaic expressions. As Bert Groen argued, "Greek rhetoric has an emotional meaning different from the Western European that tends to be more sober. Not only praise but also abuse is earlier uttered and may already be forgotten on the next day. Also, today in Greece and the Near East, it may happen that first there is an intense controversy and then the opponents drink coffee or ouzo together. Things that may sound terrible in German or in English might sound different in Greek or Arabic".⁴⁶ That is why such anti-Judaic expressions should not be understood as antisemitic utterances on the part of the Orthodox Church. Rather they represent the need of the Orthodox community, in continuation with the biblical ways of speaking, to articulate its identity through radical separation from the Synagogue.

I believe, therefore, that the silent reform already present in the Romanian Orthodox Church is an optimal solution. The censorship only of texts that are closer to the public seems to me salutary because it retains both the historical background (the involvement of the Jews at that time) and the care that believers do not remain with the idea that the Jews are generally guilty of Christ's death. But this reform should have been done through a courageous, explicit assumption on the part of the religious authorities in Romania, and amid more extensive discussions. Such explanations could be included in the preface of the service books (Triodion, pocket editions of Enkomia) and the biblical texts of the anti-Canaanite or anti-Judaic polemics could be given as examples for the religious need of the community to distinguish themselves from outsiders and understand their limits.

⁴⁴ M.G. Azar, "Prophetic Matrix", p. 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 21, footnote 49.

⁴⁶ B. Groen, "Anti-Judaism", p. 381.