

The Increasing Social Relevance of the Catholic Liturgical and Theological Reform Regarding Judaism (Nostra aetate 4): an Orthodox Point of View*

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One of the smallest and most influential documents of Vatican II is the Nostra aetate (declaration. The dynamic of the discussions as it was formulated and the subsequent arduous process of and reception application on local church level proved that the reconsideration of the attitude of the Roman-Catholic Church towards Judaism was concealing unforeseen consequences at the moment of the promulgation. Not only that Nostra aetate has been a turning point for the relationships between Catholicism and Judaism, but it has opened and encouraged – of course, along other documents of the council – a whole new perception of one another and of the ecumenical dialogue. The Jewish response to the 50 years Jubilee of Vatican II confirms the ultimately social relevance of the possible collaboration between Christians and Jews in ethical issues. This paper puts at the fore the Nostra aetate as example for the Orthodox Church as well, and draws attention to the many benefits that may follow such responses.

Keywords: *liturgical renewal; Nostra aetate; Orthodox liturgy; anti-Judaism; ecumenism; social theology*

Introduction: « Je ne veux pas être un souvenir, je serai pour vous un appel »¹

In March 2016, a street in Paris was given a new name and this was a name that surprised many people. It was the name of Saint Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945), already canonized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2004. The street was officially opened in the presence of several representatives of the Orthodox Churches in Paris, of local political public figures, but also

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¹ “I don’t want to be a memory, I will be a call for you,” among the last words of nun Maria Skobtsova quoted by Catherine Vieu-Charier in her inaugural discourse of the street in Paris. Source: <http://orthodoxie.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/DISOURS-CATHERINE-VIEU-CHARIER-Inauguration-rue-M%C3%A8re-Marie-Skobtsov-31-03-2016.pdf>, viewed 23. 01. 2017.

of the Leader of the Parisian Islamic community; who were also joined by Jewish representatives from Jerusalem. What was what made it possible for a street in Paris to be given the name of a recently canonized saint of the Orthodox Church? And how come lay political officials took part in such an event, together with religious representatives of Judaism and Islam? These questions lead to the acknowledgement of the importance of some recent events still not sufficiently understood in the present media tumult and which still await proper reception, especially in the countries of the Orthodox East from where St. Mary of Paris comes.² The social impact of this event has surely had a far wider effect than the one had by monographs written on the saint by Sergei Hackel or Jim Forest³, or even by her own theological writings. This public acknowledgement was needed for her deeds “for humanity”⁴ since mother Maria had saved many Jews from being deported during World War II. Then she finally gave her own life for the life of a Jewish woman, and she was eventually gassed in Ravensbrück concentration camp. Her sacrifice for the poor of Paris, for people in misery and in deadly danger, as well as her manner of living in the heart of Paris – in the “desert of the hearts of the people”, as she used to say – have all lead to acknowledging her as “righteous among people” within the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and to posthumous appreciations coming from prominent politicians in Paris.

I found it best to begin my text with this brief illustration of the personality of a militant woman, a saint of the Orthodox Church, although this study has as its subject liturgical reform and especially the contribution of the catholic document *Nostra aetate* to revising catholic worship and theology regarding to Judaism. The reason for this juxtaposition is that Maria Skobtsova and the *Nostra aetate* have a lot in common–

² In the Romanian context we have at least one mention in the news agency of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. See <http://basilica.ro/eveniment-unic-la-paris-inaugurarea-unei-strazi-in-cinstea-unei-sfinte-ortodoxe/>, viewed 22.01.2017.

³ Sergei Hackel, *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova 1891-1945*, Yonkers, Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press 1981; but see also Jim Forest, *Silent as a Stone: Mother Maria of Paris and the Trash Can Rescue*, Yonkers, Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press 2007; and other publication where Mother Maria was mentioned especially for her help for the Jewish Children: Mordechai Paldiel, *Saving the Jews: Amazing Stories of Men and Women who Defied the „Final Solution”*, Rockville, Maryland 2000; Michael Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

⁴ „Mère Marie nous attribue une responsabilité, à nous et aux générations à naître: celui de transmettre le message d'humanité, de générosité et d'altruisme qu'elle a porté tout au long de sa vie, même jusque dans l'horreur de la déportation et de la mort.” Cf. the speech of Catherine Vieu-Charier, the representative of the Mayor of Paris. Source: <http://orthodoxie.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/DISCOURS-CATHERINE-VIEU-CHARIER-inauguration-rue-M%C3%A8re-Marie-Skobtsov-31-03-2016.pdf>, viewed 23. 01. 2017.

if I may be permitted to exaggerate by comparing a person with an official document: 1) They have both been difficult to accept by their contemporaries, namely their conciliar bishops; 2) they are a small, but powerful example; 3) although several decades have passed, both the Catholic declaration and the message of mother Maria have become increasingly more well-known and they remain valid as a *call* which still awaits proper acknowledgement and which challenges every generation to formulate its own acknowledgement.

In what follows I want to address *Nostra aetate* from the perspective of an Orthodox Theologian and to follow recent relevant events in the trajectory of its acknowledgement in catholic and Jewish context. After that I will highlight the difficulties that mark the acknowledgement of its message in the Eastern Orthodox milieu.⁵ In brief, the question that may guide the reader through the following lines is: Could the *Nostra aetate* (hereafter “NA”) be an appropriate model to adopt for the Eastern context? My initiative comes on rather modest grounds since there is still no general perspective on the particular reactions and the general acknowledgement of this document by Orthodox theologians.⁶

From Liturgy to Bible, to Ecumenical Theology and Ethics

NA is doubtlessly a turning point in Catholic theology, and there are some who claim that this would be Vatican II⁷. Fifty years from its official issuing have been celebrated not very long ago (28.10.1965), and the numerous discussions around this event have proven the present relevance and reverberation of a small, but significant text in the whole process of renewal of the Roman Catholic Church for the realities of the 20th century and con-

⁵ A first approach of the *Nostra aetate* from an Orthodox and mostly biblical perspective I have conducted within the annual conference for the Jewish-Christian encounter at “Sfânta Cruce” Monastery (Stânceni, Mureș), which is organized by mother Éliane Poirot and the Fraternity of St. Elijah. The text is accessible in the community review: Alexandru Ioniță, „Nostra aetate – une lecture personnelle d’un point de vue de la théologie orthodoxe”, in: *MIKHIAV* 73-74 (2015), p. 143-159.

⁶ This is the purpose of the research project from which this study is part, financed by Lucian Blaga University (see footnote 1): „The Reception History of the Catholic Declaration about Judaism «Nostra aetate» (1965) in the Orthodox Theology: A Critical Approach”. One has to mention here the overview on catholic-orthodox dialogue as the one offered by Ioan Moga, “Ökumene auf Rumänisch. Zur Rezeption des orthodox-katholischen Dialogs in der rumänischen orthodoxen Theologie (1960-1990)”, in: *Orthodoxes Forum* 25 (1-2/2011), p. 85-104.

⁷ Johann Figl, Ernst Furlinger, „Nostra aetate – Grundsatzklärung über die Beziehungen der Kirche zu den Religionen“, in: Jan-Heiner Tück (ed.), *Erinnerung an die Zukunft. Das zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, Herder 2013, p. 473.

temporary life.⁸ I will not retell here the whole sinuous history of the development and approval of this text⁹, but I have to remind the reader of some of the moments of the initial enterprise which are relevant for this study.

It is well known that the first “fruit” of the Council was liturgical reform, which is the reason that the official documents issued in 1963 have in view liturgical worship (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*).¹⁰ This comes rather naturally for our understanding, because the first half of the 20th century, with its two World Wars and the ensuing all-pervading social changes have led to new sensibilities and needs with regards to liturgical worship in Western Europe. But these worship related documents do not address the issue of anti-Jewish texts in the Latin mass, but have a broader purpose, of rejuvenating liturgical life. They are, nevertheless, a good preparation for the later document with the perspectives of *NA*. For the liturgical constitution (*SC*) has resolutely assessed the importance of the Holy Scriptures for the liturgical service and the need of the Church to rediscover this reality. Moreover, the liturgical lectionary was modified and expanded so that more biblical pericopes would be heard on Sundays, which were joined by pericopes from the Old Testament. For this reason, M. Faggioli, who has been researching in great detail the liturgical reform of the council, says that:

Sacrosanctum concilium and its clear affirmation of the unity between the New and the Old Testament is inseparable from *Dei verbum*, as the new relationship with the Jews brought about by Vatican II is inseparable from the liturgical reform of the council. [...] This inseparability of liturgical reform, biblical renewal, and new relationship with the Jews is confirmed by the reason given by

⁸ See the review *Sens. Juifs et Chrétiens dans le monde aujourd'hui*, *Revue publiée par l'Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France*, with many issues on this topic from both 2015 and 2016. For a broader look at recent literature regarding the Vatican II see: Stefan Tobler, *Das zweite Vatikanische Konzil. 50 Jahre danach*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 142 (6/2017), p. 694-704.

⁹ See the classical work of Karl Müller, *Die Kirche und die nichtchristlichen Religionen. Kommentar zur Konzilerklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen*, Aschaffenburg, Paul Pattloch Verlag 1968, p. 58ff.

¹⁰ Jürgen Bärsch, “Die erste Frucht des Konzils. Die Bedeutung der Liturgiekonstitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* für die Erneuerung des Gottesdienstes der Kirche”, in: Philipp Thull (ed.), *Ermütigung zum Aufbruch. Eine kritische Bilanz des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2013, p. 29-38. For further reading about the relevance and priority of the liturgical renewal for the Vatican II see: Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Collegeville-Minnesota, Liturgical Press 2012, with a chapter also on *NA*, and Timothy Menezes, “A Vision for a Living Liturgy: Past, Present, and Future – *Sacrosanctum Concilium*”, in: Gavin D’Costa, Emma Jane Harris (eds.), *The Second Vatican Council. Celebrating its Achievements and the Future*, London, Bloomsbury 2013, p. 69-84, especially p. 76ff.

Sacrosanctum Concilium for a more abundant reading from Scripture in the liturgy – the history of salvation and the connection between God's works in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ, and the celebration of the liturgy.¹¹

Although the rejuvenating of Catholic liturgical life has been a step so strongly connected to the renewal of Christian theology in relation to Judaism and the Old Testament, some of the actors of this liturgical renewal movement, such as Louis Bouyer or Prosper Gueranger, have been explicitly anti-Semitic.¹²

This brief review of the preceding context of *NA* enables us to understand the difficulties of the process of formulating the declaration in an expression that would have been acceptable for a voting majority in 1965.¹³ One has to recall here that not only in the pre-conciliar times, within the movements for liturgical renewal, but even also during the development of the *NA*, there were quite a few bishops that were against it and their voices were significant. This was the reason for which the commission had to give up some of the assertions it had made, and thus to soften the progressive tone of the declaration. For example, while in the 1964 version one could read that the Church “condemns” all anti-Semitic manifestations, in the final text one reads the term “decries”.¹⁴ In the same way, the intention to drop the old liturgical formulation on the Jews as chosen people was given up.¹⁵ Eventually, nothing was mentioned on the responsibility of the Church in what concerns Christian anti-Judaism and its role in modern anti-Semitism from the time of national-socialism.¹⁶ The declaration was voted and officially promulgated with these amendments, omissions and reservations, but a group of bishops and clerics

¹¹ M. Faggioli, “Liturgy and the new Relationship with the Jews”, in: idem, *True Reform. Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Collegeville-Minnesota, Liturgical Press 2012, p. 114-115.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 115.

¹³ S. Tobler speaks about „scharfe innerkatholischen Kontroversen” in his review of the recent literature on Vatican II: S. Tobler, “Das zweite Vatikanische Konzil. 50 Jahre danach”, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 142 (6/2017), p. 699.

¹⁴ “...decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone”. See: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, viewed 12.02.2017.

¹⁵ For more details concerning the state of liturgical texts after the Vatican II, see: Hubert Wolf, “Liturgischer Antisemitismus? Die Karfreitagsfürbitte für die Juden und die Römische Kurie (1928-1975)”, in: Florian Schuller et al. (eds.), *Katholizismus und Judentum. Gemeinsamkeiten und Verwerfungen vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg, Pustet 2005, p. 253-269.

¹⁶ J. Figl, E. Furlinger, “*Nostra aetate*”, p. 484f.

still did not agree with it and eventually – not only on the basis of *NA* – broke away from the communion with the Roman-Catholic Church.¹⁷ Some have even said about the *NA* that the only practical consequence that it demanded was the open invitation for Christians and Jews to deepen mutual knowledge “through studies and meetings”.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in spite of the many instances on which the *NA* simply goes silent – which was later sanctioned by Jewish theologians as well¹⁹ – this declaration proved to be, especially in subsequent decades, a revolutionary text. But what is it that makes it revolutionary? First of all, the overall tone of the text is a positive one²⁰: the Church “scrutinizes itself”, “appreciates” and proves herself to be aware of the “spiritual common patrimony” with Judaism and strives to highlight the meeting points and the biblical perspective upon Israel present in the Pauline text of *Romans* 9-11. This text is quoted and paraphrased several times during the declaration.²¹ One of the most important results of the declaration consists in the fact that the *NA* is the first official document of the Catholic Church that drops completely “the theology of substitution”. The Church rejects therefore the *supersessionist* manner of interpreting the Old Testament, which has hallmarked the Christian position up to the 20th century, according to which Israel has been surpassed and replaced by Christianity.²² In addition, *NA* rejects the overall condemnation of the Jews as chosen people”, which appears especially in old liturgical texts, and underlines the irrevocable choice and the unique place of the people of Israel in the history of salvation.

The fact that these ideas of the *NA* are grounded on the biblical text of *Romans* 9-11, but with no mention of the patristic tradition, have led

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 473.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 484.

¹⁹ Edward Kessler, “«I am Joseph, Your Brother»: A Jewish Perspective on Christian-Jewish Relations since *Nostra aetate* no. 4”, in: *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), p. 48-72; Daniel Krochmalnik, “In unserer Zeit – *Nostra aetate* jüdisch gelesen”, in: Dirk Ansorge (ed.), *Das Zweite vatikanische Konzil. Impulse und Perspektiven*, Münster, Aschendorf Verlag 2013, p. 246-260.

²⁰ D. Krochmalnik, “In unserer Zeit”, p. 247.

²¹ See Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching her Own Mystery. Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church*, Oregon, Cascade Books 2015.

²² Johannes Schelhas, “Israel”, in: idem, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Geschichte, Themen, Ertrag*, Regensburg, Pustet 2014, p. 131-134, here p. 134. See also the volume entirely dedicated to this topic by Berthold Schwarz (ed.), *Wem gehört das ‘Heilige Land’? Christlich-theologische Überlegungen zur biblischen Landverheißung an Israel*, Edition Israelologie 6, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 2014; G. D’Costa, “Vatican II on Muslims and Jews: The Council’s Teachings on Other Religions”, in: G. D’Costa, E. J. Harris (eds.), *The Second Vatican Council*, p. 105-120, here p. 111.

many authors to a harsh valuation of the reforming spirit of the *NA* which has been viewed as a break with Church Tradition.²³ Then again, others have assessed the declaration as a “seismic shift of attitude towards these religions [Judaism and Islam].”²⁴ In this sense, Gavin D’Costa considers that the process of reception of Vatican II has generated at least four major groups: the first one is the *liberal*, pro-reforming group which wants to conduct ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, and only to a minor extent be tied to the Tradition, claims that the Tradition, at least in what concerns its relation to Judaism, cannot serve as constructive model. The second group is the *traditionalist* group, which appeared as reaction to the first group and one can easily guess its features. One can then mention the *conservative* group, which does not necessarily see in reforming ideas a break with Tradition, but an attempt to adjust to contemporaneity, focusing especially on *continuity*. And, eventually, the group of those who not only did not accept the council, but have also broke with the communion with the Roman-Catholic Church.

Gavin D’Costa pleads for the apparently impossible position of a “liberal conservative”²⁵ – suggesting that „these changes, though radical, are not marked by discontinuity of doctrine.”²⁶ Drawing attention that the *NA* must not be read separately from other documents of the council, just as Faggioli above, that is not without its context within other documents, the author sees in the *NA* a still unfulfilled potential in its 50 years of existence.

The Roman-Catholic Commitment to Put into Effect the *NA* and Its Ecumenical Fruits

The difficulties in formulating this declaration during the council have not been resolved, but by the difficult path of its reception within the Church at local, pastoral level. After decades of debates and especially after the opening of the Roman Catholic Church towards Judaism, one could observe unhopd for effects of the declaration which have gone much further than the text itself implied. The text is actually a *compromise version* for its time which attempts to make peace between divergent parties at the council, as O. Rota justly observes in his evaluation:

²³ “ein klarer Bruch mit einer fast 2000 Jahre zurückreichenden Tradition...” J. Figl, E. Förlinger, „*Nostra aetate*” p. 485.

²⁴ G. D’Costa, “Vatican II”, p. 111.

²⁵ G. D’Costa, “Vatican II”, p. 106.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

A peripheral question if compared with the questions that prompt an update of the way in which the Church thinks and presents itself, the question of the Church's relationship with the Jewish people had to stir up a long debate which imperceptibly engaged all the Council. For this reason, the fourth paragraph of the *Nostra aetate* was a compromise text, endorsing both a conservative reading, and a generous and open reading.²⁷

But precisely the fact that the *NA* has generated so many other documents²⁸ of the Roman Catholic Church for the promotion of Jewish-Christian dialogue, alongside numerous symbolic gestures and visits made by Pope John Paul II and Benedict XIV with the explicit purpose of endorsing the spirit born with the *NA* proved that this declaration is still a vibrant *spiritus movens* in Catholic-Jewish relations.

One can therefore say about the *NA* declaration that – especially in the decades that followed its issuance – it has become even more significant²⁹, as it has paradigmatically opened the whole of the catholic theology towards inter-religious dialogue, implicitly inspiring and encouraging inter-confessional dialogue as well. For from the essentially missionary attitude of addressing the *other* (*or one another*), which was the hallmark of the whole of the Middle Ages, one goes now to the dialogic paradigm, to the discovery of “the providential mystery of otherness.”³⁰ This is why recent discussions have been talking about the *Nostra aetate* and Vatican II in its whole as an “encouragement for new paths”³¹ and, already fifty years have passed, conciliar texts have been thought of with the paradoxical expression of “remembering the future”³², since there are still many valuable contents which await to be set to effect in the Roman-Catholic Church at local, parish level or in local situations where the innovative spirit of Vatican II has not yet fully entered.

²⁷ Olivier Rota, “Le second Concile de Vatican et la déclaration sur la religion juive (*Nostra aetate*, quatrième paragraphe)”, in: *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 114 (2013), p. 303-318.

²⁸ Philip A. Cunningham, “Official Ecclesial Documents to Implement the Second Vatican Council on Relations with Jews: Study Them, Become Immersed in Them, and Put Them into Practice”, in: *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009), p. 1-36.

²⁹ J. Figl, E. Furlinger, “*Nostra aetate*”, p. 487.

³⁰ Mary C. Boys, “What *Nostra aetate* inaugurated: a Conversion to the Providential Mystery of Otherness”, in: *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), p. 73-104.

³¹ Philipp Thull (ed.), *Ermutigung zum Aufbruch. Eine kritische Bilanz des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2013.

³² J.-H. Tüek (ed.), *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*.

The Jewish Response to NA 4 and the Social Relevance of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue

From the very first public announcements of Vatican II the Church's desire to get reconciled with the world and to renew its apostolicity towards the world was clearly asserted.³³ In this context, with a profoundly social-oriented attitude, the Church had to define its position towards other religions and especially towards Judaism, two decades away from the Shoah. The whole history of the reception and reverberations of the declaration and of the whole council, both inside and outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church, make proof of a change of perspective which one would not have expected in the interwar period, for example. A confirmation of such enthusiastic valuations and of the growing success of the *NA* consists in the fact that, at the peak of the jubilee events with regards to the completion of fifty years from its statement, a considerable number of orthodox rabbis all over the world signed a statement in which appreciation is expressed for the "reaching out" of their Christian brothers. Rabbi Joshua Ahrens – the initiator of this initiative – affirms that:

We go further than any other Judaic position towards Christianity has gone so far. We affirm that Christianity is not an alien cult and that Jesus has helped in spreading the faith in the God of Israel. We ask for a sincere partnership between Christianity and Judaism on the basis of the many ethical conceptions that we share.³⁴

Even though Rabbi Ahrens, along with those who signed the declaration acknowledged the fact that they are not the majority of Orthodox Judaism, and that their initiative was not left without the critique coming from the part of their brothers, especially in Israel³⁵, they are convinced that now is the moment in which Christians and Jews must cooperate, especially when it comes to ethics.³⁶ They affirm that:

³³ O. Rota, "Le second Concile", p. 217ff.

³⁴ Jehoschua Ahrens, "Rabbiner wollen stärkere Annäherung", <http://www.rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/duesseldorf/rabbiner-wollen-staerkere-annaecherung-aid-1.5623797>, viewed 12.03.2017.

³⁵ J. Ahrens, *Rabbi Steven Langnas & Co. und ihre Liebe zum Christentum*, <https://hamantaschen.wordpress.com/2016/01/03/rabbi-jehoshua-ahrens-rabbi-steven-langnas-co-und-ihre-liebe-zum-christentum/>, Published on 3. 01. 2016 by Miriam Woelke, viewed 21.07.2016.

³⁶ I name here the titles of the last meetings within Christian Orthodox-Jewish dialogue: "Faithfulness to Our Sources: Our Common Commitment to Peace and Justice" (Mai 27-

We cannot handle alone the challenges that come from a globalized and secularized world. Together goes better. Today, borders separate not so much Judaism from Christianity as they do the religious from the secular, the ceaseless individualism and the feeling of belonging to a group with a foundation of clear values.³⁷

This reaction of the rabbis has, of course, been a pleasant surprise for all Christians, but things have not stopped so far, because just months afterwards, in the spring of 2016, another more comprising and more detailed document, which explicitly refers to *NA*, was published. In this document one reads, for example, that:

Fifty years ago, twenty years after Shoah, with its declaration *Nostra aetate* (No. 4), the Catholic Church began a process of introspection that led to any hostility toward Jews being steadily expurgated from Church Doctrine, enabling trust and confidence to grow between our respective faith communities. [...] However, doctrinal differences and our inability to truly understand the meaning and mysteries of each other's faiths do not and may not stand in the way of our peaceful collaboration for the betterment of our shared world and the lives of the children of Noah. To further this end, it is crucial that our faith communities continue to encounter, grow acquainted with, and earn each other's trust.³⁸

The fact that this document was issued by the *Conference of European Rabbis (CER)*, *Chief Rabbinate of Israel*, and *The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA)* indicates the level at which discussions have been carried out and especially the willingness to engage in dialogue, to collaborate and to trust each other. Although it took half a century to get to these marvelous results, the richness and deepness of these fruits of ecumenical and social bearing is priceless if one considers the almost two thousand years of hatred, fear and mutual persecutions between Christian and Jews.³⁹

29, 2003, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Thessaloniki); "Religious Liberty and the Relationship between Freedom and Religion" (March 14-15, 2007); "The World in Crisis: Ethical Challenges and Religious Perspectives" (Nov. 10-12, 2009, Athens).

³⁷ Same interview with Rabbi J. Ahrens.

³⁸ See the official document: *Between Jerusalem and Rome. The Shared Universal and Respected Particular. Reflections on 50 Years of Nostra aetate*, www.rabbis.org/pdfs/BetweenJerusalemRome.pdf, viewed 24.01.2017.

³⁹ More about the influence of the declaration on the mutual relations between religions see in James L. Fredericks, Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (eds), *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate*, New-York, Palgrave Macmillan 2015.

Conclusions and Perspectives for the Christian Orthodox World

The fundamental question for an orthodox theologian who gets to know all these facts connected to the *NA* and the profound change of perspective of the Catholic Church towards Judaism is whether the *NA* can be a model for the Eastern Orthodox context. My answer is yes. Of course, such an enterprise in the Orthodox world would face at least the same kind of challenges that the Roman Catholic Church has encountered. To these, one should add many others that are specific for the Eastern and Byzantine world which I intend to address in a further study. But above all I foresee the stern opposition of all those who believe that any import from the West is evil by default, as has been the case with the calendar reform, “an idea from the papists”. If one considers just the fact that the last decades are marked in the West by a whole trajectory of emancipation, adjusting and renewal of the Catholic Church after Vatican II and since the *NA*, and that the same period has been for the eastern countries under the communist regime a reduction to ritualism, and perhaps a full extinction in some places, and so the impact of the Church upon the society and the world as a whole was dramatically reduced, or completely eliminated. These are reasons for which the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe is not yet mature for an introspection and self-assessment. In what concerns its attitude towards Judaism and towards the world, medieval fears of the other still feed conspiracy theories, negative eschatology, dualist conceptions and an altogether leaving behind of the world.

The fact that the dialogue between the Jews and Christian Orthodox fails⁴⁰ because nothing has been officially changed in the anti-Jewish affirmations of the Divine Liturgy, a first and defining impact in the Orthodox context is regrettable. But at the same time, the examples of Christian orthodox who gave their lives for the salvation of their Jewish brothers during the Shoah, such as Maria Skobtsova, or the writings and the attitude of a father such as Lev Gillet even before World War II prove to us that the authentic Christian spirit is not missing from the Orthodox Church, and it does not care for its identity in order to annihilate the other or for political reasons, but it is up for the full sacrificial service to Christ.

I think that Gavin D’Costa’s proposal of being “liberal conservative” is the right direction for the Orthodox world as well, as it possesses a priceless liturgical and patristic patrimony, that only now, after the long Ottoman

⁴⁰ See the contribution of Alina Pătru, “Der bilateral Dialog zwischen Orthodoxie und Judentum ab den 70-er Jahren”, in: *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 2 (1/2010), p. 69-82 and also the entire issue of this review, dedicated to the topic of “Der jüdisch-christliche Dialog im orthodoxen Raum”.

and Communist times, we are able to bring to light and adjust to the times in which we are living which are times of continual change. The courage and trigger for such an attitude has been already inspired for us by many of the 20th century theologians, such as Olivier Clément, Andrew Louth, Eugen Pentiuc and even the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew, who have all encouraged the reconsideration of the Orthodox attitude towards Judaism. The initiative of these Orthodox theologians would lead to a more responsible involvement of the Orthodox Church in the social and political matters of the world. Acknowledgement of the vitality and legitimacy of Jewish existence means to acknowledge the fact that Jesus, as Messiah and Son of God, has come on Earth in a humble manner, but has also announced a second coming in glory, when the Divine Kingdom is instituted. In Orthodox theology one speaks about an “already, but not yet”, which describes an eschatological tension; but, without Judaism, one has too much of “already”. If the Kingdom of Christ is already accomplished then one has too little of “not yet”. Judaism – especially after the tremendous opening that followed the fifty years jubilee from the issuing of the NA – helps us to see the world not only with the eyes of a fulfilled eschatology, but in its concrete reality, in the injustice, poverty, natural disasters and political turmoil that continue in the face of which we are called to have – Christians and Jews alike – redeeming and efficient solidarity, compassion and cooperation, not only in the afterlife, but in the life of here and now.