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## Theology of dialogue in the Ukrainian context

The article describes the Ukrainian theology of dialogue, which is an ecumenical theory of communicative religious rationality, directed against postmodern nihilism and relativism. Being postconfessional in its content, this dialogue theology uses postmodern philosophical concepts to express their own theories.

Keywords: theology, dialog, Christianity, communication, tolerance.

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# RESTORING THE ANCIENT CHURCH HERMENEUTIC OF JACOB'S CHARACTER

This article provides an accurate overview of how the personal name of the patriarch Jacob and his life have been looked upon by diverse groups of people throughout the ages. The study also reveals empirical evidence that in the past the interpretation of Jacob's name strongly impacted both the explanation of the entire life of the patriarch and the biblical narrative of the book of Genesis. For instance, the ancient Christian community predominantly had a highly positive view of the patriarch Jacob, and his personal life had been considered an iconic example of

true faithfulness. Yet, since the post-Nicene period, Jacob's name had been mainly interpreted to mean 'a deceiver'. The rationale for this statement was established on the incorrect etymological assumption that Jacob's name was built on the Hebrew noun בֵק,ע ('aqev) for 'heel', meaning 'he cheats,' but modern archaeological, linguistic, and theological discoveries disproved this view completely. Therefore, the majority of well-respected scholars today agree that the name 'Jacob' came from the Hebrew word ב'ק עי (Ya'aqov), a shortened from of the theophoric name ב'ק עי ף ע (Ya'aqov-el), which means «May God Protect (You)!». Considering these insightful discoveries, the author thoughtfully promotes that an objective methodological reevaluation of the entire life of the patriarch Jacob must be done by the scholarly community based on accurate linguistic analysis of the original text, the correct historical setting, and the author's intention in each particular passage.

Keywords: Rediscovering, text, hermeneutics, the ancient church, Jacob's character; supersessionism, deceive, post–Nicene, criticism, Reformation, archaeological, linguistic, discoveries.

## (стаття друкується мовою оригіналу)

The careful comparison of well-documented historical data reveals that the contemporary dominant view strongly contradicts the biblical hermeneutics of the ancient Christian community, as well as the traditional understanding of Rabbinic Judaism. Since the post-Nicene period, the majority of mainstream theologians, due to socio-political circumstances and the strong influence of the doctrine of supersessionism, presented to the public only a negative interpretation of Jacob's character without any alternative. Today's church is still lacking a balanced, objective study of Jacob's life. Therefore, this paper intends to raise a healthy awareness of this imbalanced misconception and encourage the Christian community to deal impartially with this issue.

For purposes of objectivity, this paper refers to several of the newest publications of recognized scholars whose work has been recently published in well-respected academic journals, such as The Journal of Religious Ethics, and the Southwestern Journal of Theology. This study also points out the relatively new archaeological and linguistic discoveries that have been described in the publications of the secular scholars C. J. Gadd, Stephan D. Simmons, as well as Dr. David Noel Freedman, one of the world's foremost experts on the ancient text. To establish the historical background and identify the time and cause of the far-reaching theological shift in the interpretation of Jacob's character, this investigation is going to make use of the patristic literature, the classical writings of the Catholic Church, the writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, as well as the ancient and contemporary writings of Hebrew scholars. This study finds that, based on the newest findings, the majority of modern scholars and Christian theologians have softened their general view of the patriarch Jacob, and that they have begun to agree with the opinion of their Jewish brethren that the name 'Jacob' came from the Hebrew word בֹיקַעֵיִי (Ya'aqov) and is therefore a shortened form of the theophoric name ב' ק ֶע ַי ן י מע (Ya'aqov–el), which means «May God Protect (You)!». It is an encouraging step forward in the process of restoring the ancient church hermeneutic of Jacob's character. However, much more must be done by the scholarly community to achieve a balanced, widespread study of Jacob's life.

In order to find the right biblical view of the patriarch Jacob, this study is entirely focused on several significant questions: when and why has the Christian community predominantly moved away from the hermeneutics of the early Church, which similarly to Rabbinic Judaism has had a very positive view of Jacob? In addition, why haven't the latest discoveries in the scholarly community had a strong impact on the general view of Jacob among the Church? It is truly remarkable that for many years not only Jacob's personal name but also his character itself have not been interpreted accurately in light of linguistic analysis of the original text, the correct historical setting, and the author's intention in each particular passage.

In order to better illustrate this matter, let us reiterate a few historical facts. To begin with, it is crucial to highlight that the Creator of the universe often refers to Himself throughout the Holy Scriptures as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 50:24; Acts 7:32). For this reason, ancient philosophers as well as Hebrew and Christian communities have predominantly held a positive view of the patriarch Jacob, and his personal life has been considered an iconic example of true faithfulness (Hebrew 11:20–21) [5, p. 1016]. For example, well-known ancient philosopher Philo of Alexandria, in his commentary on the book of Genesis, maintains that «Jacob was a man with an excellent moral character» [31, p. 163]. Similarly, Derek Kidner, as well as many other leading scholars, has confidence that the early Christian community saw that the Old and New Testament writings depicted the patriarch Jacob extremely positively [24, p. 152; 11, p. 203]. Likewise, Hebrew scholars have always held that each step of Jacob's life was guided and protected by Yahweh (/'ja:hwei/ in English; Hebrew: הֶוְהַי [jah'weh]) – the Lord God of the Israelites. As a result, the Jewish Study Bible emphasizes that «the name Jacob derives from 'y-'-k-b-'-l,'» which means «may God protect» [22, p. 49].

In fact, throughout the ages there have always been Christian theologians and laypersons who have had a positive view of the great patriarch Jacob. For instance, Augustine of Hippo, a man who had an enormous impact on Catholic and Reformed theological views, reflected the ancient view, stating that Jacob was «'a simple man living at home.' Some translators have 'guileless' in place of 'simple.' But, whether we say 'guileless' or 'simple' or 'without pretense' for the Greek áplastos... the man himself is guileless» [2, p. 553]. In the same way, St. Ephrem the Syrian (Greek: Έφραίμ ὁ Σῦρος), a Doctor of the Church, had a predominantly positive view of the patriarch Jacob [15, p. 171]. German theologian Martin Luther supports this view, saying: «Jacob had an upright and unspoiled will, was saintly and very zealously devoted to godliness, and was fervent in his desire for the kingdom of God» [28, p. 387]. Likewise, prominent British theologian and founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, also believed that «Jacob was a plain man – an honest man that dealt fairly» [40, p. 53]. The Christian scholar Dr. James L. Kugel, head of the Institute for the History of the Jewish Bible in Israel, also supports this view [25, p. 356; 18, p. 77].

It is essential to point out that the ancient Christian community was not centralized and that for the first few hundred years the palette of Christian belief truly included the whole spectrum of colors. In other words, the ancient Christian community maintained a reasonably strong unity in the presence of a countless variety of opinions. Thus, many social, operational, and theological issues were never completely settled worldwide. In discussing these matters, Dr. Roger E. Olson rightly points out that early on, mutually exclusive views such as Arianism, Sabellianism, and Trinitarianism often co–existed relatively peacefully together within the global Christian community [30, p. 137–142]. However, extraordinary changes took place when the Roman Emperor Constantine «legalized Christianity and created a

mechanism for imperial involvement in the regulation of the life of the Church» [26, p. 132]. In the beginning of the fourth century, under the leadership of the bishop Hosius of Cordoba and with the emperor personally present, the first ecumenical Council of Nicea (325 CE) established a strong need for leadership and doctrinal centralization of all local congregations [19, p. 149]. With this trajectory of the church developing, soon a single, universal theology and headship had been conveyed and popularized by the majority of bishops whose power and social status had been greatly enhanced among society.

Modern researcher Joel Richardson states that since that time the overwhelming majority of the Christian Church has held the view that the Jewish people, because of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah, have been in turn corporately rejected by the Lord God Almighty, and that now the Christian community has succeeded the Israelites as the definitive people of God [21, p. 111–112]. Today this doctrine is known as supersessionism, also called fulfillment theology or replacement theology. Scholars believe that by the end of the fourth century, these views were predominantly accepted as historical certainty and set down as one of the 'main theological principles' described by Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, in his writing, Ecclesiastical History. In this monumental writing, Eusebius argued that the destruction that came upon the entire Jewish nation is the observable penalty laid upon them by divine justice «for the crimes they dared to commit against Christ» [10, p. 68].

Since the development of supersessionism, predominantly negative attitude toward Judaism among the majority of clergy and theologians had been established, which viewed the Jews as having rejected the Lord Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah along with having rejected his teachings. During that time, theologians started to popularize the idea that some of the Old Testament characters, including the patriarch Jacob, had a negative side which should be condemned by all faithful people. The early church theologian Tertullian, often called «the founder of Western theology», is among the first people contributors to the fortification of this understanding. It should be highlighted that today historians have confidence that Tertullian was a strong supporter of Origen's allegorical method of biblical interpretation [14, p. 47; 20, p. 88]. For this reason, Tertullian always promoted the idea that «Christians must read the Old Testament Scripture spiritually and not in the literal fashion of Jews» [42, p. 17]. In addition, Tertullian claimed that the prediction of the Lord God given in the book of Genesis 25:21-25 that «the older will serve the younger» (in the literal meaning speaking of Esau and Jacob), was really a prediction that the community of Israelites would become subservient to the Church [7, p. 160]. In the same way, Tertullian thought Gentiles, having «attain[ed] the grace of divine favor from which Israel has been divorced,» the older (or greater) «Jews must necessarily serve... the (younger) Christian» [32, p. 151–152; 7, p. 80].

This clearly anti-Jewish teaching led to the development of the incorrect etymological assumption that Jacob's personal name is built on the Hebrew noun "." ('aqev) for "heel" meaning, "he grasps the heel" or "he cheats" (Genesis 25:26; 27:36) [8, p. 738]. The historical data also reveals empirical evidence that in the past the interpretation of Jacob's name impacted the explanation of the entire life of the patriarch and the biblical narrative. Therefore, fifth century Christians started to be convinced that the biblical

description depicted Jacob as a quiet «mama's boy» who mainly stayed at home, and that he was a sneaky opportunistic manipulator who knew how to trick the people around him. For all of these reasons, the patriarch Jacob was best known for years as a deceiver. The church clergy asked parishioners of the church to critically consider this, teaching that one day Jacob, seeing his strong, athletic brother weakened by hunger, unmercifully took advantage of that and forced Esau to sell his firstborn right in exchange for a bowl of soup. As a result, according to this view, Esau became a victim of his wicked brother Jacob.

The Protestant Reformation brought major changes within western Christianity. Nonetheless, the doctrine of supersessionism in general, and the post-Nicene interpretation of Jacob's character in particular, remained unchanged. From the very beginning the majority of reformed theologians strongly argued that the patriarch Jacob did not have a character worthy of praise. Thus, the fact that Jacob became «the father of the church was not given as a reward», but only as a pure result of God's grace, which, in the eyes of reformed theologians, is a point that proves the doctrine of predestination [4, p. 224]. For example, in his commentaries on the book of Genesis, John Calvin stated: «Jacob should have willingly satisfied his brother's hunger. But when being asked, he refuses to do so: who would not condemn him for his inhumanity» [4, p. 227]? The Protestant Reformation diminished the life of the patriarch Jacob, and nailed down the post-Nicene iteration both that Jacob's personal name means «a deceiver», and that his desire to buy Esau's birthright was an example of his deceitfulness.

On the other hand, this understanding has been significantly shaken by archaeological and linguistic innovations during the twentieth century. The British Institute for the Study of Iraq published an article by the secular scholar C. J. Gadd in which the author depicts the revolutionary discoveries that have been made in Iraq. The outcome of the linguistic analysis of the «Tablets from Chagar Bazar and Tall Brak» led many academics to the conclusion that the Semitic name Jacob means «may El [God] protect you» [13, p. 22-66]. It should be here noted that the word El or Elohim is a personal divine name for God that is frequently used in the Hebrew Bible. A few years later, the Journal of Cuneiform Studies published a paper by the respected secular researcher Stephen D. Simmons about other archaeological and linguistic discoveries in the Middle East. This article aroused keen interest among a large number of scholars and theologians because 'Early Old Babylonian Tablets from Harmal and Elsewhere' suggested that the patriarch Jacob's name came from a typical Amorite name ya'qub-el, meaning «may El [God] protect you» [35, p. 71-93]. In addition, renowned expert Dr. David Noel Freedman explains that the name 'Jacob' came from the Hebrew word ב קַבֶּע' (Ya'aqov) and is a shortened form of the theophoric name בֹק עֵי וְיֵע (Ya'aqov – el), meaning «May God Protect». Dr. Freedman explains further that a thoughtful reading of the original manuscript of the book of Deuteronomy, in conjunction with ancient non-biblical texts, would lead to the conclusion that the Holy Scripture in the blessing of Moses does indeed include the longer form of Jacob's name (Deuteronomy 33:28) [9, p. 125-126].

Catholic academics under the endorsement of Pope Pius XII completely accepted all of these scholarly arguments and modified their interpretation of Jacob's personal name. This far-reaching decision was reflected in a new biblical commentary called «San Jerónimo» [3, p. 128-129]. Later, this view was also reproduced in The Catholic Study Bible: «the name Jacob has no true etymological connection with the Hebrew word for «heel» (aqeb), but is instead a shortened form of some such name as yaaqob-el («may God protect») [34, p. 30]. In addition, German Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann also points to the newest archaeological and linguistic discoveries, claiming that «the explanation of the name Jacob from the noun בֵק, ע 'heel' is no longer aware of the original meaning of the theophoric name: Iahkûbila, 'may God protect' (M. Noth, Fests. A. Alt [1953] 142 = Ges. Aufs. II [1971] 213–222)» [41, p. 414; 12, p. 382]. Likewise, progressive British Old Testament scholar, Gordon John Wenham, maintains the view that the name Jacob is usually regarded as a shortened form of Ya'qub-el 'may El protect, reward' and «is a typical Amorite name of the early millennium, which is found in inscriptions from Chagar Bazar (1800 B.C.), Qatuna (c. 1700 B.C), and in second-millennium Egyptian texts» [38, p. 176]. Moreover, the leading conservative 'NIV Application Commentary' correspondingly highlights that «the name Ya'qub-el (or using other divine epithets besides 'El') is common in West Semitic and means 'May the God El protect'» [37, p. 549].

The list of distinguished secular, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant scholars who passionately support this view is growing rapidly. For this reason, the New International Biblical Commentary affirms that the majority of Christian biblical scholars recognize that the full form of the name Jacob is 'Jacob–El,' which means 'may El protect him' [17, p. 238]. Likewise, Dr. Victor Hamilton states that «scholars are agreed that the name Jacob is an abbreviated name, of which the longer form is 'Jacob-El,' or va'qub-alel. The meaning would be 'May El protects (him)' or 'El will protect (you)'» [16, p. 178–179]. Based on the newest archaeological and linguistic discoveries, the majority of Christian scholars in the present day agree with their Jewish brothers' view that the name 'Jacob' came from the Hebrew word ב'ק\_ע (Ya'agov) and it is a shortened form of the theophoric name בֹק ע י וָי ע (Ya'aqov-el), which means «May God Protect (You)!»

This development is an encouraging step forward in the process of restoring the ancient church hermeneutic of Jacob's character. Nevertheless, even though the scholarly view of the patriarch has been moderated, it has not had a substantial impact on the general view of Jacob's character among the clergy and parishioners of the church. This appears to be happening because the majority of contemporary clerics have inherited the erroneous view of Jacob's character from their preachers, theological seminaries, and biblical commentaries over a long period of time, and it is impossible to change a ship's course overnight. In addition, most pastors, preaching to their growing flock, are busy with their daily responsibilities and are not able to keep up with all new ideas or discoveries in the field of biblical studies. However, the most invasive problem is that Jacob's purchase of the birthright from his brother Esau is still viewed as an immoral action. As a demonstration of this argument, people frequently use the words of Esau when he said that Jacob had supplanted him: «Isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing» (Genesis 27:36).

Of course, any reader should consider this strong allegation. However, it is important to give emphasis to the fact that once the chief priests and the Pharisees openly accused the Lord Jesus Christ of being «a demon–possessed deceiver» (John 7:12, 20, 47). In the same way, an objective criticism of anyone must be established based on accurate linguistic analysis of the original text, the correct historical setting, and the author's intention in each particular passage. In light of this fundamental exegetical, homiletical, and fully rational frame of hermeneutics, contemporary impartial readers have to remember that the biblical text includes statements that may or may not be correct and are not necessarily always supported by the narrator. Thus, during the reading of the biblical text, it is vital to separate the voice of the author and his intentions from the other voices that are included in the text.

For instance, the same book of Genesis depicts the wife of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials and captain of the guard, accusing Joseph by saying, «That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house» (Genesis 39:17-18) [5, p. 36]. Joseph even went to prison on the basis of this accusation. At first glance, it may appear that the trustworthy wife of Potiphar was an unfortunate victim of Joseph, a well-masqueraded Hebrew criminal. However, nothing could be further from the truth than this mistaken observation. Careful study of the entire biblical narrative reveals that Jacob's son Joseph was a godly, hardworking, and moral man. In contrast to Joseph, his accuser was nothing less than an evil and wicked woman who cast her eyes upon Joseph and day-by-day sought to seduce Joseph to immoral sexual relations with her. When her seduction was rejected by Joseph many times she fabricated a story and slandered the innocent man of God (Genesis 39:1–16). This is an example of how important it is for the contemporary reader to do the deep analysis of the narrative and separate the voice of the author and his intentions from the other voices that are included in the biblical narrative.

Regarding the fact that Esau sold his birthright, theologians note that the context reveals Jacob's willingness to share his food with Esau based on a contract of sale. For that reason, he proposed to Esau, «sell me your birthright» (Genesis 25:31). The contemporary reader, separated by time and culture from the people to whom the Bible was written, may have a negative view of Jacob's proposal; modern-day readers have to keep in mind, as Dr. Eugene Merrill said, that «It is important in that interpretation of biblical texts must take into account the historical and cultural milieu» [29, p. 268-280]. Likewise, analyzing the narrative through the background of the ancient historical time period, The new Cambridge Bible Commentary concluded that the original «reader would see nothing wrong with this proposal, and would instead appreciate the wiser and more cunning Jacob over the shortsighted Esau» [1, p. 233].

Also, it is essential to keep in mind that Jacob's request was absolutely justified by the legal regulation of that historical time. For instance, in his book 'The Eternal Torah,' David Lieberman contends that «The transaction of selling the birthright, 'primogeniture' the legal privilege into which one is born, was a practice not uncommon and was recognized by ancient law» [27, p. 68]. A respected scholar, Nahum Sarna, maintains the same view: «The way Jacob acquired his brother's birthright could not have been considered either unusual or objectionable in the context of his times. As a matter of fact, there is every reason to believe

that Jacob's dealings with Esau and his father represent a stage of morality in which the successful application of shrewd opportunism was highly respected» [33, p. 188]. Esau did not have to accept Jacob's proposal, yet the fact that he entered into it absolutely freely made him fully responsible. For that reason, Dr. Shira Weiss stated: «His oath was inviolable and the contract bound by it was irrevocable, since such an oath raises the contract into the realm of the absolute» [39, p. 142–163].

With the reference to Esau's latest accusation toward his brother Jacob, linguistic analysis of the biblical narrative reveals that this allegation is baseless and should not be taken as convincing or trustworthy (Genesis 27:36). Thus, Claus Westermann openly admitted that it is incorrect to connect Jacob's character with the accusation of his brother: «the explanation from בֵקָעָ = 'deceive' (Gen. 27:36), which Hos. 12:4 (Jer. 9:3) has transferred to Gen. 25:26, is therefore different from intention of v. 26 (cf. R.B. Coote, VT21 [1971] 390)» [41, p. 414]. Likewise, Dr. Derek Kidner emphasizes that «the context does not say 'so Jacob supplanted his brother,' but 'so Esau despised his birthright;' and the Hebrews 12 shares this perspective, presenting flippant Esau as the antithesis of the pilgrims of Hebrews 11» [24, p. 152]. In the same way, Dr. Walter Brueggemann points out that «In Heb. 11:20–21, Jacob is named among those who believed in the promise. In Heb. 12:12–17, Esau is used as an illustration of those who do not believe the promise» [36, p. 219]. In light of this discussion, it has to be highlighted that this apologetic view of Jacob is in agreement with the rabbinic claim, which is supported by Hebrew scholars, that Esau had no faith in everlasting life or desire for spiritual things. As a result, «even after he had eaten he did not regret the sale». For that reason, Jordan Jay Hillman concludes that «It is with Esau's indifference rather that Jacob's opportunism that the Torah finds fault, 'Thus did Esau spurn his birthright (Genesis 25:34)'» [23, p. 89].

Let us briefly summarize that over the course of years, the life of the patriarch Jacob as well as his personal name have been seen, valued, and interpreted by diverse groups of people in completely different ways. Since the post-Nicene period, the fabric of Christian theology has been irrationally injected with an impression that Jacob's name means «deceiver» and with the view that the man himself had a deceitful character. Then, for a long time, such a view was represented to the church as the one view without any alternative. Nevertheless, this seemingly solid understanding has been significantly shaken by archaeological and linguistic innovations. For this reason, scholars these days agree with the ancient Christian view that the name 'Jacob' originated from the Hebrew word ב ק ע ַי (Ya'aqov) and it is a shortened form of the theophoric name בֹק עֵי וְיֵע (Ya'aqov-el), which means «May God Protect (You)!». This development is an encouraging step forward in the process of restoring the ancient Church hermeneutic of interpreting Jacob's character, or at least of providing an alternative viewpoint to the dominant one. The study goes on to point out that for many years not only Jacob's personal name, but also his character has often not been interpreted based on accurate linguistic analysis of the original text, the correct historical setting, and the author's intention. It is therefore possible that Jacob's purchase of the birthright from his brother Esau may not always be viewed as morally admirable by the contemporary reader, but this article indicates that it is possible to justify an alternative interpretation, namely, that Jacob's conduct was appropriate in such a situation and therefore justified by the ancient law of jurisprudence.

In light of this discovery, scholars should aim to achieve two equally important supplementary goals. First, the newest discoveries must be popularized among the clergy and parishioners of the church for correction and reaffirmation of accurate epistemology with right religious belief. Second, scholars should promote the scrupulous and methodological re-evaluation of the entire life of the patriarch Jacob. The outcome of this study will have far-reaching theological implications for a correct understanding of the biblical narrative in general, and an accurate hermeneutic of all aspects of Jacob's life and legacy in particular.

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### Відновлення стародавньої церкви герменевтикою характеру Якоба

Ця стаття дає точний огляд того, як персональне ім'я патріарха Якоба та його життя розглядалися різними групами людей протягом усього віку. Дослідження також показує емпіричні докази того, що в минулому інтерпретація імені Джейкоба сильно вплинула як на пояснення всього життя патріарха, так і на біблійну розповідь книги Буття. Наприклад, антична християнська громада переважно мала надзвичайно позитивний погляд на патріарха Якова, і його особисте життя вважалося знаковим прикладом справжньої вірності. Тим не менш, з часів пост-Нікейського періоду ім 'я Якоба в основному трактувалося як "обманник". Обгрунтування иього твердження було встановлено на неправильному етимологічному припущенні, що ім'я Якова було побудовано на івриті іменник בַק ע ('aqev) для' heel ', що означає' він читів ', але сучасні археологічні, лінгвістичні та теологічні відкриття повністю спростували цю точку зору . Тому більшість шанованих учених сьогодні погоджуються з тим, що ім'я «Яків» походить від сврейського слова ב'ק עי ון ע (Яаков), скороченого з теофіричного імені ב'ק עי ון עי (Яаково-ель), що означає «травень Бог захищає (Ти)! ». Враховуючи ці глибокі відкриття, автор тверезо пропагує, що об 'єктивна методологічна переоцінка всього життя патріарха Якоба повинна бути зроблена науковою спільнотою на основі чіткого лінгвістичного аналізу оригіналу тексту, правильного історичного середовища та наміру автора в кожному конкретному проході.

Ключові слова: повторне відкриття, текст, герменевтика, стародавня церква, характер Якоба, суперсессионність, обман, пост-Ніцца, критика, реформація, археологічні, лінгвістичні, відкриття.