A letter to Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotteregarding the Good Friday prayer of the Latin mass

31.03.2008

Leigh Lerner is the senior rabbi at Temple Emanu-El-beth Sholom (Westmont Qc, Canada) and currently the chair of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal. Cardinal Turcotte heads the Archdiocese of Montreal.

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Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte

Archdiocese of Montreal

2000 Sherbrooke Street West

Montreal, Qc H3H 1G4

Your Eminence,

As a rabbi and leader of an historical congregation in Montreal, I write with dismay over the Roman Catholic Church?s permission of and revision to a Good Friday Latin missal prayer, *Pro Conversione Iudaeorum*. Here are my concerns:

1. The Latin prayer does not correspond to what Roman Catholics say in all other languages of the world on Good Friday. It creates a division of theology between traditional Latin services and other services, a division which makes it hard for those of us outside the Roman Catholic Church to understand what the Church?s stance *vis-à-vis* the Jews really is. I imagine, therefore, that those inside the Church, cognizant of this division, may have trouble reading the Church?s theology about the Jews, as well.
2. *Pro Conversione Iudaeorum* does not seem to be in accord with the statements or spirit of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, and the words and attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward the Jews since the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*. Are we to lose over 40 years of

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progress in Jewish-Catholic relations?

3. If the prayer in Latin is meant as an eschatological one, nevertheless, it teaches something for the present about the Jews, that in the eyes of the Church, the Jews are an unsaved lot, and that risks the teaching of contempt in the present time. It also seems to indicate that the covenant of Abraham and the covenant of Sinai have, indeed, been superseded, and this small people Israel ? the people of Jesus of Nazareth ? is condemnable by God, unless God?s grace be somehow awakened. Awaiting the day when we serve God with a single voice, as *Nostra Aetate* puts it, does not exclude God?s previous covenants with the Jews, while *Pro Conversione Iudaeorum* seems to do so. The Latin prayer gives aid and comfort to those whose attitude toward Judaism can be described as ?triumphalism."
4. Simply to have a prayer named *Pro Conversione Iudaeorum* singles out the Jewish people in the minds of worshippers as a group in special need of salvation, more than others. This, too, can teach contempt. If the prayer were truly global in its eschatological hope, that all the world might come to serve God in a certain way, it would not be singling out one group, the Jews, for concentrated attention.

I know that there are voices in the Catholic Church demurring from this Latin mass prayer. I hope that you will join your own voice to theirs, asking the difficult questions which this Latin prayer elicits. Please let the leadership in Vatican City know that *Pro Conversione Iudaeorum,* raises troublesome issues in the eyes of the Jewish people, as well as among many Roman Catholics.

Thank you for your consistently positive attention to relations between Catholics and Jews.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Leigh Lerner

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