



Catholics Have a Right To Pray for Us

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Any other policy toward gentiles would deny their access to the one God whom Israel knows in the Torah. And the Catholic prayer expresses the same generous spirit that characterizes Judaism at worship.

God's kingdom opens its gates to all humanity and when at worship, the Israelites ask for the speedy advent of God's kingdom. They express the same liberality of spirit that characterizes the pope's text for the prayer for the Jews on Good Friday.

Let me explain. I derive evidence of the theology of Judaism toward gentiles from the standard liturgy of the synagogue. I draw the text from "The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire," published in London in 1953, which sets forth an English translation of a prayer for the conversion of gentiles that concludes public worship three times a day every day through the year.

The text is uniform in the worship of Judaism. In it Israel — the holy people, not to be confused with the State of Israel — thanks God for not making the holy people like the other nations. In worship, holy Israel asks that the world be perfected when all mankind calls upon God's name and knows that to God, every knee must bow.

The text of the prayer reads, "It is our duty to praise the Lord of all things." It offers thanks to God for giving Israel its own "portion," its own destiny and lot in life, and making it different from the other nations of the world. God is asked to remove "the abominations from the earth" when the world will be perfected under the kingdom of the Almighty.

This prayer for the conversion of "all the wicked of the earth," who are "all the inhabitants of the world," is recited in normative Judaism not once a year, but every day.

Normative Judaism, it can reasonably be argued, asks God to enlighten the nations and bring them into his kingdom. As if to underscore this aspiration, the prayer "It is our duty" is followed by the Kaddish: "May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time." I do not see how in spirit or in intent these prayers differ from the Tridentine Mass.

These passages from the standard, daily liturgy of normative Judaism leave no doubt that when holy Israel assembles for worship, it asks God to illuminate gentiles' hearts. The eschatological vision finds nourishment in the prophets and their vision of a single, united humanity, and in a liberal spirit encompassing all humanity.

The condemnation of idolatry does not afford much comfort to Christianity or Islam, which are passed by in silence. The prayers beseech God to hasten the coming of his kingdom.

These normative Jewish prayers form the counterpart to the Catholic one that asks for the salvation of all Israel "in the fullness of time, when all mankind enters the Church."

The proselytizing prayers of Judaism and Christianity share an eschatological focus and mean to keep the door to salvation open for all peoples. Holy Israel should object to the Catholic prayer no more than Christianity and Islam should take umbrage at the Israelite one. Both "It is our duty" and "Let us also pray for the Jews" realize the logic of monotheism and its eschatological hope.

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