



How Jewish are the Lord's Prayer and Holy Communion?

30.11.2009

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The liturgical relationship between Christianity and Judaism was highlighted in a panel discussion sponsored by the CCJ in early March when four panelists – Merrill Kitchen, OAM; Albert Isaacs; Fr. Paul Duffy, SJ; and Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black – presented comparisons between some Jewish prayers and practices and the Lord's Prayer and Holy Communion in the Christian tradition.

In her analysis Merrill Kitchen looked at versions of the Lord's Prayer from the gospels of both Luke and Mathew. She pointed to similarities in the prayer to elements of Jewish belief such as conceptualising God as a parent and identified the phrase 'hallowed be your name' as recognising the 'name' tradition in Judaism. In the prayer for bread she sees memories of the manna provided by God while the people wandered in the desert. She also pointed out that phrases such as 'your kingdom come' need to be understood as located in a time of Roman domination of the land of Israel.

Albert Isaacs emphasised the fact that, because Christianity grew out of Judaism, both religions have had common influences and often borrowed prayers and practices from each other. He noted that in some Eastern churches, for example the Coptic Orthodox Church, much would seem familiar to Jews. On the other hand, the modern Western European and American forms of Judaism have borrowed from Christianity, simply because, since the opening-up of the ghettos, Jews and Christians have lived together. In fact, today some Progressive Jews want to get rid of organ music and other elements that seem 'too Christian'. The point is that Jewish influence on parts of Christian liturgy should not be treated in isolation but seen as part of a two-way exchange by sister religions.

Albert reinforced Merrill's observation that many parts of Jewish ritual influenced Jesus as the author of the Lord's Prayer. Two Jewish prayers with, apparently, the greatest influence on the Lord's Prayer were the *Kaddish* (recited at all Jewish services with a *minyan*, a quorum of 10 Jews, and, in one form, used to praise God at times of mourning) and, to a lesser degree, the *Amidah*, also known as the Standing Prayer or the *Shemonah Ezra* (the 18 Blessings). Some analysts, particularly Christian commentators, have pointed out that the *Kaddish* was only in embryonic form when the Lord's Prayer was written, but both prayers were subject to the same influences, although with different results. Amongst several important differences are the fact that the Lord's Prayer addresses God in the second person, while the *Kaddish* uses a third person form. The *Kaddish* employs long sentences, while the Lord's Prayer has short sentences and is altogether less elaborated than the *Kaddish*.

Fr Paul Duffy spoke about the similarities in the whole ritual of the Eucharist to Jewish blessings

that express thanksgiving, with the repeated blessings of the Communion service showing the 'golden link'. He also pointed out that the culmination of Jesus' life took place in the context of the Jewish Passover festival, which included blessings of bread and wine, rituals around remembrance, expression of the covenant, the theme of sacrifice and anticipation of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black focused on comparing various elements of the Christian Communion rite with several Jewish rituals and blessings. He concluded that there are deep roots in Jewish tradition in the form of Communion. Communion has drawn on and combined the *Kaddish* memorial prayer (remembering the dead and accepting death as part of the cycle of the universe) and the wine and bread accompanying *Kiddush* (blessings to make the day special), as well as the wording of *Kedusha* (prayer to acknowledge God's holiness and greatness) to focus on, memorialise and sanctify the memory of Jesus of Nazareth. A difference, however, is that while Christians consecrate bread and wine before distributing it to participants, Jewish blessings for bread and wine are simply giving thanks for it.

Recognition of the similarities and differences between aspects of Jewish and Christian liturgy is an important step in the ongoing discourse between the two faiths. This can help Christians and Jews to celebrate their common heritage and serve as a symbol of the ongoing dialogue between two major religions, both of which have had, and continue to have, enormous influence throughout the world.

From [GESHER](#), the Australian Magazine of the Council of Christians and Jews, Victoria.