Resolution on the Revised 1962 Good Friday “Prayer for the Jews”

31/01/2009 | Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal

Resolution on the Revised 1962 Good Friday “Prayer for the Jews”

Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal

The following resolution, adopted at the January 12, 2009, meeting of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal, states the position of the Dialogue about the recent controversy prompted by the permission granted by Pope Benedict XVI to a few Catholic groups to use the pre-Vatican II Roman Missal which contained a prayer for the conversion of the Jews. The resolution (part 3) is introduced by background information (part 1) and a summary of the discussion among members of the Dialogue (part 2).

1. Background information

On July 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI allowed for a greater use of a traditional version of the Latin Mass (according to the Tridentine Rite), found in the 1962 version of the *Roman Missal* authorized by the late Pope John XXIII. The permission to use this “extraordinary rite” along with the “ordinary” one prompted protests among various Jewish and Christian groups, for its Good Friday ritual contained the following prayer for the conversion of the Jews:

Let us pray also for the Jews that the Lord our God may take the veil from their hearts and that they also may acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You do not refuse Your mercy even to the Jews; hear the prayers which we offer for the blindness of that people so that they may acknowledge the light of Your truth, which is Christ, and be delivered from their darkness. Through the name our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This prayer stands in contradiction with the important change of attitude towards the Jewish people that the Church expressed in par. 4 of the Vatican II declaration, *Nostra Aetate*:

[…] this sacred council remembers the spiritual ties which link the people of the new covenant to the stock of Abraham. […]

The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God"s plan of salvation the beginnings of its faith and election are to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. […] the Church cannot forget that it received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant. Nor can it forget that it draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (see Rom 11:17-24). […]

Likewise, the Church keeps ever before its mind the words of the apostle Paul about his kin: "they are Israelites and it is for them to be sons and daughters, to them belong the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom 9:4,5). […] It is mindful, moreover, that the apostles, the pillars on which the church stands, are of Jewish descent, as are many of those early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world.

[…] Jews for the most part did not accept the Gospel; on the contrary, many opposed its spread (see Rom 11:28). Even so, the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts He bestowed or the choice He made.[1]. Together with the prophets and that same apostle, the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and serve Him shoulder to shoulder (Soph 3:9; see Is 66:23; Ps 65:4; Rom 11:11-32) […]

The 1962 prayer also stands in contradiction to the new *Missal* promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1970, as the “ordinary rite”, which contains a very different prayer for the Jews:

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the Word of God, that they may continue to grow

in the love of His name and in faithfulness to His covenant.

Almighty and eternal God, long ago You gave Your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your church as we pray that the people You first made Your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Following the protests prompted by his authorization to use the 1962 *Missal*, Pope Benedict XVI issued on Feb. 4, 2008 a replacement for the contentious Good Friday prayer. This revised version of the 1962 Prayer for the Jews (*Oremus et pro Iudaeis*) reads:

Let us pray for the Jews. May God our Lord enlighten their hearts so that they recognize Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all men.

Almighty and everlasting God, You who want all men to be saved and to reach the recognition of truth, graciously grant that, with the fullness of peoples entering into your Church, all Israel may be saved. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. Discussion

The Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (CJDM) consists of representatives of major Christian groupings, including several representatives appointed by the Archdiocese of Montreal, as well as by Canadian Jewish Congress. It has been active for over a generation. Participants in the CJDM are appreciative of the progress which this dialogue and those of groups in many parts of the world have achieved in mutual understanding and respect, and they are committed to continuing it. They are also appreciative of the recognition by the Roman Catholic Church that Judaism is a living religion and that it is inappropriate to attempt to diminish it. But the revised version of the 1962 prayer for the Jews has raised serious concerns about the meaning of that recognition and its consequences. After several months of dialogue over this revised prayer, CJDM has resolved to make the two affected constituent groups aware of the agreement of its discussants on certain matters pertaining to this prayer.

Copyright JCRelations

1. The revised version of the 1962 Good Friday prayer is unique, quite unlike what all other Roman Catholics using the “ordinary rite” of 1970 are saying on Good Friday. The Dialogue concluded that this difference creates a “disconnect” between the theology of the prayer of the “extraordinary rite” and that of the “ordinary” one, a division which makes it hard for those of us both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church to understand what the Church"s stance vis-à-vis the Jews really is.
2. This revised *Oratione pro Iudaeis* contravenes the statements and spirit of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, and the Roman Catholic Church"s official words and attitude toward the Jews since *Nostra Aetate*.
3. We understand that when the revised 1962 prayer expresses the wish *“that, with the fullness of peoples entering into Your Church, all Israel may be saved”* , it is expressing an “eschatological” hope. But humanity"s hopes and attitudes concerning the end of time shape present thought, attitude, and action. Our Dialogue questions whether this version of the prayer might teach the faithful a negative attitude toward Jews, while the 1970 prayer does not.
4. *Nostra Aetate* speaks of the Church awaiting *“the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and serve Him shoulder to shoulder.”* This does not necessarily exclude God"s previous covenants with Jews, while Pope Benedict’s revision of the 1962 prayer seems to do so when it states that God wants *“all men to be saved”* , asks for the recognition by the Jews of *“Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all men”*, and implores God to grant salvation to *“all Israel”*. This wording of the prayer apparently conveys a messianic vision of an end of time in which Jews would cease to be Jews and would become Christians in order to achieve redemption and salvation. This vision is problematic for the Christian members of the CJDM, and for the Jewish ones, simply unacceptable. Since the Roman Catholic Church has moved away from special efforts to convert Jews, we are concerned that this version of the prayer for the Jews may be perceived as supporting special conversionary efforts.
5. *Nostra Aetate* and the 1970 prayer of Pope Paul VI’s *Missal* are a positive expression of gratitude for the shared heritage of Christianity and Judaism. We are concerned that the revised 1962 prayer will undermine the brotherly and sisterly linkages built on the commonality expressed by *Nostra Aetate* and by the 1970 prayer.

3. Resolution

Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal resolves to make the above concerns known through its Roman Catholic and Jewish representatives. Be it known that it is the hope of the participants in this Dialogue that the 1962 Prayer for the Jews (*Oremus et pro Iudaeis*) be replaced not by the revised version of Feb. 4, 2008, but by the prayer of the 1970 *Missal* of Pope Paul VI already in use by most Roman Catholics throughout the world.

Copyright JCRelations

NOTE

1. See Rom 11:28-29; see Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

Copyright JCRelations