

Here is an English translation of the Good Friday "Oratio Fidelium" ("Prayer of the Faithful") from the 1962 Missal. The notorious phrase "the perfidious Jews" had already been removed by this time; John XXIII removed the phrase in 1959. Nevertheless, the 1962 Missal does contain the following Good Friday prayers:

1) For the unity of the Church. Let us pray also for heretics and schismatics, that our Lord and God may save them from their errors and be pleased to recall them to our holy Mother the Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You save all men and will that none should be lost; look down on those who are deceived by the wiles of the devil, that with the evil of heresy removed from their hearts, the erring may repent and return to the unity of Your truth. Through our Lord....

2) 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 same our Lord...

3) For the conversion of pagans [Infidelium]: Let us pray also for the pagans, that almighty God may take away iniquity from their hearts, so that they may forsake their idols and be converted to the living and true God and His only Son, Jesus Christ, our God and Lord.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You always demand not the death but the life of sinners; in Your goodness hear our prayer; free them from the worship of idols and unite them to Your holy Church for the praise and glory of Your name. Through our Lord...

From the 1970 Missal Good Friday General Intercessions (English translation)

For the Jewish people.

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may 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.

Pope Benedict's new prayer for the Good Friday Prayer of the Faithful for use in the Tridentine form. Note: only the text of the prayer itself is changed. The title of the prayer, "For the conversion of the Jews" in the 1962 Missal remains.

Let us pray also for the Jews.

That our Lord and God may enlighten their hearts, that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as the savior of all men.

Almighty, ever living God, who will that all men would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, graciously grant that all Israel may be saved when the fullness of the nations enter into Your Church.

Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Dear friends,

As you know, Pope Benedict XVI has revised the text of the prayer for the Jews that is part of the Good Friday liturgy in the 1962 "Tridentine" Missal. The new Latin text will be used only by those Catholics who are observing the Tridentine form of the Good Friday liturgy. The normative form of the liturgy of Good Friday for the Catholic Church is the 1970 "Vatican II" Missal.

I know that this revision has caused some questions to be raised, and feelings of disappointment to be expressed. See, for example, http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-02-06-good-friday-prayer_N.htm

As an ecumenical officer, I have to accept a text from the Holy Father as a given, and then try to understand what it means. As a friend, and as a priest, I would like to share some thoughts with you. I hope they will help.

Concerning the revised text, Bishop Richard J. Sklba, Chairman, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs has stated:

"Pope Benedict XVI has chosen to present the relationship of the Church and the Jews within the mystery of salvation as found in Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans (cf. Rom 11:11-32). Central to the concerns of the Holy Father is the clear articulation that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ and his Church. It is a faith that must never be imposed but always freely chosen." (The complete text is here: <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2008/08-016.shtml>)

Of course, a Catholic prayer is an expression of Catholic hope. In the revised text, the hope is voiced that the Jews will "acknowledge Christ." Catholics need to recognize that these words are fraught with the weight of a long and painful history of accusing the Jews of blindness and the willful rejection of Christ, and that this expression in the revised text could lend itself to misinterpretation by both Jews and Catholics. According to Bishop Sklba, "The Holy Father has chosen to omit from his revision any language from the various editions of the (Latin) Missal of 1962 that have long been associated with negative images of Jews. For example, there are no references to the 'blindness of the Jews,' to the 'lifting of a veil from their heart,' or to their 'being pulled from darkness.'" I think that the removal of this derogatory language will help us to understand that Pope Benedict recognizes this painful history, and wants to preclude our misinterpretation of the revised text according to those discredited notions. In any event, simple justice demands the removal of such language.

In the Catholic understanding, there is an essential difference between our hope that, at the end of days, all people, Jews included, will know Christ as the savior of all – and claiming that the only way that Jews can be saved is by becoming Christians. The former

is, I believe, the meaning of Benedict's prayer, since the latter is not the teaching of the Catholic Church, according to the Second Vatican Council.

The Church, as Pope Benedict has stated repeatedly, remains deeply committed to the respectful dialogue with the Jewish people that was called for in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*. In the words of Pope John Paul II, the Jews are "the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God." I believe that a challenge remains for further dialogue and reflection to help Catholics deepen their understanding of what it means to recognize that the Jews remain in an eternal covenant with God - and to help Jews understand that when we Catholics express our hope for the fulfillment and inclusion of all in Christ at the end of days, even if this hope is not the faith of Jews, this is not a negation of their covenant.

I hope that this helps. Let us go forward in our dialogue and friendship.

Peace.

Fr. David Michael

The Good Friday Prayer
God Decides When and How
By Cardinal Walter Kasper

Unofficial revised translation

March 20, 2008

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI revised the Good Friday intercession for the Jews in the reinstated "extraordinary" rite of the Roman Missal of 1962. This was necessary because some on the Jewish side found the old formulation to be insulting, and many Catholics also perceived it as offensive. Admittedly, the new formulation has also led to new irritations and raised some basic questions among both Jews and Christians.

The irritations on the Jewish side are to a considerable extent not grounded on arguments from reason but are based on emotion. This should not be dismissed as a symptom of hypersensitivity. Even among Jewish friends who have been in intense conversation with Christians for decades, collective memories of coercive teaching and forced conversion are still alive. The traumatic memory of the Shoah is a defining element of the communal identity of present-day Judaism. Many regard a [Christian] mission to the Jews as threatening Jewish existence, and sometimes they even speak of it as "a Shoah by other means." The Jewish-Christian relationship therefore requires a high degree of sensitivity.

The salvation of all people

What deserves attention, however, is the fact that the Good Friday intercession of the Roman Missal of 1970, the "ordinary" rite, has not changed. This shows that the Church with the new formulation is not retreating from *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the non-Christian religions. This applies even more to the substance of *Nostra Aetate* as found in the more authoritative constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which therefore is fundamentally beyond further discussion. Moreover, since the Council there have been a large number of statements, including by the current pope, referring to *Nostra Aetate* and which confirm the declaration's importance.

In contrast to the 1970 Good Friday intercession, the 1962 reformulation speaks about Jesus as the Christ and the savior of all people—including the Jews. Many have seen this statement as new and unfriendly toward the Jews. But the formulation is grounded on the whole New Testament justifies and points to what all sides acknowledge: the fundamental and continuing difference between Christians and Jews. Even if this is not directly mentioned in *Nostra Aetate* and in the intercession of 1970, the declaration cannot be separated from the context of all the Council documents, just as the Good Friday intercession of the Missal of 1970 cannot be separated from the whole of the Good Friday liturgy, which contains this same Christian witness. The reformulation of the Good Friday prayer from 1962 therefore does not say anything new, but only speaks openly of what has been taken for granted, but apparently insufficiently raised as a central theme.

Both sides need to learn

In the past, faith in Christ, which divides Jews and Christians, was often turned into a "teaching of contempt" (Jules Isaac), with all the terrible consequences that followed. If we now seek mutual respect, it can only be found in the mutual recognition of our being different. Therefore, we do not expect Jews to agree with the Christological content of the Good Friday prayer. But they should respect that we as Christians pray in accordance with our faith, as we obviously respect their ways of praying. Both sides still need to learn in this regard.

The controversial question really is: Should Christians pray for the conversion of Jews? Does this imply a specific mission to the Jews? The word "conversion" is not found in the reformulated prayer. However, in the request for the enlightenment of the Jews, so that they recognize Jesus Christ, it is indirectly included. One should also note that the missal of 1962 provides the individual intercessions with headings. The heading for the intercession for the Jews was not changed, it still reads: *Pro conversione Iudaeorum*—"for the conversion of the Jews." Many Jews have read the reformulated prayer through the lenses of this heading, which has caused the previously detailed reactions.

No organized mission to Jews

In response, one can point out that the Catholic Church, as opposed to some Evangelical circles, has no organized and institutionalized mission to Jews. With this fact the problem of a mission to Jews is *de facto*—but not yet theologically—clarified. It is to the credit of the reformulated intercession that its second part gives a first indication of a basic theological answer. The Pope follows chapter 11 of the Letter to the Romans, which is also the basis for *Nostra Aetate*. The salvation of the Jews is for Paul an inscrutable mystery, a divine choice of grace. God does not repent of his gifts, and the promises of God to his people, despite their disobedience of God, have not been withdrawn. God has hardened the majority of his people, with the exception of a holy remnant, because of its disbelief. The stubbornness of the Jews enables the Gentiles to gain salvation. The wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted onto the holy root that is Israel. But God has the power to reattach the branches that have been severed. When the fullness of the Gentiles attains salvation, all of Israel will be saved. Israel, therefore, continues to be the carrier of the promise and the blessing.

Sometimes enigma, sometimes God's witness

Paul speaks in apocalyptic language of a secret (11:25). This means more than the fact that the Jews are—to the other peoples—sometimes an enigma, sometimes a witness to God. Paul understands this mystery as God's eternal desire for salvation, which is made known in history by the preaching of the apostles. Concretely, he cites the prophets Isaiah (59.20) and Jeremiah (31.33 f.). He refers to the eschatological gathering of the peoples on Zion, and the coming of universal peace (*shalom*) as promised by the prophets and likewise by Jesus. Paul sees his missionary work among the Gentiles in this perspective. His mission is meant to prepare for the gathering of the peoples, which—when the full number of the Gentiles is complete—will bring salvation to Israel and eschatological peace to the world. So one can say: not because of a mission to the Jews, but because of the mission to the Gentiles, God will in the End—when the full number of Gentiles has entered into salvation—bring about the salvation of Israel. Only He who has made them obstinate can remove the stubbornness. God will do so when "the savior" comes from Zion. This is, in Pauline language, nothing else but the *parousia* (return) of Christ, because Jews and Gentiles have the same Lord.

Giving witness of faith

The newly formulated Good Friday prayer gives expression to this hope in a prayerful intercession directed to God. Basically, the Church repeats with this prayer the plea in the Lord's Prayer—"Thy kingdom come," as well as the early Christian liturgical exclamation, *Maranatha*—"Come, Lord Jesus, come soon." Such requests for the coming of the kingdom of God and the realization of the mystery of salvation are by their very nature not directed at the Church as a call to missionary action. On the contrary, they respect the full extent of the incomprehensibility of the hidden God.

Thus, the Church does not put itself in charge by its intercession for the realization of unfathomable mystery. The Church simply cannot do this. Rather, the Church puts the “when” and the “how” completely into the hands of God. God alone can bring about the Kingdom of God in which the world will experience eschatological peace and all Israel will be saved.

The exclusion of a targeted, institutionalized mission to Jews does not mean that Christians are supposed to “sit on their hands.” One must distinguish between targeted and organized mission on the one hand and giving Christian witness on the other. Of course, Christians have to give witness, where appropriate, to their faith and to the richness and beauty of their faith in Jesus Christ to their “elder brothers and sisters in the faith of Abraham” (John Paul II). That is what Paul did. On his missionary journeys he went first to the synagogue and only when he could not find faith there, he went to the Gentiles.

Such a witness is also required of us today. It must certainly be done tactfully and respectfully, but it would be dishonest if Christians while meeting with Jewish friends were silent about or even denied their faith. From believing Jews, we expect the same thing to be done to us. In the forms of dialogue with which I am familiar, such behavior is entirely normal. Because an honest dialogue between Jews and Christians can only be based, on the one hand, on the commonality of faith in the one God, creator of heaven and earth, and in the promises given to Abraham and the patriarchs, and on the other hand with an awareness and respect for the fundamental difference: the belief in Jesus as the Christ and the Savior of all people.

The author is president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

[Text: FAZ, 20.03.2008, No. 68 / page 39]

Original German text can be found at:

[http://www.faz.net/s/RubCF3AEB154CE64960822FA5429A182360/Doc~E2FC4F6C0F1844D53B6AE0983FE3135E8~ATpl~Ecom
mon~Scontent.html](http://www.faz.net/s/RubCF3AEB154CE64960822FA5429A182360/Doc~E2FC4F6C0F1844D53B6AE0983FE3135E8~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html)