

## **To Convert or not to Convert, that is the Question. (Or, Reflections on that Good Friday Prayer)**

(This article first appeared in *Apropos* No. 26, Our Lady of Mount Carmel 2008 and is now posted on the Apropos website [www.apropos.org.uk](http://www.apropos.org.uk) )

In response to a claim by the editor of the *Catholic Herald* that the Good Friday prayers in the Traditional liturgy were offensive to the Jews, Fr Thomas Crean OP wrote the following in a letter to that paper:

*‘You claim that the language of the traditional Good Friday prayers for the Jewish people is offensive. Some may take offence from it, but the language is scriptural. It seems to be inspired by the second letter to the Corinthians. St Paul, a baptised Jew, speaking to his brethren according to the flesh, states that “even until this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.” (2 Cor 3:15).*

*The Good Friday prayer asks that the veil be taken from their hearts. A few verses later, speaking in general of those who do not believe the gospel, St Paul says that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4). The prayer applies this to the particular case of the Jewish people, and asks that this blindness be taken away. If, as you claim, the traditional missal is deficient because it “lacks the insight of our own generation” does the same apply to Holy Scripture?’*

Fr Crean wrote his letter prior to the Holy Father’s change to the 1959 prayer, but one cannot find fault with Fr Crean’s reasoning, and it is surely perfectly reasonable to ask why this prayer, already altered at the behest of Jules Isaac<sup>1</sup> and his brethren on account of the alleged anti-Semitic nature of the pre-conciliar era version, ought to have been changed again? Far be it from me to suggest conspiracy but something definitely was afoot. Let us recall that this latest objection to the prayers of the Traditional liturgy did not arise until Benedict XVI acknowledged that liturgy’s never-abrogated status as a legal rite of the Church, and requested that its celebration be liberated from the illegal constraints which had bound it for nigh 40 years. The Traditional liturgy had been celebrated in terms of the indult during that period but its liberation meant that the Easter Triduum could also now be celebrated in the Traditional liturgy. That this should have sparked such a Jewish reaction was not altogether unexpected but may have seemed strange nevertheless. These were, after all, the same liturgical prayers which had been used at the Council - prayers which had been altered at the request of Jewish lobbyists.

### **Conversion – hurtful and insulting**

The American Jewish Committee report referred to in footnote (1) also added that Pope John ‘felt the Second Vatican Council should provide an opportunity for the Church to clarify officially its attitude towards Jews and Judaism, and to repudiate traditions that had too long perpetuated tension and hatred’. One can reasonably assume that this was effected in the Council decree *Nostrae aetate*. John XXIII’s change to the Easter liturgy, however, predated Vatican II and therefore *Nostrae aetate*<sup>2</sup> and Paul VI’s *Novus Ordo* both of which gave effect to some aspirations of the Jewish leaders [Joseph Roddy refers to these as a latter-day Sanhedrin] who had arranged

<sup>1</sup> A confidential publication by the American Jewish Committee, *The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Jews – A Background Report* (November 1965) advises us that: ‘During the two years following his accession in 1958, Pope John gave repeated indications that the time might be ripe for such decisive action. [ i.e. ‘revision of the traditional attitude towards Jews and Judaism’.] He entered into searching discussions with Professor Isaac. He ordered certain phrases offensive to Jews, such as *perfidii Judaei* (“perfidious” or “unbelieving Jews”), stricken from the Holy Week liturgy.(p.9)

<sup>2</sup> While recognising that *Nostrae aetate* signals a historic turning point, The AJC admit that it ‘falls somewhat short of its supporters’ highest hopes.’ *Ibid.* p.48.

and held secret meetings with Cardinal Bea<sup>3</sup>, his representatives<sup>4</sup>, and with Paul VI<sup>5</sup> prior to and during the Council. The “restoration” of the Traditional liturgy, even that already modified to assuage Jewish concerns, was enough to raise the ire of such Jewish bellwethers as Abe Foxman, but why? Not, as Zenit and others suggested, because of confusion that it was the “perfidious Jews” prayer that was to be reinstated (which was clearly untrue) but because the revised prayer of 1959, in the words of Abe Foxman, ‘*would now permit Catholics to utter such hurtful and insulting words by praying for Jews to be converted*’<sup>6</sup>

### **Profoundly Anti-Semitic Elements**

In other words, the liberalisation of the Traditional Mass, despite the Jewish-inspired changes already effected to it, was obviously a backward step in the judaisation of the Catholic liturgy which had progressed since Vatican II to the extent that in the *Novus Ordo* ‘*the prayer for the conversion of the Jews was replaced by a positive prayer recognising the Jews’ eternal covenant with God, a principle to which Pope John Paul II was deeply committed.*’<sup>7</sup> Indeed the Traditional Mass was described by *Israelinsider* as having ‘*profoundly anti-Semitic elements*’<sup>8</sup> on account of its pre-conciliar outlook, one which the editor of *The Catholic Herald* would no doubt hold as ‘*lacking the insight of our own generation*’. As Thomas Reese SJ, former editor of *America* magazine was to suggest: ‘*The treatment of the Jews in the 1962 missal was not ideal. It prayed for the “conversion of the Jews”.*’<sup>9</sup>

### ***If it is not necessary to change.....***

The mere fact that the present Pope sought to change the 1959 Good Friday prayer for the Jews indicates that he bowed to pressure from the Jewish lobby outwith the Church and its ecumenical supporters within the Church who share an hostility to the very concept of conversion of the Jews. The question one felt compelled to ask, therefore, was whether the Holy Father’s new Good Friday prayer answered those Jewish and ecumenical concerns, and if not, why change the prayer at all? In this regard we bring to mind that old French proverb: ‘*If it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.*’

The traditional movement has suffered no little internal tension regarding the Holy Father’s decision to alter the traditional prayer at the behest of Jewish lobbyists and we do not think any less of our traditionalist friends who have taken an opposite view from us. Some find the new prayer entirely satisfactory while others see it as a retrograde step watering down the Church’s concern for the Jewish people. Even if the prayer is as orthodox as its predecessor, the very act of changing the prayer in response to pressure from those outwith the Church can only lead to distrust of the change no matter how well it be constructed. If the existing 1959 prayer is offensive to Jews on account of its unambiguous call for their conversion, why change it at all if, as some would say, the new prayer equally calls for their conversion and is almost equally offensive to Jews?

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<sup>3</sup> Those attending the meeting ‘*were connected in leading capacities with such organisations as The Jewish Theological Seminary, the Rabbinical Assembly of America, the Synagogue Council of America, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Yeshiva University ...*’ *Ibid.* p.19.

<sup>4</sup> See meeting with French Jewish leaders and Yves Congar OP at the Strasbourg synagogue described in Jean Madiran’s article “Rome’s Secret Accord with the Jewish Leaders” in *Apropos* 9.

<sup>5</sup> See the detailed report in “How the Jews Changed Catholic Thinking” in *Judaism and the Vatican* by Leon de Poncins. Britons Publishing Co. 1967.

<sup>6</sup> *Israel Insider* 7-7-07

<sup>7</sup> *Israel Insider* “Vatican OK of Old Mass a “body blow” to Jewish-Catholic relations.” 7-07-07

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-06-07

<sup>9</sup> Reported by Rebecca Nappi in the *Spokesman* –Review.

### **An unambiguous call for conversion?**

But does the new prayer really and unambiguously call for the conversion of the Jews as understood in the traditional sense? True, the first plea that they acknowledge Our Lord as saviour mirrors that of the traditional Good Friday prayer, although as one anonymous commentator has demonstrated the prayer has been stripped of any apportioning of fault or indication of error in the Jewish people. Thus, as an editorial in *Forward* states, *'The prayer no longer speaks of Jewish "blindness" or "darkness" much less "perfidy"'*. This begs the question: If there is no fault or error, why is there any need to change i.e. to make an act of conversion? But it could be equally argued that although the prayer makes no direct reference to blindness, there is an indirect connection in the scriptural reference in the prayer to 'the fullness of the Gentiles' entering into the Church. This text comes from the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans 11:25 which reads in full: *'For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of this mystery (lest you should be wise in your own conceits) that blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in.'* But, if Vatican II has taught us anything it is to beware of that ambiguity, expertly described by Romano Amerio in *Iota Unum*, of which the current controversy is a perfect example.

### **Major Departure from Vatican II?**

Abe Foxman of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League acknowledged *'that some of the deprecatory language has been removed'* from the new version of the prayer, i.e the direct Pauline scriptural references. He dismissed the prayer overall, however, as 'cosmetic revisions' because in his view it retained the most troubling aspect for Jews, namely the desire to end the distinctive Jewish way of life, and thus constituted *'a major departure from the teachings and actions of Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and numerous authoritative Catholic documents, including Nostrae aetate.'*

### **Full Conformity with Vatican II**

Within days of the Feb 2008 new Good Friday prayer, Cardinal Kasper, President of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews<sup>10</sup> had responded to a letter from Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Chairman of the IJCIC in which the Cardinal confirms that, in the reformulated prayer, *'nothing is withdrawn from Nostrae aetate: indeed this text remains totally valid and fundamental for our Jewish-Christian relations.'* Cardinal Kasper specifically reassures his Jewish interlocutor that: *'The reformulated text no longer speaks about the conversion of the Jews, as some Jewish critics wrongly affirm. The text is a prayer inspired by St Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter II, which is the very text that speaks also of the unbroken covenant. It takes up Paul's eschatological hope that at the end of times all Israel will be saved. As a prayer the text lays all in the hands of God and not in ours. It says nothing about the how and when. Therefore there is nothing about missionary activities, by which we may take Israel's salvation in our hands. We leave all in the hands of the one who is the only master and Lord of history.'*

Nor was Cardinal Kasper's obsequious apologia a mere presidential aberration. It was followed by a more measured Vatican statement which confirmed that. *'The continuation of the position found in Nostrae Aetate is clearly shown by the fact that the prayer contained in the 1970 Missal continues to be in full use, and is the ordinary form of the prayer of Catholics'*<sup>11</sup>

The 2008 Good Friday prayer in the "extra-ordinary" liturgy allegedly seeks the conversion of the Jews sought by the 1959 and the earlier unamended prayer, but both Cardinal Kasper and the Vatican statement of 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008 advise us that the scandalous 1970 Good Friday prayer and the 2008 amended "Traditional" Good Friday prayer reflect the spirit of *Nostrae aetate* which the Jews consider as a bar on attempts to convert them. This affair demonstrates that despite the liberalisation of the Traditional Mass, and despite the protestations of

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<sup>10</sup> Which lies within the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian [sic] Unity

<sup>11</sup> Zenit 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008 ZE08040406 -2008-04-04

those who claim that the new Good Friday prayer in the traditional liturgy equates to the old, the reality is that the mark of Modernism is stamped on the whole affair. First, the irresistible need to change where such is not necessary, to introduce novelty, and by that very act creating an air of uncertainty in the Traditional liturgy where none existed before. Furthermore we find in this affair of Good Friday texts what Fr Calmel described as *'the double advantage for Modernism of not being able to be accused of clearly heretical propositions but nevertheless of being able to be drawn in a sense opposed to the faith'*. One finds in the text or the explanation of the text that ambiguity which Arnaud de Lassus tells us is connatural to Modernists. Thus the text of the new Good Friday prayers is held wholly orthodox by many traditionalists in that it calls for the conversion of the Jews, whereas Cardinal Kasper assures his Jewish friends that it no longer speaks of their conversion. Does not scripture itself warn us that : *'If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle'*<sup>12</sup>

If that battle be the missionary task of the Church to “convert all nations” who indeed shall prepare himself for such. The fruits of this policy are all too clear to see.

The question still remains as to why the Holy Father felt constrained to alter the 1959 Good Friday prayer for the Jews. As the resulting brouhaha demonstrated, the change satisfied neither traditional Catholics nor most Jews. Nor are we fully aware of whether the objections to the 1959 prayer arose primarily from a Jewish or Modernist Catholic source. One thing is certain, however, the Holy Father felt constrained to change the prayer in response to Jewish representations. To appreciate why one must consider the background to the Second Vatican Council. We are aware of the Rome-Moscow agreement, conducted by Cardinal Tisserant and the KGB agent Nikodim, the outcome of which was that Rome would no longer criticise Communism and that Moscow would permit the Russian Orthodox to attend the Council. The agreement between Rome and Jewish leaders is also now well documented<sup>13</sup>. Jean Madiran in his article “Rome’s Secret Accord with the Jewish leaders” recounts the report by Lazare Landau in issue 903 of *Tribune Juive* in which Landau wrote:

*On a misty, freezing winter’s evening in 1962-63, I went to the Centre communautaire de la Paix at Strasbourg in response to an extraordinary invitation. The Jewish leaders were holding a secret meeting in the basement with an envoy of the Pope. At the conclusion of the Sabbath, a dozen of us were there to welcome a white-robed Dominican, the Reverend Father Yves Congar, whom Cardinal Bea, in the name of John XXIII had charged with asking us, on the eve of the Council, what we expected from the Catholic Church (...)*

*The Declaration of ‘Nostrae aetate’ – Fr Congar and the three authors of the text assured me – represented a real revolution in the Church’s doctrine on the Jews (...)*

*Homilies and Catechisms changed in a few short years (...)*

*Since the secret visit from Fr Congar in a concealed part of the synagogue, on a cold winter’s night, the Church’s doctrine had indeed undergone a total change.*

Madiran comments:

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<sup>12</sup> I Cor. 14:8

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Joseph Roddy, *Look* magazine, “How the Jews changed Catholic Thinking” - see Chapter 15 of *Judaism and the Vatican*, by Leon de Poncins; *The Second Vatican Councils Declaration on the Jews – A Background Report* [‘A Private Communication Not for Publication’] published by The American Jewish Committee Institute of Human Relations NY; *Rome’s Secret Accord with the Jewish Leaders* by Jean Madiran , published as a supplement to *Apropos* No 9.

*Such was the origin of the new perspective which would be imposed on Catholic doctrine: ‘we must no longer speak of the infidelity of Israel, but of its fidelity.’*

The Rome-Moscow agreement ostensibly had the “benefit” to the Church of allowing the Russian Orthodox to attend the Council. There appears to have been no benefit to the Church in whatever accord was drawn up between the Vatican and the Jewish leaders unless it amounted to some sort of ecclesiastical Balfour Declaration the terms of which are yet to be realised. One thing is certain, however, whatever agreement was arrived at it has been faithfully adhered to by every pontiff since Vatican II and any breach must be immediately remedied by the Church. How else can one explain the heretical 1970 Good Friday prayer and paragraph 840 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. How else can one explain the indecent haste of the Vatican’s response to Jewish representation about the revised 1959 prayer and its 2008 amendment following the *Motu Proprio*, a haste unknown in response to requests by the faithful regarding matters of grave concern in faith or morals. Whatever constraints arose from these secret accords they are clearly still in place and the Church will not have liberty to pursue her mission until they are removed.

With all the sentimental talk, writing, and bloviation about Love and all that, why is there so little talk about our true love for the Jews - our selfless and generous Charity for the Jews here and now, not just at the end of time (about which there is a somewhat vague prophecy about their conversion)? If we truly love them, we will desire and work for their true conversion to the Catholic Faith and its more abundant life in Heaven. Conversion and Baptism is a necessary condition toward that end, and grace is indispensable. God created us without our help but, as St Augustine says, He will not save us without our help, hence the need for our free response to His generous Divine Grace.

Postscript:

Following our writing of this article we learned about a previous incident in the history of the Church when pressure was put upon the Church to change its Good Friday prayer regarding the Jews. It is recounted in Professor Robert Anderson’s *Pope Pius VII 1800-1823*.<sup>14</sup>

After the Napoleonic invasion of the Papal States, the Treaty of Tolentino was concluded with the French in 1797, the conditions of which required Pope Pius VI to give up all his rights over the Papal territories, known as “The Legations” which included Imola, the seat of Cardinal Chiarimonti, and which became part of the Cis-Alpine Republic proclaimed by Napoleon before his departure to Egypt. Cardinal Chiarimonti, the future Pope Pius VII, called upon his flock to submit to the new Republican order and when he returned to Imola he was welcomed by all. However, as Professor Anderson relates:

*‘Nevertheless, he was shortly afterwards enjoined by the New Minister of Police to order the suppression of prayers for the Emperor and princes and to substitute prayers “for all in authority and the good of the people in the Cis-Alpine Republic.” He was next required to suppress the Good Friday and Holy Saturday prayers pro perfidies Judaeis.*

*Then “Citizen Chiaramonti” was informed by the local commissars of the Parisian Directory that “a religion such as that of Christ, founded on humility, is incomprehensible with pomp and display.” So as once again “to put into force the simple maxims of the Gospel,” the Cardinal-Bishop was invited to remove from the altars every sign of ecclesiastical and aristocratical distinction, diametrically opposed to principles of Republican equality, and to take away the dais, steps and baldequin of the Episcopal throne.’*

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<sup>14</sup> Tan Books, Rockford, Illinois 61105, 2001.

It is worthy of note that, even in that era, the removal of the traditional Good Friday prayer for the Jews should be seen as a primary concern of a revolutionary Masonic regime. Worthy too of note is the Revolution's interest in securing changes in liturgical architecture and prayer. Reflecting on this might help some to realise the true source of inspiration for the liturgical changes which arose in the era of Vatican II almost two centuries later. A S Fraser.