



Subject: Position Paper on Church and Jews

The following article was written at my request by the Rev. Garth Neel and reflects the sense of the Anglican Orthodox Church, on the subject as well as that we feel to have been of the Ancient Church:

All those familiar with the English *Book of Common Prayer* 1662

will know that it provides three collects (prayers) to be used on Good Friday. While the first two are prayers for the church, the third is for those who are outside the church. The third collect reads as follows :

O Merciful God, who has made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

This collect had appeared in exactly this same form in the very first English prayer book of 1549 and in the same form in the second prayer book of 1552 It appears in a 19th century copy of the 1662 book which I have in my library and in the present-day editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* still being used in England today.

However, in the first revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* made in Canada in 1918, the first Canadian prayer book, the prayer was altered to read

O Merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live; Have mercy upon the Jews,

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soften the language of the prayer and to give to the Jews a special status. But while they do indeed have a special status in the history of salvation, and while we should be thankful for what God has done through them, they are quite rightly included in the older collect with Turks (i.e. Muslims), Infidels (i.e. all others who do not have faith in Christ) and Hereticks (those who profess the Christian faith but deny its basic tenets), for all four unite in rejecting the Saviour.

The prayer appears again in this last less specific form in the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* made in Canada in 1962 but with a further change. Now, reference to being "saved among the remnant of the true Israelites" is entirely removed and we only pray that they "may be made one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord." The other two collects that precede this third one remain unchanged from 1662. Here it seems likely that referring to Gentile Christians as "true Israelites" proved offensive to the ears of the revisers. Yet, this is just what Paul is getting at in Galatians 3:7 when he calls the Gentile believers "children of Abraham".

As well, the *Book of Common Prayer* (USA 1928) has the collect in this form:

O Merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live; Have mercy upon all who know thee not as thou art revealed in the Gospel of thy Son. Take from them ignorance, hardness of heart and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy fold, that they may be made one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

Here, all reference to the Jews has been deleted and there is a hint that, while we might want people to know God as He is revealed in the Gospel, there is the possibility that they can know Him, in some sense, perhaps savingly, apart from that Gospel.

Not surprisingly, in the 1985 Canadian *Book of Alternative Services* (a collection of modern liturgies similar to the 1979 Episcopal "Book of Common Prayer"), the collect itself disappears entirely. And, in recent printings of the *Book of Common Prayer* (Canada 1962), the collect likewise does not appear at all, a response to a ruling made by Archbishop

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Michael Peers, sometime Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, that the collect was no longer permitted to be used. It has now simply been deleted from the Canadian book.

One cannot help but wonder what lies behind this process of steady revision, steady revision leading, in some cases, to total exclusion. But it would seem to follow that those who do not want the church to pray for the conversion of the Jews (or for others who are not Christians), must be convinced that the Jews (and the others) have no NEED of conversion. It is difficult to see how they could be thinking anything else.

I suppose it likely that in the case of those who, while professing a form of the Christian faith, have lost all confidence in the truth of the Holy Scriptures, it is simply a matter of not seeing the need for ANYONE'S conversion. Why would you pray for the conversion of the Jews and the Muslims and the Hindus if you were convinced that none of us really needs to be converted anyway? It would be inconsistent to do so. And I suppose that this is the case for many who would call themselves Christians in Canada today. Since the Bible is no longer for them the authoritative Word of God, all that it has to say about sin and salvation and turning to God through Christ no longer applies.

But what about those who believe that the Bible is authoritative and, generally speaking, conversion IS necessary for human beings, but that it is NOT necessary for the Jews? This is the position taken by some who would see God as having a special program for the Jews, a salvation that works for them apart from the salvation wrought through Jesus Christ. In simple terms, they are God's people, and that's that. For example, the 20th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America warns that there has been "an organized effort on the part of some who claim to profess the name of Christ to deny that Jewish people need to come to Him to be saved", and that "these people have spread a false hope and security that Jewish people can inherit eternal life apart from the faith in God's New Covenant promises foretold by the Jewish prophets."

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Such a view is often taken by people who are wanting to be faithful to the Word of God, but who clearly have lost sight of several important truths. One of these truths is the idea of the basic unity of the Bible. As an Anglican, it is interesting for me to note that we have several statements in the 39 Articles of Religion that bear upon the question of the conversion of the Jews and the adherents of other religions. Most pointedly, Article VII, *Of the Old Testament*, clearly states

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and the New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises ...

In other words, even in the Old Testament times, the Gospel was being preached. And those who were the Old Testament saints, who formed the Old Testament church, were saved by none other than by Jesus Christ, just as we are today. To put it another way, God's Gospel of Grace did not just come into effect with the advent of Christ. It was the promise made to all the believers of the Old Testament, to Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah ... all of them. This is surely what Paul refers to when he says that

the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. Gal. 3 8

To suggest that there is now another plan of salvation for the Jews, is simply to deny the evidence of the Jewish Scriptures themselves. It is not that Jesus has now become the way of salvation for the Gentiles, while the Jews continue with another program all their own. Jesus has ALWAYS been the way of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike. Add to this the reality that, for the Apostle Paul, election is always election in Christ (see Ephesians 1:4), both for Jew and Gentile, and you should have significant trouble trying to find a separate plan of salvation for the Jews.

So, it can hardly be wrong to pray for the conversion of the Jews or for Muslims or for unbelievers or for those who claim to be Christians but are not. Neither can be it wrong to recognize that, while the Jews have had a special place in the history of salvation, they are like "Turks, Infidels and Hereticks", in that they also reject Jesus Christ. One can only pray for the day when all the church will be more concerned about offending Christ than about offending men.

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