

By Gary Taphorn

With Holy Week now upon us, Catholics are turning their thoughts to the summit of the liturgical year, the Easter Triduum. If there is one aspect of the liturgy that is likely to provoke public comment these days, it is surely the “great intercessions” on Good Friday, particularly the prayer for the Jews which somehow manages to evoke accusations of “antisemitism.” Yet, as author Kennedy Hall [stated](#) so well during Holy Week last year, “There is no salvation outside of the Church, and Christ is King and always will be. To hold fast to those truths is not antisemitic; it is, instead orthodox Catholic belief.”

A review of the attempts, both successful and unsuccessful, to change the text of this prayer since the 1920s would make a fair-sized dissertation. Fortunately, Wikipedia provides an extensive treatment of the issue under the heading [Good Friday prayer for the Jews](#). As a baseline, let’s consider the version of the prayer in use for nearly four centuries, from the Council of Trent through 1955:

*Let us pray also for the faithless Jews: that Almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts; so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord. [‘Amen’ is not responded, nor is said ‘Let us pray’, or ‘Let us kneel’, or ‘Arise’, but immediately is said:] Almighty and eternal God, who dost not exclude from thy mercy even Jewish faithlessness: hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people; that acknowledging the light of thy Truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

In this version, the description of the Jews as “faithless” is considered slightly less controversial than “perfidious” which has also been used in English translations. Unlike the other petitions (for Holy Church, the Supreme Pontiff, etc.) in the pre-1955 liturgy, the faithful were not requested to kneel for the Jews. In justifying this omission, the French liturgical scholar Dom Prosper Guéranger [stated](#), “The Church has no hesitation in offering up a prayer for the descendants of Jesus’ executioners; but in doing so she refrains from genuflecting, because this mark of adoration was turned by the Jews into an insult against our Lord during the Passion.”

In his 2023 book *If You Believed Moses* (Volume 2), an Australian priest, Fr. James Mawdsley, offers the following comment on the Good Friday prayer for the Jews: “Precisely because this prayer is so vital, it has long been targeted for change. Ever since the Church’s resistance to the spirit of this world began crumbling in the 1950s, this prayer has been changed and diluted by the Vatican more times than any other public prayer, eviscerating it to appease enemies of mankind, powers who do not want the Jews to convert. It was in

order to utterly bury the old prayer, and more importantly to exclude its spirit, that the secularization of the entire liturgy got underway and continues today.” (pp. 257-258).

Without reviewing the entire recent history of the prayer, we note that in 1955 Pope Pius XII added a genuflection for the prayer, making it similar to with the other petitions. During his first Lent (1959) as Supreme Pontiff, Pope John XXIII ordered the word “faithless” (“perfidious”) stricken from the text, which was formally updated in the widely used 1962 Roman Catholic Missal. Two more changes followed during the papacy of Paul VI. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*, which radically expanded the availability of the Latin Mass and the rest of the 1962 Missal. Benedict’s action was met with widespread objections from Jewish groups, especially the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which had presumably ignored the Latin mass after Vatican II. Under pressure, Benedict issued an amended version of the prayer in 2008, removing references to “the blindness of that people” and “they may be rescued from their darkness.” (Latin mass users of the monthly *Benedictus* from Sophia Institute Press can note the differences with the original text of the 1962 Missal.)

For *novus ordo* (ordinary form) Catholics, the difference between the pre-1955 version of the prayer (cited above) and what the Church now offers them is even more stark. Since 2011, the English version of the prayer [is translated](#) as follows:

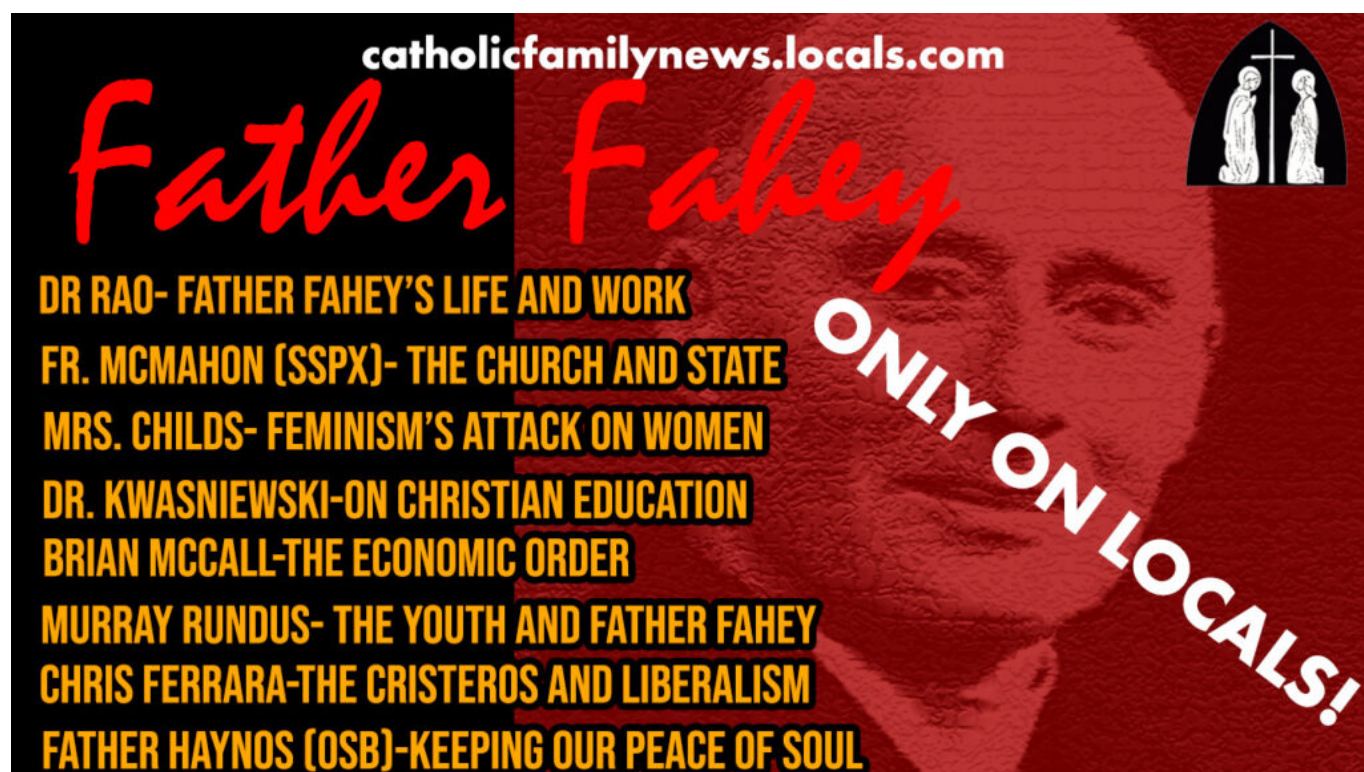
*Let us pray also for the Jewish people, to whom the Lord our God spoke first, that he may grant them to advance in love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant. [Prayer in silence. Then the priest says:] Almighty ever-living God, who bestowed your promises on Abraham and his descendants, hear graciously the prayers of your Church, that the people you first made your own may attain the fullness of redemption. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

As Fr. Mawdsley noted above, the current *novus ordo* prayer is so “diluted” that it no longer even asks that the Jews “acknowledge the light of thy Truth, which is Christ...” How can they “attain the fullness of redemption” without Him? And to which “covenant” are they to be faithful? Likewise, there is no longer a reference to the “veil” or “blindness” of the Jews. Do we not agree with St. Paul when he wrote, “Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” (2 Cor 3:15-16).

In addition to changes in the Good Friday prayer, the Church has taken other measures that effectively marginalize its mission to evangelize the Jews. The most notable step was taken through the 1965 Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*. Although conceived and developed as a means of addressing Catholic-Jewish relations, the title of the final

document concerns relations with “non-Christian religions.” Regardless of the text and intentions of the document, the [perception](#) it has given to Jews (as noted by the Anti-Defamation League) is that the Church “repudiates the centuries-old ‘deicide’ charge against all Jews, stresses the religious bond shared by Jews and Catholics, reaffirms the eternal covenant between God and the People of Israel, and dismisses church interest in trying to baptize Jews.”

Also notable was the 2015 document “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable: a Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*.” In paragraph 40, this document [states](#) that “the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work (i.e., evangelization) directed towards Jews.” Given the Church’s near abandonment of its commission to “teach and baptize” the Jews and the near impossibility of proselytizing Jews in Israel, these words of Christ to His apostles may take on new meaning today: “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” (Matt 10:23).



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Regardless – or perhaps because of – the specific form of the Good Friday prayer for the Jews and the two documents cited above, a casual look at today’s world reveals Jews at or near the center of multiple global tensions. The near collapse of Palestinian society, the

apparently dramatic rise in antisemitism, and the concern about Iran's potential access to nuclear weapons are only three. There are clearly more.

At the risk of gross oversimplification, the events of the last few years, especially since the Hamas attack of October 2023, seem to be driving the Gentiles into one of three camps. None of these is pleasing to God. First are the Christian Zionists, who effectively support the Israeli government's agenda to expand its territory into a "greater Israel" and to expel the inconvenient Palestinians. Most of them have adopted the "dogmas" that Jews have an eternal right to the Promised Land, that the native Palestinians are inherently evil or irrelevant, and that they themselves will be "raptured." Second are those who "fear the Jews" and so remain silent. Although they oppose the actions of Israel, they are intimidated by the immense power of the Jewish/Zionist lobby in Western society. Let us recall that even in the time of Christ, there were those who kept silent "for fear of the Jews." The Gospel of John alone gives us four such examples. Finally are the racists, who despise the Jews because of who they are, not what they do. All three groups have one thing in common - they fail to bring Christ to the Jews. And, as we have seen above, now they are seemingly joined by the Catholic Church, at least at the institutional level.

Yet there remain heroes, people willing to speak truth to Zionist power, even and especially among the Jewish people themselves. One example is New York Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss, a confirmed anti-Zionist. In a recent [interview](#), the rabbi lamented the current situation in Israel, stating that "we cry and hurt with the people of Gaza, with the people of Palestine." He likewise reminded the Israelis that, as "the Almighty warns us that in the Torah, the land will reject you if you will defile the land." Other heroes include 350 rabbis and other Jews who in February [signed](#) an advertisement in the *New York Times* in which they condemned President Trump's proposal for the forced removal of Palestinians from Gaza, which they did not hesitate to call ethnic cleansing. Even Jewish Senator Bernie Sanders - hardly a friend of "conservative values" - comes to mind. Just days ago, he [sponsored](#) a bill to block further U.S. munitions to Israel (funded by American taxpayers). Stated Sanders correctly, "Israel has dropped U.S.-provided 2,000-pound bombs into crowded neighborhoods, killing hundreds of civilians to take out a handful of Hamas fighters, and made little effort to distinguish between civilians and combatants. These actions are immoral and illegal." As Sanders surely knew in advance, his bill was a lost cause, opposed by every Republican in the Senate and garnering only fifteen votes in approval. Nonetheless, he made a principled stand.

With all praise to God, there are at least two prominent American Catholics who have joined the ranks above, condemning injustice and true antisemitism, but also pointing the way to Christ. In late March, Bishop Joseph Strickland [wrote](#) a magnificent "Open letter to

President Trump and the Administration” in which he requested “urgent moral reflection,” hopefully leading “this administration to reconsider its path” on the situation in the Middle East. His letter is first-rate and deserves reading by every American Catholic. Finally, we must mention Mother Miriam of the Lamb of God (the former Rosalind Moss). A convert from Judaism, Mother Miriam [has stated](#) that “the worst form of antisemitism ever is to deny the Jewish people the knowledge of Christ.”

As Good Friday approaches, I am praying that Catholics (especially Americans) meditate on the significance of praying for the Jews. First, the length of the current liturgical prayer is barely 70 words in the *novus ordo* version, which takes well under a minute to recite. Can we not devote more than one minute a year for the welfare and conversion of the Jews, given all that is at stake in the world? Second is the text of that prayer, which fails to even mention the name of Christ (the Light who will deliver the Jews from their darkness), until the perfunctory ending. Can we even begin to fathom the era of holiness and blessings that would ensue across the world following a mass conversion of the Jews? “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.” (Rom 11:25). Surely God will care for the Jews in His own way and time, but would He not still be moved by our prayers if offered regularly and with a sense of urgency? Since we cannot expect the Church to make changes to its liturgy overnight, perhaps it is up to the laity to take the initiative and pray, each in his own way.

Both Jesus and Paul openly expressed their anguish over the fate of Jerusalem and the Jews. “As he [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” (Luke 19:41). As for Paul, he testified that “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel.” (Rom 9:2-4). But no one weeps over Jerusalem or the Jews today except for the few Arab Christians in Palestine, even as they sense their abandonment by us Christians in the west. Meanwhile, the Zionists continue along their obstinate path while the Palestinians endure their slow-motion agony of bloodshed, starvation, illness and despair, now at eighteen months and counting.

Queen of Patriarchs and Prophets, teach us how to pray for your own people, the Jewish people, and their neighbors.