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IS THE TRADITIONAL GOOD FRIDAY ORATION FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE FACTUALLY HURTFUL? ATTEMPTING TO OFFER AN APOLOGY FOR “PRO PERFIDIS JUDAEIS”

Key words: oration for the Jewish people, Jews, Good Friday, liturgical reform, Birkat ha-Minim

1. Introduction. 2. The Good Friday oration for the Jewish people. 3. The Jewish prayer “Birkat ha-Minim”. 4. The defence of the traditional Good Friday oration for the Jews. 5. The relation between the Good Friday oration for the Jews and Birkat ha-Minim. 6. Conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional Catholic prayer for the Jewish people offered on Good Friday is one of the most controversial orations which led to various disputes as it was considered intolerant and hurtful. Increasing pressure to change this oration was exerted as early as in the 1920s, and after the first failures¹ it renewed forcefully about twenty years later to bring about a radical modification of the Good Friday prayer for the Jews in the next several years². In this context, the following question arises: was the traditional Good Friday prayer for the Jews truly harmful, intolerant or even theologically incorrect? Did Catholics pray inappropriately on one of the most important days of the liturgical year for over a thousand years?

The paper is an attempt to defend the traditional Good Friday oration for the Jews and to present its theological correctness. This will be achieved by analysing the crucial fragments of the oration and by juxtaposing them with the Jewish prayer “Birkat ha-Minim”. The study will be presented in four parts. The first one juxtaposes the versions of the Good Friday oration for the Jews. The second one presents

¹ See G. Volli, *Papa Benedetto XIV e gli ebrei*, La Rassegna Mensile di Israel 22/5 (1956) 223.

² See J. Borelli, *The Origins and Early Development of Interreligious Relations during the Century of the Church (1910–2010)*, U.S. Catholic Historian 28/2 (2010) 85; M. Horoszewicz, *Uzupełnienie do wielkopiątkowej modlitwy za Żydów*, Więź 38/6 (1995) 186.

Birkat ha-Minim. The third one presents an explanation of the essential fragments of the traditional prayer for the Jews. Finally, the Good Friday oration will be juxtaposed with Birkat ha-Minim.

2. THE GOOD FRIDAY ORATION FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The present-day oration for the Jews prayed on Good Friday cannot explain the Jews' opposition to the way Christians intercede for them: "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".

To understand the Jews' objection to the Catholic prayer it is necessary to present the traditional, former Good Friday oration for the Jews, the oration which was prayed for over a thousand years: "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. 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".

Without going into details concerning the regulations on how to change this prayer, for the purpose of this study, it is worth noting that the Good Friday oration for the Jews was revised five times over the course of fifty years, thus by far the largest number of changes as compared with any other Good Friday intercessions. There were far-reaching modifications, which can be seen by juxtaposing the aforesaid orations³. Nowadays, the Church uses two prayers for the Jews. The first one (quoted above and inspired by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council) is used in the so-called ordinary form of the Roman rite, while the other (promulgated by Benedict XVI) appears in the so-called extraordinary form of the Roman rite⁴. Importantly, the 2008 version has not received full approval of the Jewish community⁵.

³ See D. Mielnik, *The Good Friday oration for the Jews in the Latin liturgical books in the background of the postconciliar liturgical reforms. From the conflict to the cooperation*, International Relations Review 4/2 (2021) 141–158.

⁴ Sekretariat Stanu, *Nota Sekretariatu Stanu odnośnie do wskazań papieża Benedykta XVI dotyczących modlitw za Żydów w liturgii Wielkiego Piątku w Mszałe rzymskim z 1962 r.*, Anamnesis 14/3 (2008) 10; J. Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965*, Cambridge 2012, 270.

⁵ H. Heinz – H.C.H.G. Brandt, *A new burden on Christian–Jewish relations: statement of the discussion group «Jews and Christians» of the central committee of German Catholics on the Good Friday prayer «for the Jews» in the extraordinary rite version of 2008*, European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe 41/1 (2008) 161; H. Muszyński, *Jak się modlimy za Żydów*, Więź 52/3 (2009) 50–51.

3. THE JEWISH PRAYER “BIRKAT HA-MINIM”

It is difficult to arrive at a correct understanding of the traditional oration for the Jews without considering the ancient circumstances. If you placed the ancient prayer in the contemporary context you would commit a mistake known as an anachronism. Certain phrases should not be evaluated from the contemporary point of view because today's context significantly differs from that in which the traditional Good Friday oration for the Jews was created. At the same time, it is impossible not to refer to the way the Jewish people formulated their prayers for heretics or apostates (including Christians) since it also shows a certain mentality.

In order to prove that the Good Friday oration for the Jews does not have to differ considerably from the orations formulated by the Jewish people, before attempting to prove the legitimacy of the traditional Good Friday Catholic prayer, a brief introduction to the so-called Birkat ha-Minim, i.e. the oration recited by the Jews, should be made. The aim of this part of the paper will be to show that using phrases that would be regarded as intolerant from the contemporary point of view phrases was not so unusual in antiquity.

An example of a prayer formulated in a way that is intolerant from our point of view can be the Jewish oration “Amidah,” which is one of the two main (next to *Shema Yisrael*) prayers uttered daily by the Jews⁶. Its alternative name is *shmone esre* which can be translated as “eighteen (blessings)”. This name is supposed to refer to the number of invocations and the number of repetitions of God's name⁷. In turn, “amidah” (lit. standing) indicates the attitude that is adopted when reciting this oration. This prayer can be divided into three main parts. The first is a collection of texts praising God. The second group consists of requests addressed to God. In the third, there is a request to return to Zion, prosperity for Israel and thanksgiving for God's protection.

From the perspective of our research problem, the key fragment of the prayer was placed in the second group as the twelfth blessing and is called “Birkat ha-Minim,” which can be rendered as “blessing of heretics”⁸. When juxtaposing the title and content, it is easy to notice that terminology is ironic and should be understood as an euphemism⁹. The prayer reads as follows: “For the apostates let there be no hope. And let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the apostates (*nocrim*) and the heretics (*minim*) be destroyed in a moment. And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant”¹⁰.

⁶ See M. Tomal, *Jak modlą się Żydzi. Antologia modlitw*, Warszawa 2000, 7, 15; L.I.A. Levine, *Judaizm od zburzenia Jerozolimy do upadku drugiego powstania żydowskiego (lata 70–135)*, in: *Chrześcijaństwo a judaizm rabiniczny. Historia początków oraz wczesnego rozwoju*, ed. H. Shanks, Warszawa 2013, 233. The text of this prayer can be found in: N. Mendecki, *Modlitwa «osiemnastu błogosławieństw»*, *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 37/2 (1984) 140–143.

⁷ See D.C. Allison, *Blessing God and Cursing People: James 3:9-10*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130/2 (2011) 397.

⁸ See H. Lempa, *Modlitwa codzienna w judaizmie*, *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 4/1 (1996) 56; J.P. Lewis, *Jamnia After Forty Years*, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 70/71 (1999–2000) 234.

⁹ See A. Reinhartz, *Early Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*, New York 2018, 109.

¹⁰ See Y.Y. Tepler, *Birkat HaMinim: Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World*,

On the basis of the preserved testimonies it could be claimed that the form of the prayer was created in Yavne at the end of the first century¹¹. This text was included, for example, in the Berakhot tractate in the Babylonian Talmud¹². According to this document, *shmone esre* was created by Shmuel ha-Katan. In the beginning, the prayer did not include Birkat ha-Minim. It was supposed to be added at Gama-liel's request and created by Shmuel ha-Katan¹³.

Analysing Birkat ha-Minim, two important issues should be considered. Firstly, attention should be paid to the original version of the prayer itself, which, apart from the credibility of the testimony contained in Berakhot is not so obvious¹⁴. Secondly, it is important to determine whom the terms "apostates" and "heretics" refer to, because their identification with Christ's followers is not very evident¹⁵.

As regards the first problem, it is fair to admit that a considerable number of manuscripts are certified not to bear any reference to the extermination of apostates and the heretics. On the basis of the analyses of Ehrlich and Langer, it can be concluded that out of the 86 analysed manuscripts as many as in 24 have no reference to these two groups. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the reference to the destruction of apostates and heretics is present, however it should be underlined that the reference is found in different parts of the prayer¹⁶.

Tübingen 2007, 23; *Birkat Ha-Minim*, in <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/birkat-ha-minim> (access: 28.11.2021). See the different versions of the prayer in: M.S. Wróbel, *Jezus i Jego wyznawcy w Talmudzie. Analiza tekstologiczna, historyczna i socjologiczna*, Lublin 2013, 150–155.

¹¹ See S.T. Katz, *Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103/1 (1984) 63; S.J. Joubert, *A bone of contention in recent scholarship: The 'birkat ha-minim' and the separation of Church and synagogue in the first century AD*, *Neotestamentica* 27/2 (1993) 351. According to some scholars, the author of the last canonical Gospel alluded to this prayer. See J.A. Harrill, *Cannibalistic Language in the Fourth Gospel and Greco-Roman Polemics of Factionalism (John 6:52-66)*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127/1 (2008) 133–158; W.A. Meeks, *In Search of the Early Christians*, London 2002, 116–123; D.R.A. Hare, *How Jewish Is the Gospel of Matthew?*, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62/2 (2000) 268.

¹² See R. Langer, *New Directions in Understanding Jewish Liturgy*, in *Early Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. F.E. Greenspahn, New York 2018, 162.

¹³ See J.T. Townsend, *How can late rabbinic texts inform biblical and early Christian studies?*, *Shofar* 6/1 (1987) 27.

¹⁴ It is obvious that the prayer was developed. See A.J. Saldarini, *Jews and Christians in the first two centuries: the changing paradigm*, *Shofar* 10/2 (1992) 19. Anyway, Justin Martyr might have been a witness of the existence of this prayer. Also, Jerome and Epiphanius probably alluded to it. See D. Boyarin, *Justin Martyr Invents Judaism*, *Church History* 70/3 (2001) 433; T.C.G. Thornton, *Christian understandings of the «birkath ha-minim» in the eastern Roman Empire*, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 38/2 (1987) 419; E.M. Meyers, *Early Judaism and Christianity in the Light of Archaeology*, *The Biblical Archaeologist* 51/2 (1988) 70; W. Kinzig, «Non-Separation»: *Closeness and Co-operation between Jews and Christians in the Fourth Century*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 45/1 (1991) 50.

¹⁵ See J.E. Burns, *Essene Sectarianism and Social Differentiation in Judaea after 70 C.E.*, *The Harvard Theological Review* 99/3 (2006) 254.

¹⁶ A detailed analysis can be found in U. Ehrlich – R. Langer, *The Earliest Texts of the Birkat Haminim*, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 76 (2005) 63–112.

In relation to the second problem there are different answers to the question who the “apostates” and “heretics” are. Although the most natural reference are Christians¹⁷, the term “minim” never refers to Christ’s believers in the Talmud, which weakens this identification¹⁸. Despite that, some scholars opt for this relation and assert that the term “minim” points to Christians of Jewish origin, i.e. Jews who, from the Jewish point of view, departed from the orthodox faith¹⁹. Others note that in the New Testament there are allusions to the term “nocrim” as denoting Christians (Acts 24:5) which can confirm the statement that both words should be understood synonymously²⁰. Perhaps the term “minim” was used to signify all heretical groups and the term “nocrim” was added in a restrictive way²¹.

Even departing slightly from the problem of the identification of “minim” and “nocrim” with a specific group, the content of Birkat ha-Minim should be considered. This oration is composed of several curses directed at certain categories of people. Firstly, those who ask God not to give hope for those described as apostates. Secondly, the prayer speaks of the immediate eradication of the impudent kingdom (“in our days”)²². Thirdly, prayers ask for three misfortunes for “apostates” and “heretics”: being destroyed in a moment²³, blotting out of the Book of Life and not being inscribed together with the righteous. It should be underlined very clearly that none of these requests, in their literal meaning, alludes to the good of the beneficiaries of the prayer. The good is only shown from the Jewish perspective and it is about getting rid of an uncomfortable group of people.

¹⁷ See A.Y. Collins, *The Function of «Excommunication» in Paul*, *The Harvard Theological Review* 73/1-2 (1980) 254; N.J. McEleney, *Orthodoxy in Judaism of the first Christian century*, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 4/1 (1973) 42; L. Teugels, *The background of the anti-Christian polemics in Aggadat bereshit*, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 30/2 (1999) 197; S.A. Leavy, *«For Fear of the Jews»: Origins of Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, *American Imago* 63/1 (2006) 66.

¹⁸ See J.H. Charlesworth, *Chrześcijaństwo i Żydzi w pierwszych sześciu wiekach*, in: *Chrześcijaństwo a judaizm rabiniczny. Historia początków oraz wczesnego rozwoju*, ed. H. Shanks, Warszawa 2013, 510.

¹⁹ See S.J.D. Cohen, *Judaizm do czasu opracowania Miszny (lata 135–220)*, in: *Chrześcijaństwo a judaizm rabiniczny. Historia początków oraz wczesnego rozwoju*, ed. H. Shanks, Warszawa 2013, 343–344; D.M. Grossberg, *Orthopraxy in Tannaitic Literature*, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 41/4 (2010) 540.

²⁰ See M.S. Wróbel, *Znaczenie formuły Birkat ha-minim w procesie rozdziału synagogi od Kościoła*, *Collectanea Theologica* 78/2 (2008) 68.

²¹ See R. Kalmin, *Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity*, *The Harvard Theological Review* 87/2 (1994) 160; S.S. Miller, *The Minim of Sepphoris Reconsidered*, *The Harvard Theological Review* 86/4 (1993) 378; S.J.D. Cohen, *The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism*, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984) 41–42.

²² See D. Instone-Brewer, *The eighteen benedictions and the minim before 70 CE*, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 54/1 (2003) 41.

²³ According to some scholars, this request should not be understood as destruction, but humiliation. See L. Jacobs, *Praying for the Downfall of the Wicked*, *Modern Judaism* 2/3 (1982) 303.

4. THE DEFENCE OF THE TRADITIONAL GOOD FRIDAY ORATION FOR THE JEWS

Considering the traditional Good Friday oration for the Jewish people, it is worth noting that the prayer was not created as a desire for some emotional discharge on the representatives of the Jewish people. Of course, one should be aware of the very difficult relation between the Church and the Jewish people, which was caused primarily by the fact that, from the Christian perspective, it was the sons of this nation who led to the shameful death of the Son of God, thus defying God's revelation and rejecting special privileges, endowed with their covenant with Abraham. The Church lived for many centuries with this painful belief that the Jews who in the first place should have recognized Christ as the Messiah foretold in the sacred Scriptures did not do that²⁴.

In order to understand the nuances and details of the traditional oration for the Jews the Christian interpretation of the Church's establishment and her emergence from the Jewish people should be considered. Nowadays, the dominant tendency seems to define the Christian community as a certain sect which arose on the roots of Judaism, and which then grew in number to such an extent that it became a separate religion. This interpretation from the perspective of ecclesiastical identity is incorrect because it suggests that the Church was created somewhat "by the way," somewhat on the margins of the Jewish religion. From the Christian perspective, however, the situation is quite the opposite. The Church was foreseen in God's eternal plans as the realization of the Jewish religion²⁵. In other words, Moses' law was directed to be fulfilled in the institution of the Church. Thus, with the advent of the Church, the former Jewish institutions became obsolete (cf. Gal 3:23-25)²⁶.

As a consequence, from the Christian perspective, God's will was to transform Judaism into Christianity and to recognise Christ as the Messiah by the Jews, any manifestation of revolt against this will of God is precisely a kind of a "sect" or "heresy" that arose in the bosom of the primitive Church. In this perspective, the Jewish guilt appears to be even bigger than, for example, the guilt of the pagans because the latter were not the beneficiaries of the historical revelation.

Moving into the content of the said oration, it should be stated that it was composed on the basis of the motives present in the New Testament writings. In other words, the main basis for this traditional prayer was in the words of Jesus and the

²⁴ See Ł. Kamykowski, *Podstawowe elementy nowej chrześcijańskiej teologii judaizmu*, *Collocanea Theologica* 69/2 (1999) 50.

²⁵ So nowadays the Church is the true Israel. See Cz. Krakowiak, *Geneza i rozwój liturgicznej modlitwy za Żydów w Mszałe Rzymskim*, *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 163/2 (2014) 297.

²⁶ It is interesting to see that, contrary to the contemporary opinions that Jews are not the Christians' "older brothers in faith". The present-day Judaism (rabbinic) was founded after the Church's foundation, and unlike OT Judaism, its essence is not based on temple worship. So the Old Testament Judaism should not be equated with rabbinic Judaism as the former lost its raison d'être in 70 AD when the Jewish temple was destroyed. These nuances were once noticeable even on Wikipedia. In the past, there was information there that rabbinic Judaism was formed only in the fourth century after Christ. This information has now been modified.

apostle Paul. On the other hand, other expressions, although not drawn directly from the text of the Holy Scriptures, were formulated on the ground of scriptural data.

The analysis of the particular components of the traditional oration should begin with probably the most controversial attribute describing the Jews. It is a question of the word “perfidus,” which through Latin passed in the essentially unchanged form (perfidious, perfide, perfido, perfidny) to various modern languages. It should be noted, however, that its equivalents have no longer the correct nuance which contained in the Latin meaning. At present, this word can mean “perverse, deceitful, artful, cagey, deceitful, insidious,” whereas the scope of the connotation of the Latin word is different.

The Latin word etymologically derives from two terms: the preposition “per” meaning “across, along” and the noun “fides,” which can be translated as “faith, trust”. Literally, this word is related to the phrase “by faith/trust”. There is also a noun form present in the Good Friday oration. In fact, in Latin “perfidus” means “unfaithful,” so the phrase “pro perfidis Judaeis” should be understood as “for unfaithful Jews,” and “*judaicam perfidiam*” as “unfaithful Jews or unfaithful Jewry”²⁷.

Therefore, a Catholic who prays “pro perfidis Judaeis” only expresses the fact that the Jews are unfaithful: they do not confess the Christian faith, which is an objective truth and no follower of Judaism will admit that he/she shares Christian dogmas. In this case, the adjective “perfidus” is not hurtful but it expresses an objective, empirically verifiable state of being unfaithful to the Christian faith. As for a Jew a Catholic is unfaithful because he/she does not confess the Jewish faith so for a Catholic a Jew is unfaithful for the same reason. There is nothing offensive or harmful in this statement²⁸.

When this adjective was removed from the prayer (as John XXIII did), paradoxically, the sense of the oration became more complicated. In the traditional prayer, the presence of this adjective along with the word “iudaeus” indicated a narrowing of the circle of people to whom the prayer applied. As it is known, some ethnic Jews confessed Christ as their Messiah and joined the Church. From the Catholic point of view, such Jews cannot be said to be unfaithful. If the oration had the form of “*oremus pro Judaeis*,” it would suggest that this prayer is also for the Jews-Catholics, which is not true since the Church prays for them in the so-called *ad intra ecclesiam* orations. Therefore, in order to stress that this prayer concerns the Jews who did not accept Christ’s message (so thus are unfaithful), an adjective was added, narrowing the circle of people embraced in the prayer.

The fragment “removing the veil from Jews’ hearts”²⁹ has its biblical basis in 2 Corinthians 3:13-16: “We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face

²⁷ See J. Hershkopf, *The Church and the Jews: The struggle at Vatican Council II*, The American Jewish Year Book 66 (1965) 107; G. Ignatowski, *Modlitwa za Żydów w Wielki Piątek*, *Więź* 38/3 (1995) 198.

²⁸ The fact that the term has assumed a pejorative character does not mean that this nuance was present at the time the oration was created. It would be a misunderstanding to set up classical texts simply because some words lost their original meanings over time.

²⁹ See A. Ages, *Veillot and the Talmud*, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 64/3 (1974) 248.

to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away"³⁰. Here Paul describes a situation in which he believes that the Israelites are now, that is while reading the Scriptures, they cannot fully understand their message. The obstacle that prevents them from understanding God's word is the veil covering the depth of the message. Only when this veil is removed, it will be possible to get to know the full content of the sacred books³¹.

According to Paul, the *sine qua non* condition of removing this veil is to confess Christ as the Messiah. Only then the person who reads the Old Testament will be able to understand its message³². Paul defines confessing Christ as the Messiah as "turning to the Lord," thus accepting everything that God revealed, including acknowledging Christ as the Messiah sent by him. In the light of the traditional oration, the request to remove the veil is a request for being open to God's revelation and not to make any barriers to it, caused by one's own ideas as to what the Messiah sent by God would look like. The fulfillment of this condition, i.e. full openness to God's revelation, is to lead, as the oration shows, to know Jesus as God's emissary.

There are several biblical references to another controversial passage in which the Jews were called "blind people". The most clear one is probably Christ's words from Matt 15:14: "Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit"³³. The context of these words is the dispute over the faithfulness to the ancestors' tradition of the elders³⁴. Here Jesus spoke about the Pharisees when he heard that they were shocked by his message. His words did not factually concern the entire Jewish nation but a strictly defined group. Yet, it does not change the fact the driving force behind his words was the context of the unfaithfulness to the tradition and abolition of God's commandments, which is evidence of disobedience to God himself. In this sense, then, from the Christian perspective, the image of blindness can be ascribed to the Jewish people as a whole because they disobeyed God by the not accepting his emissary.

The motive of blind eyes also appears in Acts 28:25, where Paul referred to a quotation from the Book of Isaiah speaking of people's heart becoming calloused towards God's message. The passage reads as follows: "Go to this people and say, «You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving». For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal

³⁰ See Ł. Kamykowski, *Sens przeobrażeń modlitwy za Żydów w rzymskiej liturgii Wielkiego Piątku*, Analecta Cracoviensia 20 (1988) 181.

³¹ See A. Martini, *Ufficio della settimana santa colla versione italiana*, Milano 1837, 469.

³² This interpretation is confirmed by the next fragment where Paul wrote about Christians who saw the Lord's glory without any veil (2 Cor 3:18).

³³ See G. Śniadoch, *Msza święta trydencka. Mity i prawda. Apologetyka starej Mszy dla początkujących*, Ząbki 2014, 89.

³⁴ Here the context is eating with unclear hands.

them” (Acts 28:26-27). The Apostle referred to this passage in the context of lack of faith in the messianic mission of Christ by some Jews. “Blind eyes” expresses the inability to understand fully the sense of the inspired Scriptures, and especially to see in them the truth about the Messiah.

The clearest scriptural motive referring to the idea of “delivering Jews from darkness” can be found in John 8:12, where Jesus speaks of himself: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”. According to the logic of this statement, there is a close relation between Jesus and lightness. Thus anyone who follows Christ has this light. Obviously, this light should not be understood in a literal or physical sense. The one who does not follow Christ has no light. Since the Jews consciously rejected Christ as the messiah and so they are not in his presence, it can consistently be said that deprived of the light, they are walking in darkness.

Finally, the problem of gestures (in fact, the lack of them) during the prayer should be considered. As aforementioned, during the Good Friday oration for the Jews there was no kneeling down and praying in silence, thus some people regarded that as an expression of disapproval of the Jews³⁵. The literature on this question gives two justifications for such practice. Some authors referred to the scene taking place in the praetorium. According to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus was beaten and mocked by Pilate’s soldiers. One of their gestures was kneeling down before him (Matt 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 22:63-65). Other authors suggested a slightly earlier scene which took place before the Sanhedrin. According to the evangelists, Jesus was slapped in the face and mocked by the Jews (Matt 26:67-68; Mark 14:65)³⁶.

Some scholars explained the practice of non-kneeling down by the fact that this gesture was one of the ways of behaviour used by the Jews to mock Jesus. For this reason, to express their disapproval of the Jews’ attitude, the faithful did not kneel down during the oration for the Jewish people. It is not difficult to see that this interpretation poses a significant problem – according to the evangelical narratives, it was Pilate’s soldiers, not the Jews, who mockingly knelt down before Jesus³⁷. The second justification is also problematic. While it is true that before the Sanhedrin the Jews mocked Jesus, the Evangelists did not mention that they knelt down before him. Further, it is worth noting that the Gospel accounts ascribed mocking acts to the Jews not only on the night of his arrest but also during his agony on the cross (Matt 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37).

Regardless of these observations, it should be stated that the gesture that was omitted in the Good Friday oration had no anti-Semitic character. Since the omission

³⁵ There were opinions that this kind of gesture derived from the apostolic tradition. See L. Rogalski, *Wielki Tydzień*, in *Encyklopedia powszechna*, vol. 26, Warszawa 1867, 922.

³⁶ See *Uffizj della Settimana Santa con alcune necessarie annotazioni e rubriche italiane a comodo specialmente de’ laici*, Firenze 1859, 228; F. Cancellieri, *Descrizione delle funzioni della Settimana Santa nella cappella pontificia*, Roma 1802, 94; *Manuel des cérémonies qui ont lieu pendant la Semaine Sainte et l’octave de Pâques au Vatican*, Rome 1856, 41.

³⁷ See G.M. Baggs, *The Ceremonies of Holy-week at the Vatican and S. John Lateran’s Described*, Rome 1839, 75.

of kneeling was not to express disapproval of the Jews but disapproval of the attitude attributed to the Jews. In other words, here the point of reference is not the person but a particular conduct³⁸.

5. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE GOOD FRIDAY ORATION FOR THE JEWS AND BIRKAT HA-MINIM

Our analyses show that each of the components of the Good Friday oration for the Jews is rooted in concrete biblical texts. Naturally, these biblical motifs became only the foundation on which further issues related to the oration were developed. Now, considering the research problem it is worth discussing what the Church actually asked God for in the said prayer. The faithful wanted to acknowledge Jesus as God's messiah, which was expressed twice in the oration. Although the prayer does not express it directly, yet on the basis of the whole biblical tradition and traditional Church's teaching, it can be stated that the ultimate goal of the prayer was the salvation of the Jewish people. From the Catholic point of view, there is no other possibility of salvation except through Christ as the only mediator (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9). Therefore, since the Church asks God for the Jewish people so that they recognise Christ as the messiah, she implores God to save them. The prayer does not aim at offending the Jewish people but expresses sincere concern for their eternal fate.

In the light of these observations, finally it is worth juxtaposing the Good Friday oration with the Jewish prayer called "blessing of heretics" recited by the Jewish people³⁹. While throughout the centuries the Church prayed for the highest goodness of the Jewish people, since from the perspective of a believer there is no greater goodness than eternal salvation, the Jews formulated their request in such a way that the goodness of Christians (neither eternal nor temporal) was not directly expressed in its content.

The literal wording speaks of removing a specific category of people, which the Church definitely avoided in her traditional oration. What is more, the Jewish prayer clearly formulates the request to blot them out of the Book of Life, which is a figurative expression of eternal damnation. In other words, the Jews prayed for the worst "goodness" from a believer's perspective – the loss of eternal life. In this context, the "blessing of heretics" can be considered an anti-Christian (and even anti-human) prayer, while the traditional Good Friday prayer for the Jews cannot be called an anti-Semitic oration. Even if it is assumed that Birkat ha-Minim does not refer to Christians but to somebody else, it changes nothing because the content of the prayer alone shows what effects the followers of Judaism pray for their adversaries. This sharply contrasts with what Catholics pray for in the Good Friday *ad extra ecclesiam* orations.

³⁸ Finally, the gesture was recovered in 1955 in the Holy Week reform included in *Ordo Hebdomadae Sanctae Instauratus*. See S. Louis-Gabriel, *The Church and the Jews*, *The Furrow* 15/11 (1964) 698.

³⁹ To see in what manner Christians/Jews express their requests for answering the question if traditional Good Friday prayer for the Jews is factually hurtful.

6. CONCLUSION

The paper was an attempt [to defence] at defending the traditional Good Friday oration for the Jews and to present its theological correctness. It was achieved thanks to the analysis of the key fragments and the juxtaposition of the oration with the Jewish prayer “Birkat ha-Minim”.

The analyses reveal that the Good Friday oration for the Jewish people was inspired by New Testament texts. It was not created to offend the members of the chosen people but to show their tragic situation, from the Catholic point of view, in which they found themselves as a result of rejecting Christ. A thorough analysis of the prayer leaves no doubt that its purpose is to save the Jewish people, that is to say, to offer them the greatest possible goodness, which cannot be regarded as a manifestation of intolerance or anti-Semitism.

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Summary

The paper is an attempt at defending the traditional Good Friday oration for the Jewish people and to present its theological correctness. This was achieved due to analysing the crucial fragments and juxtaposing them with the Jewish prayer called “Birkat ha-Minim”. The study was / presented in four parts. The first one juxtaposes the versions of the Good Friday orations for the Jews. The next one presents Birkat ha-Minim, followed by an explanation of the key fragments of the traditional prayer for the Jews. Finally, the Good Friday oration was juxtaposed with Birkat ha-Minim. The analysis led to a conclusion that the Good Friday oration for the Jews was inspired by the New Testament texts. It was not created to offend the members of the chosen people but to show their tragic situation in which they found themselves as a result of rejecting Christ. A thorough analysis of the prayer leaves no doubt that its purpose is save the Jewish people, that is to say, to offer them the greatest possible goodness, which cannot be regarded as a manifestation of intolerance or anti-Semitism.

Key words: oration for the Jewish people; Jews; Good Friday; liturgical reform; Birkat ha-Minim

CZY WIELKOPIĄTKOWA MODLITWA ZA ŻYDÓW ISTOTNIE JEST KRZYWDZĄCA? PRÓBA APOLOGII ORACJI „ZA WIAROŁOMNYCH ŻYDÓW”

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego opracowania jest próba obrony tradycyjnej wielkopiątkowej modlitwy za Żydów. Realizacja celu pracy jest możliwa dzięki analizie kluczowych fragmentów tej oracji oraz zestawieniu ich z żydowską modlitwą Birkat ha-Minim. Temat został zrealizowany w czterech częściach. Najpierw zestawiono wielkopiątkowe modlitwy za Żydów. Następnie zaprezentowano żydowską

„Birkat ha-Minim”, zwracając szczególną uwagę na jej kluczowe frazy. Potem wyjaśniono kluczowe wyrażenia tradycyjnej modlitwy wielkopiątkowej. Na końcu zestawiono obydwie oracje. W świetle przeprowadzonych analiz należy stwierdzić, że tradycyjna wielkopiątkowa ektenia za Żydów była inspirowana tekstami Nowego Testamentu. Nie została ona ułożona po to, by obrazić członków narodu żydowskiego, ale po to, by podkreślić tragiczność sytuacji, w której się znaleźli wskutek odrzucenia Chrystusa. Przeprowadzone analizy nie pozostawiają złudzeń, że celem tej modlitwy było zbawienie Żydów, a zatem najwyższe możliwe dobro, które w żaden sposób nie jest wyrazem nietolerancji czy antysemityzmu.

Słowa kluczowe: modlitwa za Żydów, Żydzi, Wielki Piątek, reforma liturgiczna, Birkat ha-Minim

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