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**THE THIRD OF THE GOOD FRIDAY COLLECTS –  
A DEVOTIONAL STUDY**

By Gary Townsend

*He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*  
1 John 2:2.

On Good Friday, when our thoughts are directed to our Lord's agonies upon the cross, we do well to remember the purpose of that suffering. The death of Christ was an atoning sacrifice; He died in our stead that we might be spared the agonies of God's wrath and everlasting damnation.

The third of the Good Friday Collects in the Book of Common Prayer draws our attention to a very important aspect of Christ's atoning work upon the cross: His offering there was *made once for all* (Hebrews 9:28; 10:10 & 1 Peter 3:18). The Apostle John makes explicit the fact that Christ's death was for all people (1 John 2:2). This does not mean that all people benefit from Christ's death since many refuse to acknowledge that Christ has died for them and of those that do many do not go on to respond to His death for them in repentance and faith. The Apostle Paul states plainly and uncompromisingly that those who do not obey the Gospel shall be punished with everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

The corollary of Christ's death for all people is that there is no other salvation on offer for mankind (John 14:6 & Acts 4:12).

Looking closely at the Collect we see first of all the character of this God who gave His Son for the sins of the whole world. He is a *merciful God*. 'We are about to pray for the extension of God's pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace to those who are outside the pale of His Covenant. The appropriate attribute, then, by which to address Him is clearly "merciful."' (1) The Collect then broadens our appreciation of God's merciful character and His good will towards all people: *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*. The words bring to mind Psalm 145:8,9, Ezekiel 33:11 and a verse from the Apocrypha, The Wisdom of Solomon 11:24 (2). It is well to stop and remember that God, in His mercy, does not gloss over man's wrong; those in error must convert, they must turn to the God whose desire is that they should not perish.

So, this is the God of mercy to whom we pray; and our prayer is that He will extend His accustomed mercy to all those in error. The kinds of error into which mankind falls are summarised under four different types: *Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks*. A useful summary is given in Stephens: '*Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics*, an exhaustive division of all who are outside the Christian Church; Jews, who believe in God but not in Christ; *Turks*, i.e. Mohammedans, who believe in God and allow that Jesus was a prophet, but do not call themselves Christians; *Infidels*, who do not believe in God or Christ; *Heretics*, who profess themselves Christians, but have departed from the right faith.' (3) Today, in multi-cultural, secular Britain, we could think of so many different groups that would fall into one or other of these categories. Perhaps the greatest threat has always been and continues to be *Heretics* – the attack upon the Faith from within the Church's own ranks.

It would, of course, be really helpful to have a modern version of the Collect authorised for use. 'Turks' could do with being changed to 'Muslims', and 'Infidels' to 'unbelievers'. Sadly, Common

Worship has no modern version or equivalent of this Collect and it is to be lamented that Church Society's 'An English Prayer Book' makes no mention of Muslims or heretics.

Having petitioned God to extend His accustomed mercy to all such as be in error, we now request that God would deal with the root causes of their error: *and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word*. Paul could speak of Gentiles *being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them* (Ephesians 4:18) and Jesus put the error of the Sadducees down to their ignorance of both the Scriptures and the power of God (Matthew 22:23-29. See also Romans 10:1-3). Ignorance keeps people away from a right understanding of the true God. Perhaps *hardness of heart* has a special reference to those people who, whilst knowing the Scriptures, cannot see that they speak of Jesus. This was certainly the case with some of the Jews at the time of the Apostles (2 Corinthians 3:12-16). But it is also true that the hardening of Israel's heart is all part of God's sovereign will in election (See Paul's closely argued treatment of this in Romans 9,10,11). *Contempt of thy Word* is clearly a shocking attitude on the part of anybody but the fact that we should pray for such people flows out of our knowledge that God's mercy is vast and can extend to those that wilfully disregard His Word and consider it worthless; it can extend even to the very worst of blasphemous sinners (1 Timothy 1:12-17). The petition is that God would *take from them* these root causes of their error. It is only by God's sovereign grace that change is effected in the human heart and were it not for His mercy and grace to us we would be as ignorant, hard-hearted and contemptuous as the rest (Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Akin to this thought of God's sovereign action is that of election, and this is picked up in the following highly moving plea: *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*. The great doctrine of election dealt with so exhaustively by Paul in Romans 9,10 and 11 is surely at the back of our Lord's words in John 10:16: *And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice* (cf. Ephesians 2:17). God is gathering in the Gentiles through the hardening of the Jews to the Gospel (Romans 11:25-32), but God's promises made to the Patriarchs will not be broken for not all that are called 'Israel' are Israelites (Romans 9:6-13). There is a 'True Israel', a remnant (Romans 11:1-5), and God will join with them those chosen from among the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-15 & 3:6) *one fold under one shepherd*.

In keeping with so much of our Prayer Book this Collect does not pull any punches. Many clergy and Lay Readers, otherwise not adverse to the BCP, might nonetheless balk at using this Good Friday Collect because it uncompromisingly affirms that those outside of Christ's flock are lost and their beliefs, however sincerely held, are false and will keep them away from God rather than lead them to Him. Those who consider such a view to be narrow, dogmatic, offensive or even un-Christian must take up the matter with the Shepherd Himself: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me*. (John 14:6). But, in keeping with our Master's love for the lost, for whom He came to die, let us pray with all the compassion and pity of this Collect for those who follow false religions and the vain philosophies of men and for those who have fallen away from the Faith. Surely we will feel more for them if we take to our hearts God's mercy towards them and the seriousness of their predicament which this Collect invites us to recognise.

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone ... This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time.* (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

(1) E.M. Gouldburn. *The Collects of the Day. An Exposition Critical & Devotional Of The Collects*

*Appointed At The Communion.* Vol. 1. p.333. Longmans, Green & Co. 1897.

(2) For the use of & place of the Apocrypha in the Church of England see Art. 6 & note the use of verses from Tobit in the BCP Communion Service Offertory. See also the articles in *Cross†Way* No 102 Autumn 2006.

(3) W.R.W.Stephens. *Helps To The Study Of The Book Of Common Prayer.* 2nd edition. p.94. Oxford, Clarendon.

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