

Guidance for Methodist people concerning Anti-Semitism and the service for Good Friday (MWB 255-264), Seders, and other local liturgies.

The liturgies of Holy Week and especially Good Friday confront worshippers with our own sin, hardness of heart, and participation in current injustice. As we recall the passion of Jesus Christ, we identify ourselves with those who caused his pain and death. We ask God for mercy and repent of our sin.

The service for Good Friday (MWB 255-264) includes an option for the 'Reproaches of God' to be read in two voices after the reading of the Passion, John 18.1-19.42. In this litany, God confronts the congregation with our failure to respond to the promises and faithful love of God. The congregation responds at intervals with a collective plea for God's mercy. There are different versions of these Reproaches: those included in the Methodist Worship Book are in modern language, recording the faithfulness of God to God's people during the Exodus from Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the life of Jesus Christ.

At times in Christian history, these 'Reproaches' or other texts used during Holy Week have been used explicitly or implicitly to condemn Jewish people or to stir up hostility against Jewish people in the present day.

As noted in the Church of England guidance for Holy Week:

'...the services and ceremonies of Holy Week have in the course of Christian history been the occasion of, or have actively encouraged, hostility towards the Jews. The *'Ioudaioi'* of St John's Gospel have all too easily been identified with 'the Jews' as a whole, or more specifically those Jews who were neighbours of a Christian church.'

Where the Passion narrative is used and where the Reproaches are used by Methodist people, there is a responsibility to take care not to perpetuate such hostility. As included in the Authorised text of the Methodist Worship Book service for Good Friday, it is clear that where the text uses the phrase 'my people' this refers to the present Church in general, and the worshipping congregation in particular. We are being reproached by God for our own sin.

Though the versions of the Reproaches in Common Worship are different from that in the Methodist Worship Book, the Church of England affirms the same principle in its guidance for their use: '...'Israel' and 'my people' stand for the Church, and we are to hear the Reproaches as directed to our own hardness of heart and failure of discipleship.'

Where the Reproaches are used, the leader should introduce the litany by reinforcing that guidance.

Methodist people should take care that locally produced liturgies, including song, symbolic action, spoken prayers or images make this association clear as well. This should be done where possible by positive statements (eg: 'Where the text refers to 'My people' this means each of us') to guide the congregation in its engagement with the liturgy.

Seders

There are occasions in Holy Week, especially on Maundy Thursday and in symbolic commemorations of the Last Super, where Christians in worship share a ritual meal as part of worship as distinct from Holy Communion. Many locally produced liturgies for this exist in British Methodism. This is entirely appropriate, allowing a congregation to enter into the events of Jesus' last days. However where this happens, leaders of worship will be careful not to appropriate Jewish Haggadah liturgy or 'Christianise' versions of existing Seder meals. There is ample creative resource not to make this

necessary. Congregations are encouraged to learn about Jewish tradition, practice, and its present expression, and where possible, to share hospitality with local Jewish congregations.

The following is guidance from *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992) concerning United Methodists participation in Seder meals, and is equally appropriate for Methodist people in Great Britain: we '...are encouraged to celebrate the Seder as invited guests in a Jewish home or in consultation with representatives of the Jewish community, thus respecting the integrity of what is a Jewish tradition and continuing the worthy practice of Jews and Christians sharing at table together. Celebrating the modern meal without a Jewish family as host is an affront to Jewish tradition and sometimes creates misunderstanding about the meaning of the Lord's Supper.'