



CHRISTIAN LITURGICAL MATERIAL FOR NATIONAL HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 2008

INTRODUCTION

Since 2001, the Government has invited British society to observe 27 January each year as Holocaust Memorial Day. This is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by Soviet troops on 27 January 1945. The idea of a national Holocaust commemoration was proposed with three broad and interrelated aims in mind:

- to commemorate the Holocaust or Shoah, the murder by the Nazis and their agents of six million Jews and millions of Gypsies, Slavs, Russian POWs, the physically and mentally disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and other people belonging to minority groups;
- to acknowledge the repeated occurrences of genocide around the world since 1945 (In 2004 the national focus was on Rwanda);
- to renew the commitment of British people to combat racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia, and to work for an inclusive, caring and open society.

All of these aims are important for all of society. For those of us who seek to take the Gospel seriously, Holocaust Memorial Day will provide a particularly valuable opportunity for churches to reflect on some of the core concerns of Christian faith in the light of world history.

Although the remit of the day is wide-reaching, its focus remains the central event we call the Holocaust. This is intended to root the day in historical fact, especially concerning an event which cast a gigantic shadow over European history. Although many others perished as a result of Nazi actions, this time provides an opportunity to consider the fate of European Jewry in particular, for whom Hitler and others reserved a special hatred, and which was almost entirely wiped out. Jesus and his first followers were all Jewish, although the Church's attitude to Jews through most of our shared history been scarred by a teaching and practice of bitterness and contempt. This tradition of anti-Judaism prepared the way for modern antisemitism, in which many Christians also participated. These issues give us particular cause for reflection.

However, Holocaust Memorial Day is also intended to provide opportunity for reflection on issues raised by all atrocities, especially those events officially designated as genocides, such as Bosnia and Cambodia. The mass murder of millions of people of different ethnic, cultural, religious and political groups in more than one genocide provided the darkest side of twentieth-century human history. Christians have also been among the perpetrators of genocide, as well as among the bystanders and, indeed, the victims. Holocaust Memorial Day can



give us cause to remember the reality that evil is still powerful in our world. It can strengthen our resolve to protect every community of God's people from ethnic cleansing and elimination.

Neither the Holocaust nor any other genocide would have been possible without whole societies being told that certain groups of people were alien, dangerous, contemptible or not fully human. It is not difficult in our own society to find dehumanising language, stereotyped images and hostile attitudes expressed against those who are 'different', in order to dismiss them as alien and unwanted. These must be seen as attempts to wipe out the image of God in the dignity of his children. Holocaust Memorial Day asks of us that we fight against any tendency, from any source, to deny or demean the humanity of any person. It is also a chance to affirm the blessings which diversity can bring to our society.

The theme for 2008

One of the stated purposes of Holocaust Memorial Day is to 'ensure that the horrendous crimes, racism and victimisation committed during the Holocaust are neither forgotten nor repeated, whether in Europe or elsewhere in the world'. Another purpose of the day is to 'restate the continuing need for vigilance in light of the troubling repetition of human tragedies in the world today'. Since the Holocaust, some lessons have been learned. Yet tragedies involving genocide and racism continue to occur.

By commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day, we stand united together in calling on the world to prevent such crimes happening again. At no time is this more important, with the events of Darfur ongoing and the lack of a Western response. Whether we call it genocide, or ethnic cleansing, people are being killed simply because they are different – and if Holocaust Memorial Day teaches us one thing, it is to listen to the voices of the past, the voices of the survivors, and react to ensure that never again truly does mean never again.

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2008 is "**IMAGINE... remember, reflect, react**". This challenges us all to imagine the unimaginable. It asks us to imagine the lives and experience of victims and survivors of the Holocaust; of Nazi persecution and of other genocides. It invites us to find new and creative ways to express this experience through art and media. It marvels at the resilience of enterprise, culture and of life itself in the face of destruction. Ultimately it is a call to action for us all to:

- **Remember** the past
- **Reflect** on the present
- **React** to create a better future

It is impossible to imagine the realities for people living under the threat of genocide, if one has not undergone the same experience. The reality for Jews living under the Nazis was extreme; as is the reality for Darfuris today. There is



no language to describe the suffering and trauma experienced by those affected by the Holocaust but we can remember and reflect, and consider our own experiences and the priorities in our own lives. Above all, for those of us who stand in the tradition of the Incarnation, this theme provides an opportunity to come alongside the victims and survivors, rescuers and bystanders, of the Holocaust and more recent genocides.

The theme of 'remembrance' is a recurring one in the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, we are called to remember God's mercy, his loving kindness, his salvation and deliverance. By contrast, God chooses not to remember our sins. In addition, we are enjoined to remember God's commandments. When we come into the New Testament, Jesus is asked by the penitent thief to 'remember him' and Jesus, himself, asks us to take bread and wine in remembrance of him.

Such remembrance is not simply an intellectual exercise, a recollection, but is intended to be a practical act. Commemoration in Jewish terms is 'remembering before God' or, more specifically, ensuring that 'God will remember'¹. Commemoration looks not simply to the past but to the future, claiming God's promises for what is to come, as much as thanking him for what has already taken place.

These pages contain suggestions for material to be used in Christian services, for prayer and reflection.

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."
(*Mathew 25:45*)

¹ Jeremias (1966) *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, pub Mackay, Chatham p 246ff.



A LITURGY FOR SUNDAY 27TH JANUARY 2008

Preparation

The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us,
identifying with humanity in the most intimate way.
As we draw near to him, may we draw closer to others,
Each made in the image of God.

Call to penitence

The Lord waits to be gracious to you;
he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
(Isaiah 30:18)

Or

'Yet even now,' says the Lord,
'return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments.'
(Joel 2:12)

As we begin to consider the terrible things of which humanity is capable, let us first come before God in penitence and humility to confess our own sins, our own failures and our own disobedience.

Confession

You called us to feed the hungry
 But we filled ourselves instead
Lord of mercy
Forgive us our sins

You called us to love our neighbour
 But we strengthened our own boundaries
Lord of mercy
Forgive us our sins

You called us to love the stranger
 But we were suspicious and closed the door
Lord of mercy
Forgive us our sins

You called us to rise up and follow you
 But we were too busy
Lord of mercy



Forgive us our sins

You called us to forgive others
But we nursed our resentments
Lord of mercy

Forgive us our sins

You called us to your banquet, as heirs to your Kingdom
But we lacked faith in the vision
Lord of mercy

Forgive us our sins

May God, the Almighty, who in our Lord Jesus Christ knew pain, suspicion and betrayal, forgive *us* through the same Lord Jesus, inspire *us* through the Holy Spirit and restore us in unity. **Amen**

General Readings

A.²

The British prisoners of war, working-class provincial boys captured during the evacuation from Dunkirk, had hardly met a Jew before. If they thought hard, they might remember the odd soldier who was excused church parade. Until a bleak, icy day in January 1945, they knew nothing of the murderous brutality of Hitler's Final Solution. They had spent most of the previous five years [as forced labourers on German-owned farms on the Polish borders, but] they were jolted out of their ignorance in the last winter of the war by a squad of SS men driving 300 living skeletons through the village, the frail survivors of 1,200 Jewish women force-marched west because their jailers needed a pretext to escape the advancing Red Army. One of the POWs [was] Willie Fisher, who kept a diary. That night he wrote in anger:

'They came straggling through the bitter cold, about 300 of them, limping, dragging footsteps, slipping and falling, to rise and stagger under the blows of the guards. Crying loudly for bread, screaming for food, 300 matted-haired filthy objects that had once been Jews.'

One of the marchers was Sara Matuson, a sixteen-year old Lithuanian girl. Sara was still fighting for life:

'[I] slipped out of the line – don't ask how, I don't know how – and into a ditch. I ran into a barn. [It] was animal instinct. I laid myself in a trough. There were cows in the barn. They looked for me for two hours, but didn't find me'.

² Adapted from: Silver, E (1992) *The Book of the Just*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd pp 70-76



The hue and cry petered out, and then a man came into the barn. He was one of the POWs, Stan Wells, who had served in the Royal Norfolk regiment. He reassured her in rudimentary German that he knew she was the runaway Jewish girl and that the police had stopped looking for her.

'I felt pity', he recalled, 'I was sorry for her, she was in such a state. Ragged, very thin, crying. That's how I found her: I heard her sobbing. I told her to lie still and keep quiet. I made sure she was safe. I left her for the time being.'

In the morning, Wells told the girl that] he had talked to his fellow POWs and they had agreed to hide her. They remembered that when they were taken prisoner and were marched through Holland on their way to Germany, Dutch townsfolk had risked being shot to throw food to them. Stan later explained:

'We were aware of the chances we took, but they didn't come into it. [It] came to me that we had a place to put her, and everyone was in agreement.' Two other POWs, Alan Edwards and George Hammond, concurred:

'It didn't matter to us that she was Jewish. She was just a human being. If she had been Polish, or any other nationality, we would have done the same. [She] had to have some help or she would have died.'

The men hid Sara in the hay loft of the stable where they were locked in each evening next to a warm chimney. But first they gave her food, [meat] from their rations. At first, she vomited it up, but gradually they noticed an improvement. The POWs would take food off their plates and smuggle it home to her. Edwards stole clothes for Sara, a coat, a sweater, shoes and stockings. They began the slow process of rebuilding her health and strength.

Sara never forgot the British prisoners who restored her faith in humanity. In March 1989, Yad Vashem honoured them in Jerusalem where they planted a carob tree in the Avenue of the Righteous.

B.³

Rosette Musabe Sebasoni was 15 years old when her parents and four sisters were killed in the Rwandan genocide. Here she talks about her responses today.

Forgiving and forgetting? It is just not possible for us to forget our own families and people. Even wise men say that forgetting is a form of sickness. For example, there is no way I can forget that I have no parents. And just because I don't see them any more, it doesn't mean I can ever forget that I once had sisters. I often see children of their age who went to school with them and are now finishing secondary school. There's a lot that reminds me of them. We can never forget.

³ The Aegis Trust (2006) *We Survived Genocide in Rwanda* Quill Press, p 203



I think forgiving is possible. For example, I personally have forgiven. Although no one has ever come to me to ask for forgiveness, I forgave all the killers. When I think about it, it goes beyond what I can comprehend. I always wonder if they really knew why they killed people, what they were thinking. Then I feel sorry for their hearts; they know they killed their own people. [Personally], I do believe forgiving is possible. Not holding any grudges against them is an extraordinary gift that God gave me.

C.⁴

Elie Wiesel, writer and thinker, survivor of the Holocaust, reflects:

I remember: it happened yesterday, or eternities ago. A young Jewish boy discovered the Kingdom of night. I remember his bewilderment, I remember his anguish. It all happened so fast. The ghetto. The deportation. The sealed car. The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed.

I remember he asked his father, "Can this be true? This is the twentieth century, not the Middle Ages. Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How could the world remain silent?"

And now the boy is turning to me. "Tell me", he asks, "what have you done with your life?" And I tell him that I have tried. That I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we ever forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices.

And then I explain to him how naïve we were, that the world did know and remained silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the centre of the universe.

D.⁵

The Red Cross Telegram

Lotte Kramer, a Jewish child, was sent to safety in England before the war. Eventually she came to realize that her parents had not survived.

The red-cross telegram
Read when it came
Those five and twenty words;
The terror, fear.

⁴ Wiesel, E (1972) translated by Wiesel, M (2006) *Night* London: Penguin Books, p116/7

⁵ Kramer, L (1997) *Selected an New Poems 1980-1997* Ware: The Rockingham Press



Was there; I did not dare
To grasp the cruelty
That now I know
It did contain:
'We have to move,
Our residence will not
Remain this town,
Farewell, beloved child.'
How can I ever sing
A requiem
In silent, dark despair,
Transfiguring
Your calvary of nails
And gas and graves'.

E.

YAD VASHEM⁶

(At Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, a large outdoor sculpture by Nandor Glid commemorates Holocaust victims.)

We did not find Him
In the Bazaar
On the way of the Cross,
So we bought bright baubles
And carried carved camels.
Our ersatz experience
Cost thirty pieces.

Then we came to a place
Where skeletal forms
Stretched starkly under a livid sky.
Backs arched
In one continual agony
Over the twisted iron limbs;
Fingers spread like giant thorns
Pushing us away;
Skulls screamed silently,
Accusing us
Who were not there when it happened -
Or were we?

It was this -
This metal monument of death
Which pierced our apathy
And brought us back to life again.

⁶ Margaret Connor, in *Liturgy of Life*, pub. NCEC



We shed our tears then,
Burning with shame and grief.

And we found Him there -
Weeping with us.

Suggested Psalms (As set out in the Church of England Psalter: Common Worship)

Psalm 2

- 1 Why are the nations in tumult, •
and why do the peoples devise a vain plot?
- 2 The kings of the earth rise up,
and the rulers take counsel together, •

against the Lord and against his anointed:
- 3 'Let us break their bonds asunder •
and cast away their cords from us.'
- 4 He who dwells in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; •
the Lord shall have them in derision.
- 5 Then shall he speak to them in his wrath •
and terrify them in his fury:
- 6 'Yet have I set my king •
upon my holy hill of Zion.'
- 7 I will proclaim the decree of the Lord; •
he said to me: 'You are my Son; this day have I begotten you.
- 8 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance •
and the ends of the earth for your possession.
- 9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron •
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'
- 10 Now therefore be wise, O kings; •
be prudent, you judges of the earth.
- 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and with trembling kiss his feet, •
lest he be angry and you perish from the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.



12 Happy are all they •
who take refuge in him.

Psalm 23

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; •
therefore can I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures •
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He shall refresh my soul •
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; •
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; •
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
- 6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, •
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 82

- 1 God has taken his stand in the council of heaven; •
in the midst of the gods he gives judgement:
- 2 'How long will you judge unjustly •
and show such favour to the wicked?
- 3 'You were to judge the weak and the orphan; •
defend the right of the humble and needy;
- 4 'Rescue the weak and the poor; •
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
- 5 'They have no knowledge or wisdom;
they walk on still in darkness: •
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.



- 6 'Therefore I say that though you are gods •
and all of you children of the Most High,
- 7 'Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals •
and fall like one of their princes.'
- 8 Arise, O God and judge the earth, •
for it is you that shall take all nations for your possession.

Collect

God who is unchanging and eternal,
Keep before us the remembrance of the sufferings of humanity;
May we not seek to forget;
May we learn the lessons for the sake of our society today,
And seek to lay the sure foundations of our future.

Suggested texts with regard to the theme 'Imagine...remember, reflect, react' and generally for Holocaust Memorial Day.

- i) *The concept of 'active remembrance' - what does it really mean for us to remember? - can be followed in the story of the penitent thief in **Luke 23:39-43**, or **John 14: 25-26**.*
- ii) *Following on so closely after Christmas, it may be appropriate to consider the Incarnation - the greatest act of identification with fallen humanity. This will lead us to reflect on our own calling to identify with the suffering of others. Suitable passages include **Philippians 2:1-11** and **Mark 10:35-45**.*
- iii) *The compassion of God, from whence we derive our own duty of compassion, is also appropriate. Stories of healing miracles are useful here, especially the raising of Lazarus - **John 11:1-24**, the widow of Nain's son - **Luke 7:11-16** and Elijah and the widow of Zarepath - **1 Kings 17:17-24**. The latter story also provides the opportunity to consider how God also relates to those we regard as 'outsiders', as does **Luke 10:25-37** (the parable of the 'Good Samaritan').*
- iv) *The prophetic imperative to 'Do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God' (**Micah 6:8**) helps us to consider our reactions to the injustices of the world today. Further prophetic passages which may be considered include **Isaiah 58: 6 - 9a** and **Micah 4: 1-5**.*



ACT OF COMMEMORATION

(The most appropriate focus of this part of the service would be the lighting of candles. Six is the more usual number at such services, one for each of the million or so individuals who perished in the Holocaust. Some congregations may wish to light a seventh, commemorating all others who perished under Nazi rule or in remembrance of another event which has specific relevance to the congregation. Others may wish to light one in memory of all victims of genocide. If more than one candle is lit, ideally, each should be lit by a different member of the congregation.)

A. We light these candles in memory of the six million people, each known to you by name, who perished as a result of human action. We light them as a sign of our determination to dispel darkness wherever we may find it and of our commitment to live for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

B. We light *this candle* in memory of all people, each known to you by name, who perished as a result of human action. We light *it* as a sign of our determination to dispel darkness wherever we may find it and of our commitment to live for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

C. We light this candle for your covenant people
We light this candle for the Roma people
We light this candle for the people of Armenia
We light this candle for the people of Rwanda
We light this candle

D. We light this candle in memory of all splintered families and lost communities
We light this candle in memory of smashed lives and destroyed ambitions
We light this candle in memory of bewildered, frightened and orphaned children
We light this candle in memory of those whose last act was a selfless one
We light this candle in memory of those who lived and died in the service of you and of their neighbour
We light this candle in recognition of our commitment to work for peace and seek the common good



Concluding prayer

Lord, you instill in us
the desire to put our own welfare and social comfort above the basic needs of
others,
The opportunities to become involved in the lives of those we encounter,
The knowledge that it is better to give than to receive,
The vision to see your image in someone who is different,
The ability to welcome the stranger and live in harmony with our neighbour,
The power to be a light in the darkness.
Inspire us with your Holy Spirit, we pray,
To live this life to which you have called us;
That your Way may be known through the wilderness
And your Kingdom established throughout the earth.