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In Memoriam



Dr. William Stewart
1941–2003

ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ . . . ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῇ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.
Colossians 3:3–4

Dr. William (Bill) Wayne Stewart, son of Roy and Gladys Stewart, was born June 8, 1941, in Austin, Texas, where he died on December 4, 2003. Bill graduated from the University of Texas, Texas Tech University, and the University of Southern California.

Bill had a lifetime interest in education, serving as a director at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. He was especially interested in Christian education, serving on the Board of Brentwood Christian School and as an adjunct faculty member of Austin Graduate School of Theology.

Bill is survived by his wife Becky, his son Landon and daughter-in-law, Lana, two grandsons, Christian and Casey, and his sister, Jan Colley. Bill's first wife, Daphren, died in 1986.

From 1973 Bill was a member of Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ where he taught classes and for several years faithfully composed prayers for the order of worship. He was a man of deep personal faith who was sensitive to all those around him. He viewed all life as God's gift and sought to live in a manner showing gratitude for those who have gone before and concern for those who follow.

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FOREWORD

4

ARTICLES

The Lord's Prayer

The Touchstone of Christian Spirituality

Allan J. McNicol

5

True Religion and Undefined

Spirituality in Micah and James

R. Mark Shipp

23

More Than Routine Words

A Reflection on Psalm 100

Craig Bowman

29

Living As Sacrifices

Walking in Accordance with the Spirit in

Romans 12–15

Jeffrey Peterson

33

Seminaries, "Spirituality," and "Spiritual Formation"

A Quick Fix for the Disciplined Life of Faith?

J. J. M. Roberts

43

Confession and Intercession

Two Spiritual Disciplines

Michael Weed

51

Remembering a Friend

A Tribute to Dr. Bill Stewart

David Worley

63

BOOKSHELF

A Confessional Community

The Seedbed of Spiritual Formation?

Reviewed by Allan McNicol

65

OBITER DICTA

73

CONTRIBUTORS

77

Foreword

It is frequently observed that modernity, with its highly mechanized and overly managed societies, leaves many with a sense of loss—a deep-seated unrest, an emptiness and longing. It is also evident that an endless array of entertainment options is unable to bring any lasting calm to the restless hearts of moderns. In fact, the near hysterical search for diversions is viewed by some as a major cultural crisis of modern civilization.

Current widespread interests in “spirituality” pose opportunities and problems for Christians. Over eighteen hundred years ago, Tertullian warned of the “itching curiosity” of Christians leading them into false spiritualities. Today, in an era of doctrinal minimalism, we are reminded that there are many “spiritualities” and many versions of Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, we also need to respect concern among modern Christians, even if awakened by the shallowness of our mechanistic culture, to have a deeper understanding of their faith and to be “more spiritual.” The essays in this issue of *Christian Studies* are presented both to edify our hearts and to increase our discernment.

This issue of *Christian Studies* is dedicated to the memory of a dear friend and colleague, one of God’s devoted servants, Bill Stewart, whose life is hidden with Christ in God. Special thanks are owed to guest contributors Craig Bowman and Jim Roberts.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

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Allan J. McNicol

Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus and his word?

William Cowper

These haunting words of William Cowper resonate within the hearts of most believers. Perhaps it is a cliché, but a recurrent model for describing the Christian life is that of a journey; and on every journey there come dry spots where we wither and sense we are about to die.

In desperation we search for some way to enable our return to the right path. Some re-examine their prayer lives or resolve to be more disciplined in reading and studying scripture. Others may explore the works of Teresa of Avila or Søren Kierkegaard, while still others may take in a *Road to Emmaus* seminar or a local Taizé service.

The perception that we are running on empty is not confined to believers. Contemporary society with its endless banalities also conforms to the dictum attributed to Chesterton that those who will not believe in the God of the Bible will believe in anything or everything. Community bulletin boards throughout the country overflow with announcements of classes and seminars ranging in everything from Joseph Campbell to Zen. Catering to

narcissistic urges embedded in the culture, many presume to fashion for themselves do-it-yourself religions.¹

It is common to place all of this under the banner of spirituality.² Frequently one hears the comment, “I do not accept many of the dogmas of the church but I seek to be deeply spiritual.” Consider the journey of Elaine Pagels, the well-known historian of religion at Princeton. In her latest book, Pagels speaks movingly of her rapprochement with a version of organized Christianity after the tragic death of her young son.³

Yet reconciliation comes on her own terms. Time and time again she speaks about what she can and *cannot* love in Christianity. What she cannot love is its insistence on acceptance of the belief structure crystallized in the ancient creeds. For her, Christianity is about unconditional acceptance and approval of others in an inclusive community which considers matters of the spirit as simple mystery, things *beyond belief*. Her strongest models for *faith and spirituality* are the Gnostic Christian groups of the early Christian centuries. She considers that they were on a journey of self-discovery. According to Pagels, they recognized that “the capacity to discover truth is within you,” and that the “image of God” is hidden within each of us, secretly linking all “humankind” with the *One*.⁴ Spirituality is making the right connections.

¹ “Do-it-Yourself Religion,” *Wall Street Journal*, Friday, June 11, 2004, W1, 5.

² A good working definition of spirituality is supplied by Gordon S. Wakefield in his article on “Spirituality” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. Gordon S. Wakefield; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 361. Wakefield says, “This is a word which has come into vogue to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people’s lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities.”

³ Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 1-7.

⁴ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 54-55.

In other words, the way to the transcendent, what is truly beyond, passes through the development of spiritual sensitivity. We are left with an understanding of Christianity as a voyage of discovery of the inner self. This may take place in community or just as well in awe-inspiring places like the mountains of Colorado. But, the bottom line is that spiritual wholeness can be found in the search for the "inner light," discovering our true self. Anything that can facilitate this enterprise is fair game. Spirituality is the process of each person arranging his or her building blocks of self-discovery. Pagels challenges Christians to get over their emphasis on the structures of right belief and join with those who pursue the inward journey. If mainstream churches cannot make this accommodation to the *zeitgeist* they will have nothing to say to the multitudes who have embarked on these journeys.

A Proposal

Pagels claims that any major faith system (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, or Christianity), with their resources of stories and community, can accommodate the seeker of the spiritual. The issue of finding wholeness in other faith systems, or for that matter outside of them, is not one that we wish to engage in this essay. Some forms of historical Christianity have placed great emphasis on self-discipline, mystic union with the divine, and beatific visions.⁵ But although Christianity has housed these diverse versions of spirituality, in the main it has not claimed that they are genuine expressions of the faith apart from maintaining basic Christian beliefs. Indeed, genuine Christian spirituality appears to strike an essential balance between an

⁵ One thinks of a work such as Athanasius' *The Life of Saint Antony*, where, according to Athanasius, Antony viewed Christ as having such perfect self-control that he was free from any inner weakness. Antony, by living a life of solitude sought to find God in a similar way. He became the progenitor of cenobitic monasticism in the West. See *St. Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony*, (trans. Robert T. Meyer; Ancient Christian Writers 10; New York: Newman). Of course, he has been followed by many major Christian figures both in the West and in the East.

inclination to search for spiritual union with God in such areas as prayer and participation in the Lord's meal and a contingent pursuit of appropriate moral conduct in our daily lives structured on basic biblical beliefs (1 Cor 11:17–33).

In this essay I suggest that being part of a contrast society of care for each other and a community of encouragement of the formation of spirituality (the church) is entirely compatible with holding fundamental beliefs about God and his revelation in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ. Indeed, I suggest that genuine Christian spirituality occurs when basic Christian belief structures provide the resources to make the necessary connections between doctrine and our inward hunger for spiritual food in ordinary daily life. Procedurally, I wish to demonstrate this thesis by discussing the centrality of the model prayer of Jesus (the Lord's Prayer) for both early Christianity and Christian spiritual formation today. My goal will be to show that Christian spirituality that emerges out of the biblical tradition has a very different shape and appeal than that which is nourished in contemporary versions of spirituality based on vastly different resources.

The Model Prayer of Jesus

The model prayer of Jesus (often called the "Our Father" or Lord's Prayer) is found in three ancient sources: Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; and *Didache* 8:2–3.⁶ Luke places it in the context of a request of a disciple, "Lord teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1); hence

⁶ *The Didache* dates from about A.D. 100 and seems to be the product of a late first-century Christian-Jewish community in greater Syria. The wording of the *Didache's* version is very close to that of Matthew. The most striking feature of this version is that it provides the earliest textual evidence for part of the doxological ending to the prayer, "For yours is the power and glory for ever." According to Kenneth W. Stevenson, Cyprian was the first to give a treatise on this prayer labeled unambiguously *De dominica oratione* (*On the Lord's Prayer*). See Kenneth W. Stevenson, *The Lord's Prayer: A Text in Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 32. Since the Patristic Era this has been a common designation for the prayer.

the inference that this prayer represents Jesus' model instructions that the believer ought to follow when engaging in prayer. Both Matthew and the *Didache* represent Jesus' teaching on prayer as a contrast to what the "hypocrites" do (Matt 6:5; Did. 8:1). In both cases the context indicates the hypocrites are Jewish synagogue leaders. Since the *Qaddish* (prayer for holiness) recited in ancient synagogues had structural similarities to Jesus' prayer, scholars have concluded that the model prayer is his direct instruction for how people in his community should pray not only in private (Matt 6:6) but also in communal gatherings.⁷ With this in mind we now move to discuss the prayer in some detail.

Our Father in the Heavens

Although we have duly noted the Lukan emphasis on the prayer as a model for others to pray we should not ignore that the prayer also is a central expression of Jesus' own spiritual relationship to God. In the Lukan version it opens with the expression, "Father" (Luke 11:2). In the everyday Aramaic language of Jesus' world this may mean that he would address God as *abba* (father). Among the people of God there is a long history of recognition that God is "Father" (Exod 4:22–23; Isa 63:16; Hos 11:1, Ps 89:27; 1 Chron 29:10). But without arguing that Jesus' use of *abba* constituted his sense of a unique personal relationship between himself and God, the fact is that *abba* was a term of endearment, most often used within families!⁸

⁷ There is no clear distinction between prayers said in the synagogue and in private in the Judaism of the first century. In daily prayer a regimen of fairly standard prayers were said by pious Jews several times during the day either paralleling the temple sacrifices when it was standing or at morning and evening. This is the background for the instruction given to the Christian Jewish believers in *Didache* 8:3 to pray the model prayer three times daily. Stevenson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 26, 238, provides us with information about the medieval *Qaddish* prayers which have many structural similarities to the model prayer of Jesus.

⁸ Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 41.

This indicates that Jesus viewed a child's endearing relationship to his father as an analogy to our relationship with God. Just as important, his use of *abba* reminds us that both he and the Twelve had left their earthly families and begun a mission characterized by total dependence upon God as father (Matt 23:8–9).⁹ The early Church understood this as unusually important. It carried the Aramaic expression *abba* into its own prayers even in the Greek speaking communities (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15; cf. Mark 14:36).

Jesus' own deep sense of spirituality can be taken for granted. But what is equally important is to understand Jesus' use of *abba* in the wider context of his ministry. At the core of Jesus' message is the conviction that with his mission God was doing something fundamentally new. The kingdom of heaven was near (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15). God was in the process of regathering his people in order to dwell as king in fullness with them. In light of this coming time of the unhindered presence of God (often represented by Jesus as a banquet), his call for repentance was a trifling prerequisite for one to undertake in order to enjoy the unprecedented blessings waiting at the door. And, astonishingly, the New Testament teaches us that what Jesus said proved to be true. He did regather his people in the church and fulfill the promise to come fully and dwell with them (2 Cor 6:2; Luke 10:23–24). In biblical thinking on spirituality the tragedy is that, despite all the talk to the contrary, we hesitate to accept the promises of God that came with Jesus. Instead of keeping our eyes fixed on him we are distracted continually by a multitude of other concerns. This is the reason for the contemporary ineptitude and lack of power in the church. It all begins with our failure to apprehend

⁹ In teaching the disciples, Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimensions of Christian Faith* (trans. John P. Galvin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 48, says that Jesus' use of *abba* meant "They no longer had their earthly father, who could plan and prepare for the future with the wisdom of experience, but instead had God himself."

the value of Jesus' almost childlike trust that the God of Israel had fulfilled his promises to his people—if we would repent and open our eyes to see. This is the fundamental act of precognition we ought to presume if we are to hear the words of Jesus exhorting us to pray, "Our Father in the heavens."

**Sanctify your name
let your kingdom come¹⁰
let your will come to pass
as in heaven also on earth (Matt 6:9b–10)**

It is noticeable that the main body of the Matthean version of the prayer falls into two easily delineated divisions. These are the three second person you-petitions of Matt 6:9b–10 (as noted above), and then moving to the third person, the three we-petitions ("give us," "forgive us," "lead us not") of 6:11–12. Since a slight variation of the Matthean version (with one major exception noted below) is the version almost universally used by believers, we will focus our comments on this wording.¹¹

The first two divisions of the prayer, "Sanctify your name," and "Let your kingdom come," are considered to have close connections with the ancient *Qaddish* prayer in Judaism. The Latin equivalent to this ancient

¹⁰ I am indebted to John P. Galvin, the translator of Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 15, for the wording of these first two lines.

¹¹ A word needs to be said about the context of Matt 6:9-13. It comes as part of the context of 6:7-15 on prayer and forgiveness—the latter being a special Matthean theme (Matt 5:21-26; 18:21-35). This, in turn, has been placed into an even wider context of teaching on three fundamental expressions of piety; almsgiving (6:2-4); prayer (6:5-6); and fasting (6:16-18). As noted by Birger Gerhardsson, "The Matthean Version of the Lord's Prayer [Matt 6:9b-13]: Some Observations," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke* (ed. William C. Weinrich; vol. 1; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 209, the central teaching on the three expressions of piety is that these good things should not be performed ostentatiously. Matthew (6:9-13) places an additional word on prayer into this framework. Besides wishing to make his characteristic connection between prayer and forgiveness (6:12 and 14-15), Matthew suggests that the model prayer should be differentiated not only from the hypocrites (scribes and Pharisees), but also, by virtue of its economy, from the Gentiles (6:7).

prayer (Aramaic) is *sanctus* and thus the general idea of this prayer is that it functions as a petition that the quality and holy realm of existence present with God may come about on earth.¹² A rendering of the opening lines of the *Qaddish* provides us helpful background enabling us to understand the needed context of the prayer of our Lord.

(May) His great name be magnified and hallowed in the world which he has created according to his will.
May he let his reign rule in your life and in your days and in the life of the whole house of Israel, in haste and in the near future.¹³

It is possible that Jesus was taught an early version of this prayer and recited it many times in his youth. Besides the interesting references to “hallowing the divine name,” the major function of the prayer was to keep in mind that a day was coming when God’s rule would be absolute in the whole house of Israel.

This is also Jesus’ focus. No doubt he was deeply familiar with the words of the prophets—especially Ezek 36:20–24. The difficult relationships of Israel with the Roman administration would easily bring to mind Ezekiel’s message that the lowly state of God’s people in exile (subjected to the Romans: the contemporary Babylonians) constituted a profanation of God’s name. How could Yahweh be acknowledged as universal sovereign and creator when his people were slaves to nations who worshipped other gods? Ezekiel speaks about a time when the holiness of God’s name will be vindicated. It will be a time when all nations will stand in awe at the wonder of the gathering of his people together again in purity and holiness in their own land (Ezek 36:22–24). Jesus had already called the twelve as the nucleus of the redeemed people of the new age. Now he teaches them that they are

¹² Bruce Chilton, *Jesus’ Prayer and Jesus’ Eucharist: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 33.

¹³ As quoted in Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (trans. W. C. Linss; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 379.

daily to beseech God with a prayer that this word of Ezekiel will come to pass and that divine holiness may again rest among his people.¹⁴

Not only is the prayer an appeal for God to reconstitute his people, "sanctify your name" and thus establish definitively the arrival of the kingdom, "your kingdom come,"¹⁵ but also the believer is to petition that "God's will be done."

A remembrance of an incident in church in my teenage years is a vivid reminder of the significance of this latter phrase. Our minister was a formal person and no one could ever remember him moving from behind the pulpit while speaking. But on a particular Sunday suddenly, to our

¹⁴ The three "you-petitions" all have verbs in the Greek aorist imperative passive; literally, "let your name be sanctified." Linguists generally agree that although this third person structure in the passive suggests that God is the subject, fulfillment is contingent upon both divine and human action. Cf. Gerhardtsson, "The Matthean Version of the Lord's Prayer," 213.

¹⁵ Clearly, when Matthew was written, a generation after the resurrection of Christ, Pentecost, with its regathering of the people of God empowered by the Holy Spirit, had taken place. The gospel writers were aware of this reality. The use of the aorist suggests a definite time for the arrival of the kingdom. But the late first-century author of *Didache* 8:2-3, urging Christians to pray "three times daily" did not err. Although the kingdom emerges in Jesus' ministry and God's people were regathered on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the kingdom is also a dynamic process still dependent upon our work and prayers. This was widely acknowledged in the ancient church where the saying of this prayer was ubiquitous. Cf. Karlfried Froehlich, "The Lord's Prayer in Patristic Literature," in *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for Reclaiming Christian Prayer* (ed. Daniel L. Migliore; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 71-87 for references. In an understandable attempt to counteract the influence of dispensational premillennialism within Churches of Christ, some twentieth-century teachers and ministers, unconsciously following the precedent of some earlier Anabaptists, discouraged the saying of the Lord's Prayer on the ground that the kingdom had already come with the establishment of the church. This represented a failure to understand the dynamic nature of the kingdom and certainly would have been news to the vast majority of believers in the ancient church. Even today we still wait for its complete fulfillment. Part of the rationale for this essay is not only to help us appreciate the Lord's Prayer as the touchstone of Christian spirituality but to be a small contribution toward its rehabilitation in both private devotionals and assemblies of the Churches of Christ.

astonishment, he came down from the pulpit and stood directly in front of the pews. He had a basic query: "I have been wrestling in my life for months with this question, What is the will of God?"

Clearly he was framing the question in a personal way. "What is God's will for my life?" That was forty years ago. Contemporary religious best-sellers claim that God has a personal plan for the life of every person. And if we can make the effort we can discover it! But is this true? Those who live within the parameters of the biblical story should be aware that the focus of the revelation of God's will is not on allowing us to discover our individual destinies but the fulfillment of God's plan to bring salvation as the completion of the long history of the calling of *his people* (Acts 10:21–27; 22:14). The first two you-petitions call for the fulfillment of the divine purpose understood to be the regathering of his people in full blessedness. It is the same with the third.

This is why the Gethsemane event was so momentous for Jesus. When Jesus prays, "My Father . . . your will be done," he is in full realization that what is at stake is not discovering God's will for his life, or even his own survival, but that God's entire plan of salvation for Israel depended on his faithfulness unto death (Matt 26:42).

This is not to say that God is unconcerned about us as individuals. The very chapter in which the Lord's Prayer occurs shows us otherwise (Matt 6:25–33). But when we pray to know the will of God what is critical is that we ask for insight into the role and place we are to play in God's overall plan for his people.¹⁶ Inasmuch as it is our task to find God's will, it

¹⁶ A full discussion with many more scriptures can be found in John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (SNTSMS 76; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). As an example as to what lengths people will go in personalizing the will of God consider this prayer found in a piece of Catholic devotional literature. "How comforting it is, O blessed Father, that you have long since made my calendar down to the last detail for the coming year. So I resign

is not so much a matter of self-discovery but of remaining true to the commitment that despite all that appears to the contrary, God is in the process of bringing his promises to fulfillment.¹⁷

This leads to a brief comment about God's will being done as in heaven *also on earth*. In our judgment this constitutes a summary refrain for all three initial petitions. God's name, kingship, and will, in heaven are absolute. In Jesus he has begun to reclaim the creation for himself. Yet we continue to pray for the full realization of his plan of salvation *on earth* as in heaven.

Give us our bread today which is due on the day to come

In light of the three you-petitions directly beseeching God to establish his reign on earth, the movement of the prayer shifts to the we-petitions, where intercession for concrete needs of believers is encouraged.¹⁸ In brief, Jesus is saying, as we await the ultimate regathering of God's people for salvation, that we still have immediate needs which warrant our attention. The first of these is bread.

As metonymy, bread is an appropriate image for the messianic age.¹⁹ Throughout Matthew's gospel in the feeding episodes of the five and four thousand, and at the Last Supper, Jesus anticipates the blessings of having bread in the messianic kingdom (Matt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; 26:26-29).

myself completely to your benevolent foresight and have but one concern: to recognize and fulfill your fatherly will." Noted by Gerhard Lohfink, "Der präexistente Heilsplan: Sinn und Hintergrund der dritten Vaterunserbitte," in *Neues Testament und Ethik: Festschrift für Rudolf Schnackenburg* (Freiberg: Herder, 1989), 111.

¹⁷ As noted in Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament*, 48-49.

¹⁸ Notice now that the balancing imperatives of the second section, "give," "forgive," and "lead [us]" are active rather than the passive imperatives in the first section.

¹⁹ Bread is the first word of the first we-petition in the Greek text. This is different from the last two we-petitions of the prayer, where the verbal imperatives come first. This may indicate that Matthew wishes to give special attention to bread.

Commentators have often argued over whether the reference to bread “today” is spiritual or material. Probably the primary allusion in Jesus’ prayer is to material bread; but it is not one dimensional. There is some ambiguity. Indeed, the terminology “day to come” or “coming day” has an unclear linguistic history. We understand it to refer to the time of the coming new age; but this is a translation of a rare Greek adjective the precise meaning of which is difficult to pin down; and given this linguistic ambiguity, one cannot be dogmatic about the interpretation.²⁰ However, we believe we can safely assert that as long as bread is understood as a metaphor for the coming messianic banquet, one cannot go far wrong understanding it to be a petition to supply our present needs, both spiritual and material, in light of this new reality. As is well known, Luke has the phrase “day by day” (cf. Luke 9:23) for the Matthean “daily.” This is in keeping with Luke’s linguistic preferences and his emphasis on the need for persistent faithfulness in discipleship.²¹

In some faith traditions the Lord’s Prayer with its petition for bread is recited in association with observance of the Lord’s Supper. By and large those in the Reformed and Restoration traditions have avoided this usage because of earlier ecclesiastical misunderstanding of the nature of the Eucharistic bread. Yet the spiritual food of the Lord’s Supper is an anticipation, par excellence, of the bread of the new age. Thus, in my view, it is appropriate to say the Lord’s Prayer at the Table. But it should not be confined just to the Table. Until the arrival of the messianic banquet we are dependent for all of our needs, both spiritual and material, on a gracious heavenly Father.

²⁰ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 382.

²¹ As noted by William Farmer, *The Gospel of Jesus: The Pastoral Relevance of the Synoptic Problem* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 45–46, the expression “day by day” is a linguistic characteristic of Luke (cf. Luke 9:23; 16:19; 19:47; Acts 2:46, 47; 16:5).

**And forgive us our debts
even as we have forgiven our debtors**

In general usage this is the one place where recitals of the model Prayer follow the Lukan rather than Matthean usage. Luke's version differs from Matthew in two significant ways. First, Luke has sins (often translated "trespasses") instead of debts in the first part of the petition; second, Luke softens Matthew's suggestive impression that God's forgiveness must be preceded by our forgiveness of others. Matthew's version infers that our forgiveness of others is a one time action of the past (Greek aorist) preceding God's forgiveness of us. Luke places our act of forgiveness in the present and intimates that God is forgiving us in a continual process of our forgiving others.²² By and large, Christian communities have found the latter rendering more palatable.

These technical points aside, what is critical to note is that this is the *only* place in the model prayer where direct action is required on *our* part. And, as already noted, in Matthew's version of the prayer there immediately follows a commentary on forgiveness (Matt 6:14–15). The point is inescapable. Matthew places forgiveness at the very center of Christian community. For Matthew, Christians were brothers and sisters bound together as a contrast-society in a hostile environment as they awaited the full emergence of God's new world. As the beachhead of the new age, the emergence of lack of love

²² A complicating factor in Luke (11:4) is that the Lukan petition is for God to forgive our *sins* while we are to forgive those *indebted to us*. The Greek words in the parallel construction are different in Luke while Matthew has the stem of the same Greek word for *debtor* in both places in the parallel construction. Luke does something similar in Luke 13:2, 4 where "sinners" and "debtors" are used as similes. Thus this seems to be simply a linguistic preference of Luke rather than Luke saying that wrongs against God are of a more severe kind ("sins") than our offenses against each other ("debts"), as some have concluded.

and an unforgiving spirit in their community was a practical denial of everything they stood for. As it was then so it is today.²³

**And do not bring us into the test
But free us from the hold of the evil one.**²⁴

The standard English translation, “Lead us not into temptation,” is unfortunate because it inevitably directs believers to think that we are being asked to be spared from our trivial day-by-day temptations. The book of James may be reacting against this misperception when it acknowledges that it is the lot of all believers to suffer regular enticements and trials (James 1:2, 12) although one should never conclude that God is responsible for our failings (James 1:13). That is a given. But Jesus has something different in mind. We would do well to return to the wider context of the prayer, which centers on the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation through the regathering of the true people of God. Jesus is aware that Satan is interested in preventing this event. The test to which Jesus refers is the series of barriers which Satan places in the way of the coming of the kingdom. In the apocalyptic world of Jesus this referred to the time of woes before the full emergence of the kingdom of God.

Ironically, Jesus himself is the first to face the test. According to Luke, in the last days of Jesus’ life Satan entered Judas (Luke 22:3). Judas

²³ We have already noted other intertextual echoes of this theme in Matt 18:21–35. Raymond E. Brown (“The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer,” in *New Testament Essays* [New York: Paulist, 1965], 248) notes another instance with respect to Matt 25:34. “The fifth petition is the acting out of the Last Judgment as described in Mt 25:34 . . . Notice all the connections to the PN [Pater Noster] in this verse: the title (Father); petition 2 (the kingdom); petition 3 (the divine will: prepared from the foundation of the world); and the present petition (a favorable judgment based on dealings with our brothers).”

²⁴ Some would make these two lines separate couplets and thus bring the number of petitionary elements to seven: a favorite number for Matthew. As already noted we believe that the principle of organization is the balance of three “you-petitions” and three “we-petitions.”

plots with the temple authorities to arrest him (Matt 26:47). Immediately beforehand Jesus is with the disciples in Gethsemane. He begs them "to watch and pray lest you have to enter into the test."²⁵ And what a test it was. Although the textual tradition is dubious, Jesus is represented as being in such agony that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground" (Luke 22:44). And this was before his arrest and crucifixion! We are pressed to the edge of mystery when we consider that God's answer to *Jesus' prayer* was No!²⁶ But Jesus also knew that these events concerning his coming test (the "cup of suffering") would not be Satan's final assault.²⁷ Other great tests were on the way (Matt 24:22). Perhaps an appropriate paraphrase of these words would be "Lord, spare us from the level of testing that could lead to our apostasy and forfeiture of our share in the kingdom."²⁸

Given this close connection with the momentous events of salvation history, a believer may well ask whether it is appropriate for him or her to say this prayer today. The answer is a resounding yes! Scripture teaches that until the end of the age evil will be present in the world. There are a multitude of situations wherein we may slide down the slope into apostasy and thus hinder the sanctification of God's name. Serious reflection on the life of Christ leads one to note that it was characterized by a curious mixture of great triumphs of joy and moments of almost unbearable pain. In these ways the incarnation can be viewed as a model for the life of most believers.

²⁵ The same Greek word *peirasmon* "test" in Matt 26:41 // Mark 14:38 // Luke 22:46 (cf. Luke 22:40) is the one in Matt 6:13, usually translated "temptation," but which we have chosen to translate as "test."

²⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), in a popular reflection, captures this point well.

²⁷ We have preferred to render the Greek word *poneros* as masculine "the evil one" rather than neuter "evil." This is the case in Matthew 13:19 (cf. 13:38), although in Matthew 5:39 it probably ought to be rendered as "evil." This accounts for the differences in translation. Luke (11:4) omits.

²⁸ Cf. Gerhardsson, "The Matthean Version of the Lord's Prayer," 216.

Perhaps when we pray for release from the test we are simply echoing Paul when he dares to claim that we will not be tempted beyond our strength (1 Cor 10:12–13).

Doxology

It is customary in biblical Judaism to end prayer with a statement of praise to God. The traditional ending, “For yours is the kingdom, power, and glory forever, amen,” has some ancient manuscript support; but in the opinion of the textual critics, not enough to warrant inclusion in the text of Matthew.²⁹ Clearly, in its earliest recital some doxological conclusion must have been given to the prayer; it is difficult to hear Jesus saying, “Deliver us from the evil one, Amen.” In Jewish prayer a doxology was often based on 1 Chronicles 29:11. A version of this doxology was already placed at the end of certain prayers in the *Didache*, including the Lord’s Prayer (*Didache* 8:2; 9:3; 10:5). Kingdom, power, and glory are characteristic Matthean words. In Matt 24:30 we are taught to await the coming of the Son in power and glory. Since our analysis has shown that the focal point of this prayer is to await the fulfillment of God’s plan to regather his people, we believe this doxology is an appropriate concluding word to the model prayer, even though it is dubious to base it on the actual text of Matthew.

Conclusion

At the outset of this essay we drew attention to a widespread perception that contemporary Western culture is shallow and devoid of spiritual power. Many would extend this analysis to mainstream church life. A massive industry of “alternative spiritual resources” has rushed in to fill the vacuum.

An answer to the modern spiritual malaise may be found in a proper understanding of the Lord’s Prayer. We suggest that this vision is the perfect

²⁹ Luke omits it. Part of the problem of the textual tradition is that it occurs in a number of variegated forms.

remedy to counteract the deleterious effects of the tidal wave of self-absorption and narcissism of the age. Jesus invites us to visualize a community where the people of God have regathered and God's name is sanctified through "the blind receiving their sight . . . and the poor having good news preached to them" (Matt 11:5 // Luke 7:22). In short, we need to believe that salvation has come. We are at the beachhead of what will ultimately be. Therefore we ought to conduct our lives within this framework.

Even though five of the six petitions of the model prayer are pleas for God to complete his work of salvation, Jesus believed that a spiritual life thoroughly energized by prayer was the designated vehicle to provide the synergy between human and divine action.³⁰ What is striking is how simple are the stated human actions that are constitutive in bringing in the kingdom. In the model prayer it is forgiveness. For John it is love. And for Paul it is faith, hope, and love. Even in Revelation, where by the end of the first century some churches were becoming spiritually negligent, the risen Jesus calls for them not to raise their spiritual temperature through retreats or self-help courses but by doing the works of love (Rev 2:4; 3:15-16).

Thus the Christian faith teaches that there is an ineluctable connection between correct belief and appropriate action. The great ascetics and mystics in the Christian tradition withdrew from society into the inner world partly because they believed the church had lost its way from its genuine ideals and habits. I suggest that a way to deepen spirituality is to return to the ideals and habits of the ancient church. At its center we will find the regular recital of the Lord's Prayer, at home and in our assemblies, to be indispensable.

³⁰ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 389, says "Prayer does not become superfluous by acting, but the acting remains constantly dependent on prayer."

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