

The Lord's Prayer: 1

Please rise for the Lord's Prayer
by communal oral line-repetition
in cruciform posture.

Matthew 6.9-13

Luke 11.2-4

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.

Father,
(same)
(same)

Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

→ as we forgive
those who sin against us.

NRSV

except for
the 8th line

~~Give us this day our daily bread.~~

→ Give us each day our daily bread.

~~And forgive us our debts,~~

→ And forgive us our sins,

~~as we also have forgiven our debtors, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.~~

And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

(same, but period)

(footnote:)

For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.

When the planning committee decided that this colloquy should be on the subject of "sound teaching," I prepared a Bible study of all the Bible's references to it, & you have that in your 3-ring binder (with extra copies on the entry table). It's titled "Sound Teaching in a Sick World" because that was the colloquy's title when this Bible study was written. While our three Bible half-hours together might be called Bible studies, a better term is meditations, correlations between the lines of the Lord's Prayer (as a diagnostic tool) & ruminations I think pertinent to our colloquy's theme & parallel celebrations of the Craigville Theological Colloquies' 20th anniversary & of the Barmen Declaration's 70th. As in "lectio divina" we turn the lines of Scripture into prayer, in these three half-hours let's turn the lines of the Lord's Prayer into thoughts appropriate to our reasons for being here together (in your hearts & minds, mixing my correlations with your own): let's call it "lectio meditatio."

Why did I choose the Lord's Prayer? (1) Because when you go from here, I want it to mean more to you, & be of more use to you, than when you came. (2) Because familiarity breeds inattention (the more familiar the less examined), & this "lectio meditatio" method may help you experience with fresh eyes words embedded in the Christian's daily devotional praxis and the Church's Lord's Day worship. (3) Because I long to help you become better teachers of the Lord's Prayer (as examples, I've put on the entry table Thinksheets #2502 [2 sheets] & #2886, on group study of the Lord's Prayer).

My final introductory comment is a warning: as you hear meditations on the successive lines of the Lord's Prayer, do not expect logical development toward a conclusion: in "lectio meditatio" the succession is, rather, only thematic concatenation, or even only free association (as in the counselor's question "What comes to mind about that?"). If when you put it all together in your head it spells mama, it won't be my doing.

[As I speak, you may want to take notes on yourself, but you've no need to take notes on me: everything I say is in print & will be available after each session.] Let's begin:

The Lord's Prayer is biblical prayer, which is communion with the personal Source & Destiny of the universe. Such praying presupposes radical trust in theistic providence, with distrust of the deistic compromise & radical rejection of atheistic secularism. STORY: My 1930 biology teacher, under the guise of teaching evolution, preached evolutionism, specifically ridiculing the Bible. I raised my hand & said "That's not what I was taught in Sunday school." "Well," she smirked, "you'll just have to choose between science & Sunday school, won't you?" I had set her up, & shouted "I choose Sunday school!" Facing my challenge & my fellow-students mirth, she reddened & scowled, providing me these 74 years with the facial icon of the American public school as enemy of my religion. (I wasn't antiscientific: three years later I was president of the highschool science club; rather, I was antiscientistic, opposing the atheistic secularism which occasioned, that year (1933), the publication of the Humanist Manifesto, whose chief author (among 39 signatories) was Jn. Dewey, father of so-called progressive (actually, regressive) education, who said he hoped to live until the word "God" was no longer used in American public education. The text is ecstatically evolutionist (e.g., the universe was "not created"). The central aim was to teach the children to make total sense without religion, so throughout their lives religious sense-making would be nonsense, irrational, as violating the law of parsimony (minimal hypothesis). In consequence, since almost all of America's children are daily brainwashed to this atheistic secularism, & ever fewer are exposed to Sunday school (partly because the schools use Sunday mornings for sports), the rich-thick-round biblical language of our heritage has been translated downward into the impoverished-thin-flat terms of cultural-linguistic secularism. God's justice is forgotten (just as the Gn.3 snake intended); biblical equity has yielded to mathematical equality, fair-play, individual autonomy/rights, mutual consent as the control-value of human relations--& on the basis of these shrunken values, courts make their decisions, legislatures innovate, & even some churches revise their theologies & programs,

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Next, why do we call it the Lord's Prayer? Because (in L.11.1) the Lord Jesus gave it to his disciples in answer to their request "LORD, teach us to pray." They had the dignity of having willingly responded to his invitation to become learners & servants of their Lord. (They did not have the indignity of sinners groveling in the presence of a savior: that is why we do not call this prayer "The Prayer of Our Savior.") Now, obedience is the proper behavior in relation to a lord & master, & no one should be surprised that this is the base note in the earliest Christian creed, which is "Kurios Iesous" (Jesus is Lord). In this colloquy we are celebrating two witnesses to the fact that the Christian life is a life of submission to authority, a life of obedience: (1) One of these witnesses is the document whose 70th ann. we are celebrating in this colloquy, viz. the Barmen Declaration, whose first article affirms that Jesus Christ is the one word "whom we are to trust and OBEY in life and in death"; (2) The other witness is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred by the Nazis 59 years ago, who says this in one of the books on this colloquy's reading list (LETTERS & PAPERS FROM PRISON [Mac/72], p5; for inclusive language, I've pluralized from "man"): "Who stands fast? Only those whose final standard is not their reason, their principles, their conscience, their freedom, or their virtue, but who are ready to sacrifice all this when they are called to OBEDIENT...action...in exclusive allegiance to God." We honor Barth (in the Declaration) & Bonhoeffer (in his last book) as freedom fighters under OBEDIENCE to Jesus the liberating Lord against Hitler the enslaving lord. They lived obedience to the only Lord whose will is not oppression but freedom from sin, death, & the devil. The year Hitler came to power (1933), I read in my father's library Harry Emerson Fosdick's 1923 book titled TWELVE TESTS OF CHARACTER. This sentence, from the chapter on "Obedience" as a test of character, has remained with me through the years: "Perfect freedom is perfect obedience to the perfect law." Then, three years later in homiletics class, I was required to master F.W.Robertson's "Obedience the Organ of Spiritual Knowledge," one of the few truly great sermons of all time (based on Jn.7.17). In between those two readings I had been liberated by submission to Jesus in an evangelical conversion (at which my liberal surround sniffed). I learned the joys of obedience. I was told that before going to seminary I should acquire a working knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, & German, so I did. I was told that daily I should read the OT & NT in the original languages, & so I have for 60 years. And, in 1945, the year the world was liberated from Hitler, I was told to teach Hebrew & Greek to ex-GIs, GI-billers coming to seminary right out of the military: the best biblical-languages students I ever had, for they knew OBEDIENCE, & I was the replacement for their superior officers, & in class they didn't say "yes" to me, they said "yes SIR."

Before we've gotten even to the first word of the Lord's Prayer, I've asked you to meditate with me on the radicality of biblical prayer & on the centrality of Jesus' lordship in the NT & in the Christian creeds & in the Christian religion. But I am well aware that those infected with the adolescent virus of egalitarianism are allergic to hierarchy, to verticality. When the president of a UCC seminary preached a pro-egalitarian sermon on Jn.15.15 ("I call you friends"), she failed to thank me for remonstrating with her skipping over the previous verse, which indicates that the Voice came from above: "You are my friends IF you do what I command you."

Now, sisters & brothers, we have gotten all the way to the Lord's Prayer's 1st word: Our. As sound teaching, the LP is a diagnostic tool for disclosing sick teaching--here, the sick teaching that "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian; by myself, I can pray to my Father in heaven." But MY heaven-Father exists only within the sphere of OUR heaven-Father: continuous participation in the Body of Christ is not optional to its members. Not all church-goers are Christians, but all Christians are church-goers--church-going being the only public-observable distinctive activity of Christians. Privatized spirituality is possible in some traditional religions & in new age, but not in Christianity. A person who deliberately stops going to church has objectively ceased being a Christian no matter how many personal residual values & virtues from having been a Christian. Anyone staying away from weekly worship (whether or not it can be on Sunday) will have generated satisfying rationalizations for not returning. Laziness will have conspired with the imperial autonomous Self, a new & jealous god refusing to recognize any rival, such as Lord Jesus.