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**A Mini-Course on the Our Father/Lord's Prayer:
Lecture Notes and Workshop and Discussion Topics**

by

Scott Gambrill Sinclair

Preface

The Lord's Prayer or the Our Father has for two thousand years been one of the most recited texts. Yet, much of the prayer (e.g., "Hallowed be thy Name") is not clear to the people who recite it, and different forms of the prayer have always existed. In this course we will discuss the forms of the prayer and the meaning of each of the prayer's sections. Together we will work to produce a paraphrase of the prayer which clearly brings out the original meaning.

The Surviving Forms of the Our Father and a Reconstruction of the Original Form

- I. What has become known as the "Our Father" or the "Lord's Prayer" has the distinction of being the only prayer in the gospels that Jesus commands his followers to use.
 - A. The gospels record that Jesus prayed, sometimes at great length (e.g., Luke 6:12).
 - B. Occasionally, the gospels tell us what Jesus said (though we can seldom be sure that these words actually go back to Jesus himself; they may come from his followers).
 - C. Only in the case of the Our Father, however, does Jesus in the gospels actually tell his followers to recite a particular prayer (Matt. 6:9, Luke 11:2).
- II. There is scholarly discussion over whether the Lord's Prayer was composed as a whole by Jesus or whether it was composed by the early church based on material from Jesus.
 - A. The more conservative view is that Jesus himself put together the Our Father for his followers to use both as a distinctive mark of their corporate identity and as a model for their other prayers. And it is this assumption that I will make in these conferences.
 - B. The more radical view is that the early church produced the prayer largely based both on prayers that Jesus had used (cf. Mark 14:36) and on Jesus's teaching about how to pray (Mark 11:24-25).
- III. Regardless of which scholarly view is correct, the Our Father certainly comes the closest to anything that we have of Jesus's own prayer.
- IV. The Lord's Prayer has played a central role in subsequent Christian worship and spirituality.
- V. And the Lord's Prayer is an important thing that unites Christians. Despite many divisions, all Christian groups use this prayer.
- VI. The prayer appears in three primary sources: The Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke, and the oldest surviving manual of Christian worship, the Didache. All these documents are in Greek and date from the late first century or the early second.
- VII. There are numerous variations in the ancient manuscripts, often due to making the text of Luke more like the text of Matthew.
 - A. The text of Matthew became standard in liturgy.
 - B. Hence, scribes who copied Luke were tempted consciously or unconsciously to conform Luke's version to Matthew's.
 - C. It is a principle of textual criticism to prefer divergent forms of parallel readings because of the temptation to conform.
- VIII. Here is a translation of the three versions of the prayer as found in the more reliable manuscripts and reconstructed by modern scholarship:

Matthew 6:9-13

Luke 11:1-4

Our Father in the heavens,	Father,
May your name be kept holy;	May your name be kept holy;
May your kingdom come;	May your kingdom come.
May your will happen on earth as in heaven.	
Give us today 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 test,	And do not bring us to the test.
But deliver us from evil.	

[inferior manuscripts add with variations in wording,
"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."]

Didache 8:2-3

Our Father in heaven,
 May your Name be kept holy;
 May your kingdom come;
 May your will happen on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our "daily" bread,
 And forgive us our debt
 As we also forgive our debtors.
 And do not bring us to the test,
 But deliver us from evil.
 Because yours is the power and the glory forever.

- IX. I believe these three texts are literarily independent.
- A. Even if Luke in general used Matthew as one of his sources, as a minority of scholars believe, the version of the Our Father in Luke is so different from the one in Matthew, that it cannot be based on Matthew's text. It is clear that Luke had many other sources of information (as he hints in his introduction to his gospel!), and his version of the Prayer must have come from one of these.
 - B. It is more difficult to determine whether the versions of the Our Father in the Didache and Matthew are independent, since the texts are very similar.
 - C. Nevertheless, I believe that there is no direct dependence but only the common use of an earlier intermediate source.
 - 1. There are small discrepancies between Matthew's text and that of the Didache. The words, "Heaven" and "debt," are singular in the Didache but plural in Matthew.
 - 2. The Didache has a concluding doxology, whereas Matthew's Gospel did not originally include it.
 - 3. These differences probably would not exist if either the version in the Didache or Matthew's Gospel was directly copied from the other.
- X. The following differences between the three versions of the Our Father are particularly noteworthy:
- A. The Didache and the inferior manuscripts of Matthew add a doxology.
 - B. The Didache and Matthew expand the petitions in Luke by adding explanations (e.g., "in heaven").
 - C. Luke generalizes two petitions ("give us *each* day;" "we ourselves forgive *everyone*").
- XI. It seems that these differences appeared in order to make the prayer more suitable for

worship.

A. The doxology gave a fitting liturgical end to the prayer. However, it may be that Jesus (or the earliest Christians) presupposed that people would add their own brief doxology, and that later the tradition merely fixed the wording (Joachim Jeremias).

B. The expansions explained the original meaning of several of the sections and made the prayer longer and more dignified, and, therefore, more appropriate for formal liturgy.

C. The generalizations in Luke made the prayer applicable to continuing life.

XII. Of course, some of the differences may be due to the differing perspectives of the evangelists.

XIII. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and so the prayer or, on the more radical view, at least the parts of the prayer which go back to him, are Greek translations of an Aramaic original.

XIV. From the versions in Matthew, Luke, and the Didache we can deduce that the "original" translated into English was basically:

Father,
May your name be kept holy;
May your kingdom come.
Give us today our "daily" bread,
And forgive us our debts
As we also forgive our debtors.
And do not bring us to the test.

XV. Perhaps the first thing to note is the Our Father is the prayer of the Christian community, not of an individual.

A. All versions repeatedly have the first person plural (e.g., "*our* daily bread"), and the versions found in Matthew and the Didache start with a first person plural ("*Our* Father").

B. Hence, the prayer is the prayer of a group, and if an individual uses the prayer, the individual is implicitly acting as a member of a spiritual community.

C. And the Our Father is exclusively a Christian prayer, as the Church has always at least instinctively known.

1. In the introduction to the prayer in Luke, the disciples ask Jesus to give them a special prayer as John the Baptist gave to "his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

2. There is some evidence that in early church history the prayer was secret, and converts only learned about it at baptism.

3. In liturgical practice today we often instinctively treat the prayer as binding the Christian community together.

a. We introduce the prayer as what Jesus told us to say, and we recite the prayer in unison.

b. And sometimes there is a special community intimacy when we say the Our Father. For example, in a Mass that I often attended, this was the only point in the liturgy where everyone held hands.

4. Perhaps most important, when we address God as our "Father," we are implicitly declaring that all who are praying with us are our brothers and sisters.

D. It is particularly important for Americans to remember the communal dimension of the Lord's Prayer. As a culture we overemphasize individualism and tend to reduce religion to individual ethics and an individual relationship with God.

E. Of course, it is all right for an individual to use the prayer to meet individual needs (e.g., for forgiveness of individual sins).

XVI. We must also keep in mind that the prayer is biblical poetry. Note the arrangement in

lines given above. Biblical poetry is not as tightly structured as some later poetry (e.g., sonnets) but tends to balance one clause against another, thus producing a "thought rhyme." We see this balance in the Our Father.

XVII. The prayer has a clear structure which occurs in all versions:

- A. An invocation of God as Father.
- B. A series of petitions for the glory of God.
- C. A series of petitions to fulfill the needs of the community praying.

XVIII. As we would expect, much of the material in the Our Father is similar to material in the Old Testament and/or other Jewish prayers. For example: "Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray" (Sirach 28:2) is similar to the prayer for forgiveness in the Our Father.

XIX. We will now devote attention to each of the sections of the Our Father. For these comments I am especially indebted to various scholars. In preparing for these lectures, I read books concentrating on the Lord's Prayer by Joachim Jeremias, Nijay L. Gupta, and N.T. Wright. In doing my exegesis I will

- A. Give a scholarly interpretation of the original meaning of the prayer both
 1. In the time of Jesus.
 2. And to a much lesser extent in the time of the New Testament. Note: I will not attempt to trace later interpretations.
- B. I will also stress the multiple meanings of a given passage.
 1. In the past and sometimes even today scholarship has limited interpretation to a single meaning.
 2. But, as is increasingly realized, figurative language has many meanings, and Jesus spoke in figurative language.
 3. In general in human communication when we say something we imply many things, some of which we may not even be consciously aware of but which we still (unconsciously!) intend.
 4. The primary limitation in searching for multiple meanings is to reject any meaning which contradicts the principal (obvious, emphatic) meaning.
 5. But any meaning which is easily compatible with the principal meaning should be accepted as a secondary meaning.
- C. From time to time, I will also talk about some implications of the Our Father for us today. Of course, you are free to draw contrasting conclusions and will have time to voice your opinions.
- D. For each section of the Lord's Prayer, there will be a workshop in which the class will produce a paraphrase of the section. The paraphrase should
 1. Respect the original intent of the section of the Prayer.
 2. Make the prayer relevant to the modern world (e.g., we no longer think that God lives above the stars ("in heaven")).
 3. Be about the same length as the original.

"Father"

I. The Hebrew Bible only rarely refers to God as "Father" (for example, only three times in the Psalms [68:5, 89:26, 103:13]) and even more rarely addresses him as "Father" (never in the Psalms; e.g., Isa. 63:16).

II. Perhaps one reason for this rarity is that the God of Israel in contrast to the deities of the surrounding nations did not procreate.

- A. The deities of the surrounding nations had sexual intercourse and were the biological parents of other deities and sometimes even of important individuals, such as rulers.
- B. The God of Israel, at least in the Bible, did not have sex, and had no genetic

relationship with anyone.

- III. In the Old Testament beings are children of God (often "Sons of God") by either
 - A. Sharing in God's power, as, for example, angels ("Sons of God") do.
 - B. Sharing in God's goodness as, for example, "peacemakers" do (cf. Matt. 5:9).
- IV. It is perhaps especially important that Israel as a whole is a Son of God (e.g., "Israel is my first born son;" Exodus 4:22). Because of this special relationship
 - A. In the Old Testament God gives Israel power to defeat its enemies
 - B. Calls Israel to be more righteous than other nations (even if Israel does not usually obey).
- V. Israel becomes God's Son by adoption, especially, when agreeing to the covenant.
 - A. God adopts Israel by graciously freeing the Hebrews from slavery.
 - B. Israel enters into a voluntary and binding commitment by making a covenant with God and agreeing to abide by the Law code that God gives through Moses.
- VI. Subsequently, at the installation of a king of Israel or Judah, he becomes God's Son (e.g., "I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me" [2 Sam. 7:14]), because the king is the representative of God's people and the one most responsible for making them obedient to God by enforcing justice.
- VII. Since, the image of God as a Father is a metaphor (unlike in other religions of the time where the image is often meant literally) we need to discuss what human fatherhood meant during the biblical period.
 - A. Of course, fatherhood has many dimensions that have remained constant during human history. These include
 - 1. The love of a father for a child.
 - 2. The love which the child is at least expected to have for a father.
 - 3. The dependence of the child on the father (and mother).
 - 4. The expectation that until the child is old enough to take responsibility for his/her own life, the child will normally obey the father (and mother).
 - 5. The mutual knowledge that a father and his child have of each other.
 - B. Nevertheless, family relations vary between cultures and evolve over the centuries. The following are especially significant differences between how fathers were understood in biblical times as opposed to how (at least in middle class California where I live) fathers are increasingly seen today.
 - 1. The understanding of the biology of conception is different today.
 - a. Today we know that conception occurs when a male sperm and female egg unite. Hence, for us, a human being is genetically equally the product of the mother and father and environmentally more a product of the mother, since the fetus matures in the womb.
 - b. By contrast, in biblical understanding, the father produces the seed and plants it in the womb during intercourse. All that the mother provides is the fertile soil (actually, blood) where the seed can grow. Hence, in biblical understanding a human being is primarily the product of the father and only secondarily the product of a mother. And in the biblical genealogies, descent is traced through the male line.
 - 2. The roles of parents are different now from biblical times.
 - a. More and more today, mothers and fathers have an equal role in raising children, and both parents work outside the home to provide for them.
 - b. In ancient times, the father was the undisputed authority in the family and worked at home and was the principal wage earner. Hence, children were totally dependent economically on the father and were supposed to be totally obedient to him.

c. Children (especially, sons) were expected to model themselves on their fathers, whereas today we encourage people to become individuals and not merely to "conform."

VIII. Consequently, when Jesus invites us to address God as a Father

A. Jesus is inviting us to see God as someone

1. Who loves us deeply.
2. Whom we are to love above all else (cf. "the first and great commandment") and obey.
3. On whom we are totally dependent.
4. Who created (but not procreated) us.
5. Who is our lifelong role model.

B. We become God's children not by natural birth but by entering into the community of Jesus as part of adopting the new covenant in his blood. It is especially noteworthy that in the gospel witness

1. Jesus distinguishes between "my father" and "your father."
2. Hence, it seems that Jesus saw himself, to use the language of Romans 8:29, as the "firstborn among many brothers" and sisters. Jesus is God's firstborn son, and we become God's sons and daughters through joining his community. Note that as the "Messiah" Jesus would have continued the tradition of seeing himself as "Son of God," as the representative and leader of the (New) Israel.
3. The Lord's Prayer makes the above clear by
 - a. Being a community prayer. The prayer uses the first person plural throughout (e.g., "give us our daily bread," "forgive us our debts/sins"). We address God as our collective father, not as isolated children of God. And when a community collectively addresses God as "Father," one implication is that every member of the community is a brother or sister and deserves being treated fairly and mercifully.
 - b. Being a prayer which Jesus (the Messiah) gave to the community. We pray what the Son of God told us to say.

IX. Jesus's use of the Aramaic word, "*abba*," Father, as the ideal way of addressing God, seems to have been distinctive and was treasured by the early Church.

A. Jesus's prayer to God in Mark 14:36, even though it is otherwise in Greek, preserves "*abba*."

B. Paul's letters stress that it is by the Spirit of God's Son (i.e., the Holy Spirit), that we can cry out to God as our *abba* (Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15).

C. At least if surviving texts are any indication, contemporary Palestinian Jews seldom addressed God as "Father," especially in the secular language of Aramaic (as opposed to the sacred language of Hebrew).

X. Today because of new developments we may raise the question of whether to address God as "Mother."

A. As noted above, our understanding of the biology of conception gives equal place to the mother, and the mother has an equal role in rearing children, providing for them financially, and making family decisions.

B. Hence, what Jesus meant by addressing God as "Father" could today probably equally be represented by "Mother."

C. Feminists stress that limiting God to Father helps perpetuate unjust male dominance.

D. And some contemporary thinkers suggest that the reluctance of the biblical tradition to call God "Mother" may be partly due to the prominence of mother goddesses (e.g., Artemis of the Ephesians; see Acts 19) in some Pagan cults.

XI. I have at least experienced a radical community which began the Lord's Prayer as "Holy

Parent in heaven."

XII. As we consider the problem of making a translation from one cultural context to another, certain theoretical issues arise. Whenever there is a translation, whether in language or in culture

A. Something is lost. The conservatives have a point. Updating things is not only annoying to people who have difficulty with change; updating always does damage.

B. Something is gained, because the translation makes the original meaning more accessible to normal people, since they have only a limited understanding of the original language and cultural context. The liberals have a point.

C. There is always the hopeful possibility that we may even improve on the original.

In the special case of Jesus we may note:

1. In faith Christians confess that Jesus was sinless, since he had a divine will (as well as a human one). God made the choices in Jesus (Donald Gelpi).

2. But as a human being Jesus was limited to what was humanly possible in his cultural context (Donald Gelpi).

3. The culture in which Jesus lived was (like all cultures) sinful.

4. Hence, in the case of the image of "Father" for God, we may note that

a. It was undoubtedly the best image for God in the context in which Jesus lived.

b. Nevertheless, calling God "Father" unavoidably reinforced the inferior position of women in that culture and in subsequent Christian cultures.

c. Yet, it is clear that Jesus was trying to promote the position of women, since he had women disciples contrary to social practice, and he was concerned about the marginal in general.

5. Consequently, it may be possible today to express the vision of Jesus in images that were even better than the best that were available to him.

XIII. What I personally would prefer in dealing with gendered images in traditional prayers like the "Our Father."

A. In traditional prayers retain the traditional images (e.g., God as Father, Church as Mother) during corporate worship.

B. Not using gender neutral language when it deprives prayers of their emotional appeal. Words like "parent" and "sibling" do not have the same emotional force as father or mother, brother or sister.

C. Writing new prayers which address God as mother and using them in corporate worship.

D. Encouraging people in their private prayer to use whatever images are most helpful to them. A pastoral problem that is often overlooked is that many people had a destructive or only distant relationship with their earthly fathers, and addressing God as "Father" may be problematic to such people.

XIV. The large and controversial question whether in inviting us to address God as "Father" Jesus was inviting us to become childlike in the presence of God.

A. Jeremias famously argued that "abba" should be understood as something like "Papa," since in Aramaic this is the term which a child would use (cf. "Dada" in English).

B. There was scholarly objection, since abba is the normal adult word for father.

C. The linguistic objection is sound, but it seems to me that we have to place "Father" in the larger context of Jesus's teaching.

D. Jesus clearly taught that his followers had to become "like little children" (Matt. 18:3) and that what God hid from the wise he was revealing to infants (Matt. 11:25).

E. Part of being childlike in the teaching of Jesus was giving up all claims to superior

social privilege. Children had no status in the ancient world and were unfortunately subject to severe discipline (beatings).

F. Another part of being childlike is accepting gifts without thinking of having to earn them, and Protestant scholars have emphasized the importance in the teaching of Jesus of accepting in trust God's free forgiveness and call.

G. In addition, if we are concerned with highly compatible meanings, we must also raise psychological issues.

1. Psychologically, the human personality can be divided into an "adult" and an "inner child."
2. The adult guides and protects the inner child, since the inner child is easily hurt and often irresponsible.
3. But the inner child has all the creativity and emotional depth.

H. Perhaps then when we are addressing God as "Father" we are not only inviting him to guide and protect us, we are also allowing ourselves to have the emotional depth and intimacy that can only come from being childlike.

Discussion

Workshop 1: Write a paraphrase of the first line of the Lord's Prayer respecting its original meaning while making it relevant to our cultural situation and being approximately as brief as the original.

"May your name be kept holy;"

I. Typically, the Bible uses parallelism, that is the same thought is expressed in two different ways.

II. The two lines, "May your name be kept holy; "May your kingdom come," are an illustration of parallelism, and to some extent mean the same thing.

III. Hence, the basic meaning is a prayer for the triumph of God's will on earth, as the expansion supplied in Matthew's version, "May your will happen on earth," makes clear. This triumph takes place in two phases.

A. At present, the prayer is a request that

1. In our lives as followers of Jesus, God's will shall be done, that in this time of moral struggle we will live up to God's call.
2. More people will become disciples of Jesus.

B. The prayer is also a request that through God's mighty power, his will shall be definitively done in the future, that is that God will overcome all evil.

IV. This couplet seems to be a condensed form of a more elaborate synagogue prayer during Jesus's lifetime which, presumably, he himself prayed there: "Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will. May he let his kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon."

V. As Matthew's context for the prayer (Matt. 6:7-8) suggests, the condensation is in line with Jesus's belief that

A. Prayer should be humble and, therefore, brief.

B. If we trust God, we do not need to try manipulate him by talking him to death.

VI. Nevertheless, in my opinion a great deal more is also being expressed in the separate petition of "May you name be kept holy," and additional meaning arises when we put the prayer in the context of the rest of the Bible.

VII. In modern America a name is an arbitrary label (cf. "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet"--Shakespeare).

VIII. Nevertheless, even in our culture, to know someone's name is a sign of having a

personal relationship, and not even to know someone's name is a sign of distance.

IX. In the biblical times

A. A name ideally captured the essence or role of a person. And if there was a major change in someone's character or role, God might even give a new name, as when Jacob received the name "Israel."

B. A name

1. Gave power from that person when it was legitimately invoked or even power over a person (or spirit) when used in magic.

2. Could even be used figuratively as the person him/herself. To call upon the name of the Lord is simply to call upon the Lord; to praise the name of the Lord is to praise the Lord.

X In the Bible, as today, name can also mean one's reputation.

XI. In the Bible God has a proper name.

A. Traditionally, it was rendered in English as "Jehovah," as the "Jehovah's Witnesses" remind us.

B. More accurately, it was in Hebrew Letters the approximate equivalent of YHWH in our alphabet.

C. In Hebrew the sound of vowels changes depending on their position in the sentence, and so the vowels are not necessarily written, and the correct vowels were not written in the Divine Name.

D. But very likely the Divine Name was close to "Yahweh."

XII. Historically, before the rise of monotheism Yahweh was only one god among others.

XIII. He seems originally to have been among other things

A. A God who gave victory in battle.

B. And had a special concern for the poor and oppressed.

XIV. As the Song of Deborah (Judges 5, possibly the oldest text in the Bible) makes clear, in the era of the Judges YHWH was the patron of the peasant militia of Israel as it fought for its independence and livelihood against the professional armies of hierarchical societies who would have reduced the peasants to poverty and slavery.

XV. Apparently, with the rise of monotheism, there was an effort to make the name of God reflect that he was the only God.

A. A name normally distinguishes one member of a category from another.

B. Hence, originally the name YHWH distinguished this god from others, perhaps especially, Baal, a storm god on whose rain it was believed that the crops depended.

C. And those who continued to worship additional gods probably continued to use the name, Yahweh, without further reflection.

D. However, the biblical tradition, which had a monotheistic ideology, reflected on the name and concluded, whether rightly or wrongly, that it was derived from the Hebrew verb "to be" (*hayah*). See Exodus 3:13-15.

E. Yahweh is the God who "is," and this vague statement at least indicates that YHWH cannot be limited. Perhaps it also implies that he will be with Israel or even that he is the one who causes things to come into being.

F. Of course, this interpretation of the Name of God cohered well with the claim that there were no other gods.

XVI. Nevertheless, knowing the Name also implied a special relationship, and as people who had a covenant with God Israel was proud of knowing his Name.

XVII. As the Name of God, YHWH had numinous power, and misusing the Name would bring dishonor on God whose Name it was.

XVIII. Consequently, Israelite religion was very concerned that the Name of God not be misused, and ultimately the Name was forgotten.

A. Already in the Ten Commandments, there is the prohibition of misusing the name

(Exodus 20:7). This prohibition would include

1. Having sworn by the Name to tell the truth and then lying.
2. Making a pledge using the Name and then not fulfilling it.
3. Using the Name as magic (e.g., in a curse; Lev. 24:10-16).
4. Using the Name flippantly.

B. Increasingly, the Name was not spoken.

1. The standard Hebrew text added the wrong vowels to YHWH, and when the text was read out loud, the reader substituted "Lord" for the Name. Note that many English translations of the Bible substitute LORD for the divine name.
2. In the Dead Sea Scrolls we read that anyone who spoke the Name would be expelled from the community.
3. There was a tradition that only the High Priest knew and used the Name.

C. Ultimately, at least the pronunciation of the Name was unknown.

D. As we noted already, in modern times scholars have reconstructed the Name.

E. However, the Name should not be spoken outside of academic discussion, since Jews regard the Name as too holy to be in normal use.

XIX. The concept of "holy" basically means belonging to the realm of the Divine. God is, by definition, supremely holy, and people and things become holy by being set apart for God.

A. Typically traditional cultures, including that of ancient Israel, believe that there are two realms:

1. God himself and that which is set aside for him, such as the Jerusalem temple which serves as his house on earth.
2. That which is for normal human use.

B. Things which are dedicated to divine use are "holy."

C. Because they are in the divine realm and in some sense belong to God, they must be of the best possible quality and treated with reverence.

D. People who enter the divine realm (for example, go into a temple or become priests) must be fit to please God. This fitness can have two different qualities

1. Be ritually pleasing to God, e.g., properly dressed and having no physical defect.
2. Be morally pleasing to God by living up to his ethical standards.

XX. Jesus who associated with sinners had little concern for ritual purity and emphasized moral purity.

XXI. Hence, the petition for God to keep his name holy is a plea that we act as people who are set apart for him and by doing so cause God's Name (that is his reputation) to be honored and accepted as the only God and ruler of the universe.

XXII. An interesting question is what is the Name of God for Christians who live after the resurrection of Jesus.

XXIII. I would argue that Christians have various names for God.

A. Of course, we inherit YHWH and know God as the one who simply is and cannot be limited. God remains the ultimate mystery.

B. We also have "Jesus" as the Name of God. Note that Paul insists in Philippians 2 that at the Name of Jesus all things must bow, and that Jesus is LORD (i.e., has the divine name of YHWH). Thanks to Jesus we know God more intimately and personally, but at the same time there is something mysterious and divine about Jesus himself.

C. And we have the name, "Father." Some scholars even claim that this is the Name for God in the Our Father. I doubt this, since as a Jew Jesus certainly accepted YHWH as God's name. Nevertheless, once Christianity expanded into the Gentile world, "Father" became in practice the name by which we designate God or, at least, the first person of the Trinity ("God the Father").

XXIV. Of course, there is also the issue of profanity, using the name of Jesus or the titles "Lord" or "God," disrespectfully. To me this issue

- A. Is not as important as sometimes people make it. As sins go, profanity, even when using the name of Jesus, is far less serious than acting unlovingly toward others.
- B. Nevertheless, using Jesus or Lord or God as a swear word is disrespectful to God.
- C. However, sometimes when something bad happens and people blurt out, "Lord" or "Jesus Christ," they are only half using profanity; they are half making a prayer for patience or help.

Discussion

Workshop 2: Write a paraphrase of the second line of the Lord's Prayer respecting its original meaning while making it relevant to our cultural situation and being approximately as brief as the original.

"May your kingdom come."

- I. It is clear that the principal theme of Jesus's message was the kingdom of God.
 - A. The theme of the kingdom of God pervades the material attributed to Jesus, especially in the synoptic gospels.
 - 1. The kingdom is what the parables explain.
 - 2. Mark can even summarize the message of Jesus as, "The kingdom of God has drawn near" (Mark 1:15).
 - 3. Note that the "kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's synonym for "kingdom of God."
 - a. Heaven is a reverent substitute for "God," a word too sacred to be used often.
 - b. The kingdom of heaven also indicates that Christ's kingdom is the kind of society that "heaven" (that is, God) would wish. If everyone did God's will, the earth would become more like heaven (that is the heavenly court where God's will is done perfectly. Note the expansion in Matthew's version of the Our Father.
 - B. On the other hand, the kingdom is not a major theme in other early Christian writings (e.g., Paul's letters).
- II. The phrase "kingdom of God" implies God ruling through a divinely chosen, earthly king, and was the ideal form of government that the Hebrew Bible remembered and looked forward to.
 - A. The Hebrew Bible emphasized that God chose David and his successors to be the kings of Israel forever (e.g., 2 Samuel 7:8-16).
 - B. When nevertheless the davidic dynasty collapsed, the Hebrew Bible looked forward to its restoration under a descendant of David (e.g., Ezekiel 37:15-28).
- III. Jesus claimed to be this king.
 - A. He apparently actually was a descendant of David.
 - 1. Conceivably, the early church first concluded on other grounds that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah and incorrectly deduced that he must, therefore, have been a descendant of King David.
 - 2. However, Paul, the earliest Christian writer, already recorded that Jesus was descended from David (Rom. 1:3), and Paul knew James, a brother of Jesus, personally (Gal. 1:18-19, 2:9). Hence, it seems that there was a family remembrance of davidic descent.

3. David took numerous wives and had many children, and over the generations the number of people who were descendants of David must have become a significant percentage of Israel's population. So statistically, it is not surprising that Jesus may have been one of them.

4. The knowledge that he descended from David helps explain why Jesus concluded that he was the great Son of David whose reign the prophets had foreseen.

B. He informed his disciples that he was (or would one day be) Israel's king, and they would be his courtiers. A key quote is Matthew 19:28, "At the universal renewal, when the Son of Humanity [i.e., Jesus] sits on his glorious throne, you who followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This quote must go back to Jesus.

1. The saying implies that Judas will be one of those who will rule and, therefore, must come before Judas betrayed Jesus.

2. After the death of Jesus, the leadership of the Church quickly became three "pillars" consisting of Peter, John, and James, the brother of Jesus, who was not one of the Twelve (e.g., Gal. 2:9).

3. In line with Jesus's emphasis that leaders must act as servants, the quote does not say that the Twelve would rule over the tribes but "judge" them, that is, bring justice.

4. Note that this quotation is utopian and suggests that Jesus's kingship might come in stages and only be fully realized much later.

a. The twelve tribes had not existed for centuries.

b. The Twelve would reign only after the "universal renewal."

Presumably, a lot had to happen before then.

C. Toward the end of his life Jesus confronted Jerusalem with his royal claims by dramatically approaching Jerusalem and then staging a demonstration at the temple.

1. The gospels suggest that Jesus made careful preparations for his approach to Jerusalem by secretly arranging for a colt to ride (Mark 11:1-7).

2. During the approach his disciples hailed the coming of the davidic kingdom (Mark 11:9-10).

3. Jesus's protest at the temple implicitly asserted his royal ambitions, since it had always been the prerogative of the kings of Israel and Judah to reform worship.

4. Of course, the Jewish high priest condemned Jesus for claiming to be a messianic king, and then the Roman government tried and crucified Jesus for this claim.

IV. Jesus insisted that his kingdom would be different from other kingdoms.

A. Leaders would act as servants.

1. Jesus insisted that anyone who wanted to be first must be must be servant of all (e.g., Mark 9:35).

2. In John's Gospel Jesus models this servanthood by washing feet and commanding his disciples to do the same (John 13:1-20).

B. There would not be rich and poor. The rich would have to give away their excess to the poor to be part of the kingdom.

C. There would even be a new and greater type of human being. A key text is, "Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11).

1. This text must go back to Jesus.

a. The saying is in the enigmatic and hyperbolic style that was typical of Jesus. Note that Jesus's statements point in a direction but are often so

- extreme or general that the hearers must make specific applications.
- b. Making John the Baptist inferior to the *least* in the kingdom does not fit with later tradition which honored him as a great forerunner of Jesus (e.g., John 1:6-7).
- 2. This new humanity would have the authority to forgive sins and set aside commandments which conflicted with the well being of humans (Mark 2:10, 27-28).
- 3. This new humanity would be able to work miracles.
- D. The kingdom would in some sense be Jewish and yet be open to people of every ethnic group.
 - 1. Some prophecies, especially, in the Book of Isaiah, which Jesus liked to refer to, had looked forward to the whole world worshipping the God of Israel (Isa. 2:2-4, 42:1-9).
 - 2. Jesus himself looked forward to Gentiles from all over the world coming into his kingdom (Matt. 11:8).
 - 3. Jesus probably did not expect that non-Jews would adopt the ritual commandments of the Mosaic Law. Jesus himself ate with the “unclean,” was casual about Sabbath observance, and emphasized the love took precedence over keeping ethnic commandments.
- V. When we pray in the Our Father for the coming of the kingdom, we are praying for the realization this “kingdom”
 - A. Through our own individual and collective efforts as the church.
 - B. Through God's continuing providence.
- VI. There is an interesting variation in the ancient copies of Matthew's Gospel.
 - A. The best manuscripts have, “May your will happen on earth as in heaven,” and it is probably the original reading.
 - B. However, a number of manuscripts read, “on earth and heaven.”
- VII. The first and probably original reading implied that
 - A. At present God rules in heaven where his will prevails completely.
 - B. The hope is that God will extend his dominion to earth where presently evil reigns.
- VIII. The alternate ruling suggests that God's rule is only partial both in earth and heaven.
 - A. In heaven there are demonic forces. Note Ephesians 6:12: “the spirits of evil in the heavenly places.”
 - B. On earth there are both demons and evil people.
 - C. The hope is that God will conquer both his human and his spiritual foes.
- IX. I believe, depending on what one means by “heaven,” that both readings contain truth.
- X. For me personally, taken together the petitions for the hallowing of God's name and for the coming of the kingdom are another version of Jesus's two great commandments.
 - A. Jesus emphasized that two commandments were especially central, to love God with all of one's being and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:28-34). Note that our neighbors are everyone with whom we have relations, but are especially those whom we dislike (“enemies”) or are in special need, such as the poor and disabled.
 - B. The hallowing of the divine Name focuses on the requirement that we place God before all else.
 - C. By contrast, God's kingdom is primarily about the social relations that God would wish in an ideal society.

Discussion

Workshop 3: Write a paraphrase of the third line of the Lord's Prayer respecting its original meaning while making it relevant to our cultural situation and being approximately as brief as

the original.

Appendix: Various Suggestions On How Jesus Expected that He Would Become King

- I. There were at least three ways that Jesus might have considered gaining royal power.
 - A. He could have considered leading a revolt.
 1. The Maccabees had successfully revolted against Greek rule two centuries before and become Israel's rulers, ultimately adopting the title "king."
 2. Various messiahs before and after Jesus's ministry unsuccessfully fought against Roman rule.
 - B. He could have hoped for an apocalyptic intervention by God.
 1. The Hebrew Bible celebrated the intervention of God in the past to free the Israelites from bondage in Egypt.
 2. Apocalyptic documents predicting an imminent divine intervention to transform the world and save the Jews were common during the first century.
 3. In the gospels Jesus himself talks about his own coming apocalyptic triumph.
 4. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the mainstream of biblical scholarship has held that Jesus entertained apocalyptic expectations.
 - C. He could have hoped to persuade the Romans to appoint him to be king.
 1. The demonstration in the temple appears to have been an appeal to the Jews to accept Roman rule (Mark 11:17).
 - a. Jesus proclaimed that the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations which would surely include Rome.
 - b. His condemnation of the temple as a bandits' den seems to have been a condemnation of would-be messiahs, since the negative label for such figures was "bandit" (N.T. Wright).
 - c. This condemnation alludes to Jeremiah (7:11) who centuries earlier had counseled the Jews to accept foreign rule rather than resist.
 2. The gospels record that the Romans did not wish to execute Jesus even though he claimed to be a king and only executed him under pressure from the high priests.
 3. Both before and after Jesus's ministry the Romans appointed Jews to be client rulers.
 4. In later books in the Old Testament God sometimes saves the Jews who are under foreign rule by having the foreign rulers intervene (see, e.g., Nehemiah and Esther), including appointing Jewish leaders (e.g., Ezra).
 5. Hence, it is plausible that Jesus was at least implicitly appealing to the Roman government to consider making him a client king of Judea.
 6. And it is even plausible that the Romans might actually have been interested if Jesus could gain popular support.
 7. Jesus's protest in the temple was an attempt to gain such support.
 - a. The protest made Jesus a celebrity.
 - b. It was an attack on the wealth of the high priest who relied on the revenues from the temple.
 - c. Much of the money came from the pious poor who made donations and purchased animals for sacrifice.
 - d. Jesus attacked this exploitation of the poor by calling the temple a den of bandits and by pointing out a widow who gave her last coin to the temple (Mark 12:41-44).
 - e. Jesus hoped that he could thereby gain support from the poor and

their sympathizers who would realize that if Jesus became the ruler he would make life better for them.

II. There are problems with each of these alternatives.

- A. Leading a revolt seemed hopeless and unethical.
 1. Jesus had no political or military resources.
 2. Both before and after the time of Jesus all Jewish revolts against Roman power ended in disaster.
 3. Jesus in the gospels speaks against the use of violence (e.g., Matt. 26:52).
- B. It is doubtful that Jesus had any knowledge of apocalypticism.
 1. The Bible that Jesus knew consisted of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.
 2. With the exception of Daniel, the apocalypses were esoteric documents which a carpenter from an obscure village would not read.
 3. Jesus did not rely on Daniel.
 - a. Daniel was not part of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and Jesus would have considered it less authoritative.
 - b. In the gospels the only time that Jesus quotes Daniel is in his trial before the high priest (Mark 14:62, Matt. 27:64).
 - c. Historically, it is unlikely that Jesus quoted Daniel at the trial.
 - 1). The trial was not open to the public, and it is doubtful that the evangelists had detailed knowledge of the proceedings. Instead, the accounts of the trial probably are only how the evangelists imagined the events.
 - 2). Since the quotation from Daniel is dramatic and leads to the high priest condemning Jesus for blasphemy, the quote serves an important literary function and is especially likely to have been added by the evangelists.
 4. Jesus's predictions in the gospels of his own apocalyptic triumph reflect knowledge of the resurrection and come from the early church not from the historical Jesus.
 - a. The historical Jesus believed that there would be a final resurrection of the dead on a future Day of Judgment (e.g., Matt 11:20-24, 12:41-42, Mark 12:18-27).
 - b. It is reasonable to assume that, if everyone else would participate in this universal resurrection, he would as well.
 - c. In the gospels Jesus's predictions of his coming death and individual resurrection "on the third day" are highly literary.
 - 1). They have a consistent literary structure consisting of an announcement of his coming crucifixion, a negative reaction from the disciples, a teaching from Jesus about the need for his followers to be humble and accept that they must suffer.
 - 2). The predictions of the passion and resurrection serve as literary foreshadowing for the conclusion of the gospels. This foreshadowing is especially important in Mark which originally ended with only the announcement of the resurrection (16:1-8), and Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source.
 - d. If Jesus historically predicted his coming resurrection "on the third day," the initial astonishment of his followers at the finding of the empty tomb and at the resurrection appearances would be inexplicable.
 - e. After the resurrection the church knew that Jesus was alive and ruled the universe and eagerly anticipated his triumphant return to save his

followers who were suffering persecution.

f. Consequently, it was easy for the church who revered Jesus to imagine that he had predicted this apocalyptic return.

C. The Romans only appointed Jewish royalty to high office, and in the end the Romans executed Jesus. Hence, so far as I know, I am the only person who has ever suggested that Jesus was hoping for a political appointment from Rome!

Discussion: How do you think that Jesus envisioned that he would become king?

III. Shortly before his arrest Jesus realized that his hopes to become an earthly king had failed, and he would be killed (e.g., Mark 12:1-9, especially, vss. 6-8).

IV. Historically, what happened after the crucifixion was a series of events that made Jesus one of the most influential figures in human history. These events include

- A. The resurrection experiences.
- B. The appearance of the institutional church.
- C. The spread of Christianity to most of the world.
- D. Many nations adopting Christianity as the official religion.

Discussion: How and to what extent did the institutional Church produce the kingdom envisioned by Jesus, and how and to what extent did the institutional Church betray that kingdom?

V. An important issue is how the followers of Jesus are to fulfill his vision of the "kingdom" in a culturally diverse world.

- A. Jesus's vision was surely that in fulfillment of ancient prophecy Israel would extend to the ends of the earth.
- B. The question which would inevitably arise was whether this "kingdom," which must be a single community in some sense, would have a single culture or, if not, what would hold it together.
- C. At least three answers were/are possible.
 - 1. The followers of Jesus would have a single culture. This was the perspective of conservative Jewish Christians immediately after the resurrection. They wanted Gentile converts to adopt the Mosaic Law which included Jewish culture.
 - a. In theory this solution was rejected by the church as a whole thanks largely to St. Paul.
 - b. Nevertheless, in practice
 - 1.) Cultural loyalties have divided Christianity and produced competing denominations.
 - 2.) Christian missionaries often imposed an alien culture on converts.
 - 3.) What many people thought Christianity was was an idealized version of their own cultural values and loyalties.
 - 2. The followers of Jesus would not have a single culture but would share a common leader (the Pope?) as the successor to Jesus. This has been the Roman Catholic perspective down through the centuries, and the Catholic Church is the largest international organization.
 - 3. The followers of Jesus would only share loyalty to Jesus and his ethical and spiritual vision. This has been the normal Protestant view.
- D. Obviously, Christianity is not close to resolving the issue of how to be one kingdom in Christ, but perhaps, as Christians continue to pray for God's kingdom to come, they might at least long for the unity of Christians and reflect on how it might come about.

Discussion: How do you think that the church can be God's kingdom in a culturally diverse world?

"Give us today our 'daily' bread."

- I. The Greek word (*epiowsios*) translated above as "daily" does not occur independently of the Our Father anywhere in ancient Greek literature.
- II. Even in ancient times commentators discussed what the word meant, and translators rendered it differently. Here are the most likely possibilities as to what it meant:
 - A. Necessary for life.
 - B. For today.
 - C. For tomorrow.
- III. In any case, these differences do not matter too much, unless one takes "tomorrow" to mean the definitive coming of the kingdom. In this case, the meaning of the petition is that we would already experience in our own lives now the blessings of the age to come (Jeremias).
 - A. I think that this interpretation would have been unlikely during the lifetime of Jesus.
 1. Jesus otherwise does not use tomorrow in this sense in the gospel witness.
 2. Jesus stressed that at present the kingdom is hidden (Luke 17:20-21).
 3. And after his hopes to become an earthly king failed, he predicted a time of tribulation (Mark 13:1-25).
 - B. But this interpretation might have been possible after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit allowed people to experience the final blessings already in the present. Note, for example, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.
- IV. Because the meaning of *epiowsios* was uncertain, one stream of later interpretation understood the petition for bread to refer to the bread of the Eucharist. This interpretation was not possible during the time of Jesus himself, since he instituted the Eucharist immediately before his arrest and execution. Nevertheless, I believe that the purpose of the Our Father and of the Eucharist are basically the same. Both bind the community together in prayer and in bread and in loyalty to the vision of Jesus.
- V. The petition for the bread that we need today and tomorrow in order to live is in line with several important themes which we find elsewhere in the teaching of Jesus.
 - A. Jesus taught that our heavenly Father knows our needs and gives good things to those who ask him (Matt. 7:11).
 - B. He also taught that we must live one day at a time and not be anxious about the long term future which is in God's hands (Matt. 6:34).
 - C. The petition for bread is also an implicit criticism of seeking wealth and luxury.
 1. Bread (with a little something on it, such as olive oil or fish) was all that normal people usually ate.
 2. The rich ate more luxuriously, especially with the frequent consumption of meat.
 3. By teaching us to pray for "bread," Jesus was implicitly saying that we should not ask God to make us rich and self-indulgent (Matt. 6:19-21). Of course, Jesus warned about the difficulty of the rich being members of his "kingdom" (Mark 10:25) in which the first would be as the last.
- VI. I also think that when we are well off and pray for God to give the community bread we are also implicitly committing ourselves to help others who lack basic necessities.
 - A. Jesus was concerned about those who were hungry and in poverty ("Blessed are the poor;" Luke 6:20).
 - B. He himself fed the hungry crowds in the miracle of the loaves, and it is noteworthy that he worked the miracle in response to a boy who was willing to share his meager lunch.
 - C. When we pray that God will give the community bread/basic necessities and we

have more than enough for ourselves, surely God is inviting us to share our surplus in his name.

VII. By extension the prayer for bread also asks for the spiritual resources to get through the day.

A. In the Bible bread is sometimes a metaphor for spiritual nourishment. Note that in Proverbs Wisdom invites the foolish to eat her "bread" (9:1-6, especially, vs. 5).

B. And in John's Gospel Jesus challenges people to eat the food that endures (6:27).

C. Therefore, to pray for our daily bread includes a petition that God would give us the grace to get through today.

Workshop 4: Write a paraphrase of the fourth line of the Lord's Prayer respecting its original meaning while making it relevant to our cultural situation and being approximately as brief as the original.

"And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors."

I. In Aramaic the same word (*hoba*) means both debt and sin. Note that even today when someone abuses us, we may say, "He owes me one!" By contrast, the Greek word in the Lord's prayer for "forgive" has the basic meaning of "release," "let go."

II. Because of the ambiguity in Aramaic *hoba*, the translations of this part of the Our Father into Greek differ with Matthew having "forgive us our *debts*" and Luke having "forgive us our *sins*," although Luke then goes on to, "For we ourselves forgive everyone *indebted* to us."

III. In line with my concern to honor multiple compatible meanings, I would suggest that the prayer means both financial debts and sins.

A. It seems clear that monetary debt was a major problem for the followers of Jesus, and he was concerned about it.

1. Jesus was concerned about the plight of the poor ("blessed are you who are hungry now" [Luke 6:21]), many of whom supported him.

2. Scholars who are interested in the economic situation during the time of Jesus (e.g., Douglas Oakman) hypothesize that debt was a major problem for the rural poor in Galilee, especially, since taxation was undoubtedly high. The taxation needed to be high to support both the native hierarchy (the temple, the Herods) and the Roman system.

3. The parable that we call the "Unforgiving Servant" (Matt. 18:23-34) is in fact the Parable of the Merciless Creditor. The primary character in the story threw someone into prison for not being able to repay a small debt on time.

4. Naturally, followers of Jesus who were desperately in debt would have taken the petition for the remission of debt literally, since it applied directly to their situation!

B. Of course, it remains true that in the Lord's Prayer debt also means sin in general, since Jesus was concerned about many types of sin.

IV. A discrepancy between Matthew and Luke's versions of the Our Father is the verb tense of forgive, since the better ancient copies of Matthew (which I am following here) have, "We also have forgiven," whereas Luke has, "We ourselves forgive."

V. This discrepancy is due to the fact that verb tenses in Hebrew and Aramaic differ from those in Greek and English.

A. There are only two tenses in Hebrew and Aramaic: the perfect and the imperfect.

B. The perfect represents complete action and can express, if we use the verb, "to go,"

as an example, went, go, will go.

C. The imperfect represents incomplete action and can be used to express, was going, am going, and will be going.

D. However, most of the time the perfect is for past actions.

E. Hence, an Aramaic perfect can mean either complete action or past action and would be normally translated into Greek with a past tense.

F. And, therefore, we get in Greek translations of the Lord's Prayer the variations between have forgiven and forgive.

VI. Nevertheless, the original intent seems clear: The prayer does not claim that we already have forgiven and that God should be as generous as we are. Instead, as we ask for God's forgiveness, we declare that we now do forgive. Note that in the "Parable of the Merciless Creditor" (a.k.a. the "Unforgiving Servant") the King (i.e., God) initially forgives a huge debt and only changes his mind when the person whom he forgave refused to forgive.

VII. Consequently, when we pray the Our Father, we are pledging

A. To forgive people who have sinned against us.

B. And not to exploit people who are financially obligated to us. Today we who live in a democratic society might add not to support an economic system that exploits the poor.

VIII. Forgiveness has both a psychological and a social dimension, and Jesus and the gospel writings were concerned about both.

A. Socially, forgiveness means not taking vengeance, not trying to get even. Jesus stressed that we must turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39).

B. Psychologically, forgiveness means not harboring resentment. In the commentary that Matthew supplies for the Parable of the Merciless Creditor Jesus stresses that we must forgive from the "heart" (Matt. 18:35).

IX. A pastoral problem is that psychologically it is often impossible to forgive someone. We can get ourselves not to take vengeance, but we still feel resentment. The reason is that resentment is an anesthetic and allows us not to feel the pain that someone's behavior has caused. If the pain is too great, we cannot bear it all at once.

X. Of course, one response to the problem of not being able to forgive is to realize that forgiveness is a process involving spiritual growth in response to God's gracious call and the process takes time. Note that in the Lord's Prayer when we declare that we are forgiving others, we make that declaration in the larger context that acknowledges our dependence on God.

XI. The meaning of the Aramaic and Greek words for forgiveness in the Our Father may also be of some help.

A. When we are struggling to get over resentments, it is important to remit a "debt" (the Aramaic metaphor for forgiveness). We acknowledge that the person who has sinned against us does owe us something, but we are choosing not to insist on collecting.

B. When we are struggling to forgive, it is also important not to cling to our resentment, but to "let go" (the Greek metaphor for forgiveness).

XII. Another problem is how we should deal with the claim that God will not forgive us if we do not forgive.

A. The Lord's Prayer itself does not explicitly say this, but it seems implied, and in his commentary on the prayer, Matthew does explicitly say, "If you do not forgive people, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15). And, as we have seen, this theology does appear in the Parable of the Merciless Creditor.

B. As we noted above, forgiveness has both a social and psychological dimension.

C. At least today we would be uncomfortable with the idea that God is holding grudges.

1. In previous centuries, when people saw natural disasters as "acts of God," it seemed clear that God was actively taking vengeance, and presumably this vengeance was an expression of his psychological anger.
2. Now that we know that natural disasters have natural causes or occasionally, human ones, as in climate change, we should not see them as God taking vengeance.
3. And theologically God's infinite love and forgiveness should preclude him from taking vengeance.

XIII. However, several things remain true about "God's" punishment for holding individual or communal grudges.

- A. In the Bible
 1. God punishes sin primarily by bondage.
 2. Individuals (e.g., King Saul) who sin become sick or possessed with evil spirits.
 3. When Israel sins, it goes into exile and slavery.
 4. God's "forgiveness" is not primarily a change in attitude but the liberation of sinners from sickness, possession, exile, and slavery.
- B. Psychologically, when we hold grudges we hurt ourselves and cut ourselves from the transforming power of God's forgiveness.
 1. We, whether as individuals or groups, hurt ourselves by wallowing in negative thoughts and emotions, and these also infect all of our relationships, including with people and groups who have not wronged us.
 2. It is difficult for us to accept that God's forgives us if we refuse to forgive others. By contrast, as we forgive, we perceive more deeply that we are forgiven.
- C. I believe that God is always loving and forgiving, but it remains true that when we willfully refuse to forgive, we hurt God, and if our relationship with God is going to grow, we must face the pain we have caused him.
- D. Jesus was especially concerned about a Final Judgment, and how his followers (and the rest of the world) would fare on the Last Day.
- E. Today in our teaching and preaching mainline Christians seem to have difficulty with a Final Judgment, partly because we wish to believe that repentance and growth are always possible.
- F. I would only venture the following:
 1. There must be some things which we are supposed to accomplish during our lives on earth, and if we willfully refuse to accomplish them, there must be some lasting problem, at least in the form of remedial work.
 2. The more evil people do, the more difficult it is for them to acknowledge it.
 3. There is no final salvation without acknowledging the entire truth. As long as we refuse to face what we have done, we are
 - a. Alienated from our real selves and our real past.
 - b. Alienated from the individuals and groups whom we have hurt.
 - c. Alienated from the God of truth.
 4. Whatever the sufferings of "hell" may be, this triple alienation must be among them.

XIV. As a communal prayer, the petition for forgiveness in the Our Father binds the church together internally and externally.

- A. Internally, the prayer unites the community by making us pledge to forgive one another.
- B. The Our Father also unites the Church in its relationship with the outer world
 1. By reminding us that we must forgive the larger society when it is hostile to us.
 2. By reminding us of the Church's collective sin both against its own members

and against the outside world.

Discussion

Workshop 5: Write a paraphrase of the fifth line of the Lord's Prayer respecting its original meaning while making it relevant to our cultural situation and being approximately as brief as the original.

"And do not bring us to the test."

- I. Depending on on the translation of the Greek word (*peirasmos*) rendered above as “test,” this text has raised various concerns.
 - A. The Greek word rendered above as “test” has two related meanings.
 1. “Temptation” (an enticement to do evil)
 2. A trial that “tests” moral character.
 - B. If we choose the translation “temptation,” we have a series of problems.
 1. The Bible does not normally portray God (in contrast to Satan) as a tempter, and James 1:13 explicitly insists that God does not tempt anyone.
 2. The idea of God tempting people to do evil is disturbing.
 3. In response to these problems, scholars have suggested that "Do not bring us" is probably a somewhat misleading Greek translation of an Aramaic causative which means spare us. Pope Francis, presumably relying on this suggestion, has publicly questioned whether, "Lead us not into temptation," is an adequate translation.
 4. However, appealing to a mistranslation is problematic.
 - a. A reconstruction of a hypothetical Aramaic text can only be approximate.
 - b. The original translator knew the exact text and presumably had a fluency in contemporary Aramaic that we cannot hope to have now.
 - c. Hence, claiming that we can do better today than the original translator is foolhardy.
 5. Even if there was a mistranslation of the Aramaic, the Greek clearly means “do not bring us,” and that is what is in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and the Church regards these gospels as themselves authoritative.
 - C. If we choose to translate *peirasmos* as “test,” there is the objection that being “tested” is a spiritually necessary.
 1. We cannot grow if we are never tested, and it is by passing our tests that we demonstrate our commitment to God and to others.
 2. Therefore, it is wrong to ask not to be “tested.”
 3. Hence, one modern translation actually had, “Save us in the time of trial,” but this translation has no basis in the Greek.
 - D. Finally, it seems to me there is little substantive difference between being “tempted” and “tested.”
 1. Every “temptation” is a test of our spiritual character.
 2. Every test of our spiritual character is a temptation, since we may fail the test.
- II. The gospels record that Jesus was especially tested on two occasions.
 - A. Satan tested him when Jesus was fasting in the wilderness.
 - B. Jesus felt supremely tested just before his arrest.
- III. In response to the wilderness test, Jesus stressed that he had to live in dependence on God. “A human being shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes out of the

mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, Deut. 8:3).

IV. In response to his test just before his arrest Jesus

A. Asked for what he really wanted, namely, to be spared from torture and death. “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39).

B. Prayed that nevertheless God's will would be done. Note that the expansion on the Our Father (“Your will be done”) in Matthew's version probably comes from this scene.

V. Here we have a philosophy that makes sense of the petition, “Do not bring us to the test.”

A. In our prayers we are to be frank with God and ask for what we truly want.

B. We do not want trials, and, therefore, we should pray not to have them.

C. It would even be spiritually dangerous to ask for trials not merely because we might fail the test but also because we could be focusing on building up ourselves rather than being dependent on God.

D. If after we have asked God to be spared from trials, and the trials still come, we can depend on God's help.

1. Jesus and the early church taught that when we face some severe trial because we have been faithful to God, he will in that moment give us new resources (Matt. 10:19-20).

2. In the larger context for the Our Father, Luke talks about God's gift of the Holy Spirit and insists that God always answers prayer positively (Luke 11:5-13).

VI. Matthew's expansion underlines that the intent of the petition, “Do not bring us to the test” is that God would spare us from all trials. Note that

A. By adding “Deliver us from evil,” Matthew has produced biblical parallelism, two lines making the same point using contrasting language and/or imagery.

B. Hence, in this context the meaning of the first line must be consistent with “Deliver us from evil.”

C. And Matthew makes it clear that the trials could be social or spiritual because the Greek can be translated in two different ways, both of which make good sense, and, I believe, were intended.

1. The words could be translated, as above, “Deliver us from evil.” Here evil could be

a. Any attack on our well being, such as sickness, which might test our faith, but would mostly refer to assault from wicked people.

b. A choice on our part to sin.

2. The words could also be translated, “Deliver us from the Evil One.” Here the Evil One would be Satan. A problem with this interpretation is that Satan was not referred to as the “Evil One” prior to this text, but in Matthew's Gospel it does once (Matt. 13:19, 39; Nijay Gupta). Note that in the gospels Satan both tempts people to sin and also produces sickness through demonic possession.

VII. It is possible that Jesus and the evangelists were especially concerned about the “trial” of a dire period following the crucifixion.

A. The gospels record that just before his death Jesus responded to the rejection of his ministry by predicting a period of terrible events, including the persecution of his disciples and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Mark 13). We even read, “If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would be saved” (13:20).

B. Subsequently, the persecution of the church and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple actually occurred.

C. Certainly the evangelists who themselves lived through this terrifying period would have seen it as a supreme illustration of the sort of trials what we should pray that we be spared.

Workshop 6: Write a paraphrase of the sixth line of the Lord's Prayer respecting its original meaning while making it relevant to our cultural situation and being approximately as brief as the original.

"For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

- I. This doxology was not a fixed part of the prayer.
 - A. It does not occur in Luke's version of the Our Father or even in the more reliable manuscripts of Matthew's version.
 - B. In the manuscripts that have it, there are variations in wording.
 - C. The doxology also appears in the version of the Our Father in the Didache.
 - D. Consequently, it is clear that the doxology could be omitted and was variable.
 - II. There are two possible explanations for the origin of the doxology
 - A. A concluding doxology goes back to Jesus (Jeremias).
 1. Jesus expected that each person who used the prayer would end with a word of praise, and allowed each of us to make up our own.
 2. However, public worship required that when the prayer was said in unison, everyone needed to say the same thing.
 3. The Church then tried to fix the wording, but initially different groups had slightly different versions.
 4. But eventually, the wording we are familiar with became dominant.
 5. This version may be based on portions of 1 Chronicles 29:11-13. If so, we once again have a radical condensation of a longer, more flowery text, and this condensation is in line with Jesus's belief that prayer should be brief and not try to wear down God by going on and on.
 - B. Or the early Church added the doxology to give a more positive ending to the prayer and make it more suitable for liturgy.
 - III. Whichever explanation may be correct I prefer the Catholic liturgical practice to the one that I experience in the Episcopal Church.
 - A. In Catholic liturgies there is a break between the "Our Father" and the doxology, thus indicating that the doxology, strictly speaking, is not part of the prayer.
 - B. Whereas, in the liturgies of my church, the doxology is simply part of the "Lord's Prayer," and no one would know that it is an addition.
 - IV. In any case, the doxology, like praise in general, takes the focus away from ourselves and puts it back on God thus tying the prayer together.
 - A. As is often noted, the first half of the Our Father focuses on glorifying God. He is our Father; his Name is to be kept holy; his Kingdom is to come.
 - B. By contrast, the second half of the prayer focuses on our needs for bread, forgiveness, and protection from evil.
 - C. The doxology (regardless of how it originated) returns the focus to God, and by focusing us on God makes us open to receiving his power and peace.
 - V. Moreover, even without the doxology the Our Father implies that God is ruler of all, since God is our father, God's kingdom is coming, God is the one who gives us our basic necessities, God is the one whose forgiveness we need and who can spare us from trials.
- Discussion: Should the Lord's Prayer have a doxology?

Workshop 7: Produce an appropriate, brief doxology for the Lord's Prayer.

Appendix: My own paraphrase:

Mother and Father of all:
May you be revered and loved.
Through Jesus may justice and equality reign on earth.
Give us what we truly need for today.
Forgive us our sins and enable us to forgive others.
Spare us from temptation and tribulation.
You alone can grant these requests. Amen.

Discussion: How do you feel about my paraphrase?