

The Lord's Prayer: Paradigm for a Christian lifestyle

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THE LORD'S PRAYER

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Foreword

The contents of this booklet were presented during five Bible study sessions at the annual conference of the Christian Medical Fellowship of South Africa, held at the Kalk Bay Bible Institute, 18 to 22 July, 1984. A few remarks, by way of introduction, may help the reader to understand better what I was trying to do in these presentations.

The overall conference theme was "Christian Lifestyle". My attempt at studying the Lord's Prayer as a paradigm for a contemporary Christian lifestyle flows from the conviction that this prayer was deeply rooted in the life of the early church and, as such, reflected the realities and contingencies those first Christians experienced daily. Authentic prayer is, after all, not an escape from our day-to-day realities but, on the contrary and in a very real sense, prompted by those realities and speaking to them.

It should be kept in mind that Jesus and the early Christians were, on the whole, rather marginal people vis-a-vis first-century Jewish and Roman society, "not many ... were wise by human standards, not many were influential, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor. 1:26). In fact, many of them were slaves, poor peasants, day labourers or simple fisher-folk. All of this is mirrored not only in the gospel stories and parables, but also in the Lord's Prayer. It is - particularly in its second part - the prayer of people living a rather precarious existence, as the petition for "daily" bread particularly illustrates.

All this means that we are immediately faced with all kinds of difficulties if we attempt to reflect on the Lord's Prayer as a paradigm for Christian lifestyle today. There is an enormous historical distance separating us from the Lord's Prayer and its original setting. Between that time and ours irreversible qualitative changes have occurred in our understanding of society, politics, economics and the like. We cannot, therefore, apply those early words on a one-to-one basis to our realities today. That would mean making mechanical transpositions from one period to another fundamentally different period. If we thus consciously or unconsciously - project our own situation into the past, we inevitably distort the past as well as our own situation and do not really help ourselves to a better understanding of the message for our day.

What needs to be done is something that did, in fact, already happen in the early church: The message of Jesus of Nazareth was creatively interpreted within the circumstances of Christians in Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome and Corinth. Or, to put it differently: Jesus inspired his disciples to prolong the logic of his own ministry in an imaginative and creative way amid historical circumstances that were in many respects new and different.

As we read the New Testament documents today - and, in the current case, the Lord's Prayer - all this has to be kept in mind. Our task is to attempt to recapture the spirit and ethos of the early church and interpret those for and in our own context. Jesus has to become our "contemporary", to use an expression of Kierkegaard. The Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Palestine and taught his disciples how to pray, has to become the Jesus who accompanies us in our hectic medical and other practices and in the midst of the stupendous demands of life in South Africa today.

I am not suggesting that all this will mean exactly the same for each and every one of us. As we, in our reading of the New Testament, make the transition from first century rural Palestine under Roman rule to twentieth century South African society with its incredible tensions, demands and conflicts, we are bound to differ in our application of the "old, old story" to ourselves and our society. In these Bible studies I have, on the whole, done little

more than tried to recapture the original setting and meaning of the Lord's Prayer; only in very general terms have I intimated what this could mean to us today. The practical application, however, has to be made by each person individually. Yet he or she should make that application as a member of the fellowship of believers, and in such a way that it remains consonant with the original intention of the Lord's Prayer.

One last, formal remark. In preparing these Bible studies I read several books and articles on the Lord's Prayer and related subjects. In this respect I refer my reader to the bibliography at the end. The references in brackets in the text itself correlate with those in the bibliography.

David J Bosch
Pretoria, December 1984

A summary of the entire gospel

We shall devote our Bible Study sessions this week to some reflections on the Lord's Prayer, as rendered in the Gospel according to Matthew. My intention is to study, with you, the Lord's Prayer as an expression of an authentic Christian lifestyle. I would wish us to define "lifestyle" in a comprehensive way, as an indication of the total mode and style of a Christian's conduct and life, and not merely in the sense of "simple lifestyle" - although, naturally, that element will have to be included.

Perhaps it is not self-evident why precisely this passage was chosen for a Bible Study on Christian lifestyle. So, a few introductory remarks may be appropriate.

First, it is important to understand something of the way in which Matthew has compiled his gospel. Scholars have pointed out that the first gospel is, in several respects, a literary masterpiece, designed in a very special way, and differing in many respects from the other gospels. To mention only one distinctive feature of Matthew: His gospel contains five comparatively long "sermons" or "discourses", each of which is preceded and followed by an equally long narrative or "story". If we analyse the gospel's content, we find, then, a total of eleven main sections, five of these being discourses, the other six narratives. The eleven sections are arranged concentrically or symmetrically, in such a way that the sixth section (chapter 13: the parables of the kingdom) becomes the centre around which the other ten are arranged. Section 1 is moreover, as regards its content and message, linked to Section 11, Section 2 to Section 10, 3 to 9, 4 to 8 and 5 to 7. Matthew, for whom Jesus' message of the kingdom of heaven is so important, thus puts the section containing the parables of the kingdom in the very centre of his gospel. The overall structure then looks something like this:

A 1:1- 4:17	narrative: the birth and preparation of Jesus
B 4:18 - 7:29	a introductory material and first discourse: Jesus teaches with authority (exousia)
C 8:1 - 9:35	narrative: Jesus acts with authority – ten miracles
D 9:36 - 11:1	second discourse: the 12 commissioned with authority
E 11:2 - 12:50	narrative: the invitation of Jesus rejected by this generation
F 13:1-53	third discourse: the parables of the kingdom
E¹13:54 - 16:20	narrative: Jesus opposed and confessed, acts in compassion to Jew and gentile
D¹ 16:21 - 20:34	narrative, fourth discourse and narrative: the impending passion of Jesus, and the lack of understanding of his disciples
C¹ 21:1 - 22:46	narrative: Jesus' authority questioned in Jerusalem
B¹ 23:1 - 25:46	fifth discourse: judgement on Israel and false prophets, the coming of the kingdom
A¹ 26:1 - 28:20	narrative: passion, death and resurrection of Jesus

The five "sermons" or "discourses" in Matthew's gospel can perhaps be referred to as:

1. The sermon on discipleship, popularly known as the Sermon on the Mount (Chapter 5-7)
2. The sermon on the apostolic mission (Chapter 10)
3. The sermon on how the kingdom comes (Chapter 13)
4. The sermon on church discipline (Chapter 18)
5. The sermon on false teachers and on the end (Chapters 23-25).

The first sermon, then, deals with the glories and the demands of discipleship. It is an introduction to what is still to come. The disciples are here called to be sort of "guinea pigs" for the kingdom (Stendahl 1980:73). Right in the centre of this long discourse (ch. 5-7) Matthew puts the Lord's Prayer (6:9-13). If we have begun to understand something of Matthew's careful arrangement of the traditions about Jesus, we will not be able to regard this placing of the Lord's Prayer as accidental. As a matter of fact, the first part of the Sermon on the Mount - up to the Lord's Prayer - refers in various ways to the concerns of the first part of the prayer: God's name, his kingdom, his will. Again, the section that follows the Lord's Prayer, alludes in various ways to the second part of the prayer: ch. 6:19-34 alludes to the request for bread, ch. 7:1-6 to debts and forgiveness, ch. 7:13-27 to the dangers of temptation (Grundmann 1968:205-6).

In this way the Lord's Prayer becomes, in a very real sense, a summary of the entire Sermon on the Mount. Several scholars have, however, pointed out that it summarises not only the Sermon on the Mount but, in fact, the entire gospel. As we, during these days, look at each of the petitions in turn, we shall be struck by the fact that each of them has a parallel in one or other key passage in another part of Matthew's gospel. Thus the Lord's Prayer "is the clearest and, in spite of its terseness, the most comprehensive summary of Jesus' proclamation which we possess" (Jeremias 1964:16). It reflects a gospel of Jesus "which is richer and more integrated than any written Gospel has ever expounded it. Here we have in a single concentration what is separated in our Gospels" (Lohmeyer 1965:298). That this is so, was recognised as early as the second century, when the North African theologian, Tertullian, referred to the Lord's Prayer as *brevarium totius evangelii*: a recapitulation or synopsis of the entire gospel. The Lord's Prayer provides us with a kaleidoscopic view of Jesus' entire message and ministry. It is, for the New Testament, as central as the Ten Commandments are for the Old. As a matter of fact, Calvin was probably right in recognising a striking parallel here: The first table of the Law deals with God and our duty towards him, as does the first part of the Lord's Prayer; the second part of each of these two documents refers to the neighbour and our duty towards him or her.

A second reason for my choosing the Lord's Prayer as the basis for our Bible Study sessions is to be found in the role this prayer played in the Early Church. Only Matthew's and Luke's gospels contain the Lord's Prayer and there are some small but important differences between the two versions. Perhaps the differences are to be ascribed to the fact that Matthew's gospel reflects the prayer as it was used in Jewish Christian communities whereas Luke's rendering reflects its use among Gentile Christians (Jeremias 1964:9-10).

Matthew's gospel came to be regarded, at a very early stage, as the gospel of the church (his is the only gospel that uses the word "church"). It came to serve as the basic pattern for the church's image and understanding of Jesus' life and work. The other gospels were,

in a sense, regarded as supplements to Matthew (Stendahl 1980:72).

Another early Christian document, written some twenty or thirty years later than Matthew, also contains the Lord's Prayer. This is the *Didachē*, or Teaching of the Apostles (ch. 8:2-3). The *Didachē* adds the interesting instruction: "Pray thus three times a day". Here we therefore have an indication that, at a very early stage, the Lord's Prayer had become the distinguishing prayer of Christians. It had been given a regular place in the life and worship of the early church. The first time new Christians prayed it - jointly with others - was at their first service of Holy Communion. In fact, the Lord's Prayer had its special place in the liturgy. As a constituent part of the Communion liturgy, it belonged to that portion of the service in which only those who were baptised were permitted to participate. "As one of the most holy treasures of the church, the Lord's Prayer, together with the Lord's Supper, was reserved for full members, and it was not disclosed to those who stood outside. It was a privilege to be allowed to pray it" (Jeremias 1964:4). The reverence in which it was held is still to be detected in the liturgical formulae used. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Greek and Russian) the priest says at the introduction of the Lord's Prayer, in the context of the mass, "And make us worthy, O Lord, that we joyously and without presumption may make bold to invoke Thee, the heavenly God, as Father, and to say: Our Father. . .". In similarly fashion, in the South African Prayer Book of the Anglican Church ("Liturgy '75"), the Lord's Prayer is prefaced with the words, "As Christ has taught us we are bold to say, `Our Father . . .". Here, too, the prayer is said immediately before the sacrament is administered, which once again underlines the ancient link with the Lord's Supper and the awe with which it was surrounded ("We are [or: make] bold to say . . .").¹

A third introductory remark: The uniqueness of the Lord's Prayer for Christians only becomes truly evident when we compare it with Jewish prayers of the time. It is, of course, true that the Lord's Prayer grew out of themes familiar from Jewish prayers.

And the different petitions, taken by themselves and on face value, can be prayed wholeheartedly by any faithful Jew. There are, in fact, striking parallels between the Lord's Prayer and the "Eighteen Benedictions" (a Jewish prayer that came into vogue during the first century of the Christian era and is prayed to this day by pious Jews.)

There are, however, at the same time profound differences. The "Eighteen Benedictions" - framed by praise, thanksgiving and blessing - contains in its main body twelve petitions. These concern, first and foremost, the life of the Jewish people in the world. Then follow prayers for the future, which once again is viewed in the context of the restoration of the political sovereignty of the people of Israel, the termination of foreign domination, the return to Israel of those in the dispersion, and the sending of a national messiah. The present is regarded as empty, as devoid of any real meaning; all hopes are focused on the future. Jesus' prayer, however, contains no reference whatsoever to any nationalistic hopes. Its horizon is limitless (Bornkamm 1956:126). Even more important: it does not at any point suggest that the present time is meaningless; on the contrary, the prayer's entire emphasis is on today and on the immediate future. This is a posture made possible by the closeness of the kingdom of God - a feature of Jesus' ministry to which we shall return. It should, however, already be evident that this awareness of the nearness of the kingdom would have a decisive influence on the disciples' lifestyle.

¹ In many Protestant churches the Lord's Prayer has virtually disappeared from the liturgy of the Sunday service, in some instances even from the celebration of Holy Communion. In view of the prayer's intimate relationship with the Lord's Supper in the early church, the fact that it has fallen into disuse in our churches today is surely an impoverishment.

So the Lord's Prayer becomes - in Matthew's gospel and in the early church - the disciples' "badge", their distinctive symbol (Stendahl 1980:74). It served the function of a kind of distinguishing creed that bestows unity and identity on the group. That small group of first disciples saying the prayer of Jesus already felt itself a part of the total messianic community about to be called into being by Jesus (Boff 1983:19). It became, to them, the symbol of their new lifestyle, as citizens of the kingdom. And we too today - as we pray this prayer and reflect on it - may by the grace of God in Christ be lifted up into God's agenda by the very Spirit in which Jesus taught us to pray.

The structure of the Lord's Prayer

As we now begin to look more closely at the precise words and phrases of the Lord's Prayer, it is perhaps important to point out that this prayer is not a new letter of the law which we have to repeat in exactly the same form it has been handed down to us. No, this is no magic prayer formula. It is to be an aid to prayer, a guide to be followed without being bound to this or that wording (Schweizer 1978:147). The early church already knew of at least two different forms in which it could be prayed: the one found in Matthew, the other in Luke. So it did not regard the wording of the prayer as an unchangeable formula.

Yet, having said that, I should immediately add that this prayer - again in contrast to contemporary Jewish prayers - is so extraordinary economical in the words it uses, that every word is to be weighed and studied carefully. Every word, every expression, is pregnant with meaning. In addition, the same structure of symmetry and concentric circles we found in the macrostructure of Matthew's gospel can also be detected micro-structurally in the Lord's Prayer.

	Our Father in heaven!
A	1. Your name be hallowed
B	2. Your kingdom come
C	3. Your will be done on earth as in heaven
D	4. Give us this day our daily bread
C ¹	5. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
B ¹	6. And lead us not into temptation
A ¹	7. But deliver us from evil!

In this structure, the first petition is linked to the last (the seventh), the second to the sixth, the third to the fifth, whereas the fourth petition constitutes the centre of the entire prayer. I shall, at a later stage, try to illustrate in which respects these petitions are mutually linked. For the time being, the structural analysis serves only one purpose: to underline the fact that each phrase in the prayer is a vital and necessary part of the total mosaic and should therefore receive due attention.

"Our Father in heaven"

In the entire Old Testament God is referred to as "Father" only on fourteen occasions (Jeremias 1964:18). According to the religions of the nations surrounding Israel it was often believed that human beings had their origin in a god. In other words, human beings were regarded as divine, as of the same nature as the gods, biologically related to them, as it were. The biblical authors were waging a constant war against this view. Perhaps that explains the Old Testament's reticence to refer to God as Father (Boff 1983:25). Nowhere in the Old Testament is God directly addressed as "Father". Still, there are those fourteen references to God as Father, and we have to ascertain what they signify. If we look closely, we'll discover that in each of them the emphasis is on the relationship between God and Israel. In fact, this relationship is so tender and intimate that, in a few instances, God emerges not only as father but also as mother (cf. Isa. 49:15; 66:13).²

Jesus, however, addressed God directly as "Father". He used the Aramaic word *abba*, which was the address of a small child to his father, in other words: a term of endearment. This was something completely new. Nowhere in the immense prayer literature of Late Judaism is this invocation of God as *abba* to be found. In our four gospels, however, we find this expression (or its Greek translation) 170 times in the mouth of Jesus (Boff 1983:28). The term *abba* indeed contains in a nutshell Jesus' message and his claim to have been sent from the Father (Jeremias 1964:20).

In Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, however, God is not simply addressed as *abba*, "Father", but as "our Father". This is the only place in the entire New Testament where this expression is found in an invocation or address.

Often, of course, God is referred to as "our Father", but nowhere else is he addressed in this manner. Not even in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer does this happen. There God is simply addressed as "Father" (*abba*).

The use of the invocation "our Father" in Matthew is so exceptional and out of the ordinary, that it must mean something. And, clearly, the meaning is that Jesus' Father is also to be regarded as the Father of the disciples, that he, as the elder brother, shares the same Father with them. Thus not only he himself but they, too, are privileged to address God directly as "Father". "He gives them a share in his sonship and empowers them, as his disciples, to speak with their heavenly Father in just such a familiar, trusting way as a child would with his father" (Jeremias 1964:20). Here, God is understood as a father who cares for his children, who has a heart that is sensitive to their problems, whose eye is always upon their sufferings, whose ear is open to their cries. The emphasis, throughout, is therefore not on any biological relationship with the godhead (as among the surrounding nations), but on the personal relationship with God as Father (cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6-7) (Boff 1983:30).

There is, however, still more to this invocation. The address, "our Father", also binds together those who pray. Nobody can become Jesus' brother or sister on his or her own, no-one can pray, "My father". We are all together involved in the messianic community of

² This is not the place to embark upon a discussion of the possibility of eliminating so-called sexist terminology from the Lord's Prayer (perhaps changing "our Father" to "our Mother"), nor to consider the implications of an increasingly fatherless society for our praying this prayer. So with regard to the first, we may perhaps just state that, in praying to God as Father, the Christian faith is to be defined not in sexual but in relational terms; as regards the second, it suffices to say that the breaking down or even the disappearance of the father figure in some segments of society in no way jeopardises the validity of the primal principle of paternity. See further Boff 1983:33-40.

the Father's kingdom that was beginning to emerge in Jesus' circle of disciples. The supplicants are dependent not only on the Father and the Elder Brother, but also on one another. This inter-dependence of the worshippers is a basic element in the Lord's Prayer and we shall return to it again and again, particularly in the last part.

In Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer there follows a further qualification: the disciples are taught to address their prayers to "our Father in heaven". This qualification, too, is absent in Luke's version. Perhaps the words "in heaven" are added here to remind us that the invocation of God as "our Father" may never be taken for granted; in other words, we are here warned against familiarity, which so easily breeds contempt. We know, after all, of the brazen demand of the prodigal son: "Father, give me my share of the estate!" Some Christians speak to God in a similar vein, but then they have forgotten that he is the holy One, that he is in heaven and we on earth. This spiritual myopia is also evident in the Pharisee of the parable, "who was confident of his own righteousness and looked down on everybody else", and who had the impudence to pray, "God, I thank you that I am not like all other people .. ." (Luke 18:9,11); it is equally in evidence in those who say, "Lord, Lord", and pride themselves in the miracles they have performed, without, however, having done the will of God (Matt. 7:21-23).

Where we remember, on the other hand, that our loving Father, who loves us and who is so close to us, is at the same time the holy God of heaven, we will refrain from that kind of familiarity and brazenness in our relationship with God.

The first three petitions

The invocation is followed immediately by seven petitions. The first three clearly belong together, as regards both structure and content. They are often referred to as the "you" petitions, in contradistinction from the last four, which are called the "we" petitions. The first three petitions are, in addition, considerably shorter than the others, and each of them ends with an emphatic "your" (Greek: *sou*).

What, then, is the central meaning of the first three petitions? I believe it reveals to us that God does not wish to be God without us. He calls us to his side. He summons us to make his purposes and aims the objects of our own desire ... (He lays) this request on our lips, which open so eagerly for other requests, drawing us first to his side and then when we are set there allowing us to identify our desires with his

It is essential that these three requests be put first. Nor are they a mere introduction to be recited before we really come to the point. It is they which make human petition genuine prayer, the prayer of the Christian community" (Barth 1969:104). Thus these three petitions express, in a very special way, the lifestyle of the Christian.

But why do we have to ask that God's name be hallowed, his will be done and his kingdom come? Clearly because the desired conditions are not really in evidence now: God's name is not hallowed, his kingdom not established, his will not done. So these petitions "are a cry out of the depth of distress. Out of a world which is enslaved under the rule of evil ... Jesus' disciples ... lift their eyes to the Father and cry out for the revelation of God's glory". These petitions "strike the same note as the prayer of the early church, *Maranatha* (1 Cor. 16:22), 'Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20). They seek the hour in which God's profaned and misused name will be glorified and his reign revealed . . ." (Jeremias 1964:22).

On the surface the first three petitions appear to be virtually the same as those in the *Qaddish*, the ancient Aramaic prayer which formed the conclusion of the service in the synagogue and with which Jesus was no doubt familiar from childhood. The wording of the two prayers is, indeed, strikingly similar. Yet there is a profound difference. "In the *Qaddish* the prayer is by a congregation which stands in the darkness of the present age and asks for the consummation. In the Lord's Prayer, though similar words are used, a congregation is praying which knows that the turning point has already come, because God has already begun his saving work. This congregation now makes supplication for full revelation of what has already been granted" (Jeremias 1964:22-3).

This has a tremendous significance for the disciples' lifestyle. They live in a new era, fundamentally different from that in which the Jewish communities of the time perceived themselves to be. For the Jews of the first century all - to a greater or lesser extent - regarded the present period in which they lived as empty and dismal. The past was glorified out of all proportion, but the present was seen as the period of the dominion of evil and oppression. Everything was projected to the future when things would once again be as they had been in the time of David.

Jesus, however, evaluated the present completely differently from his Jewish contemporaries. In his first sermon in Nazareth he read a prophecy from Isaiah about the Spirit of the Lord being upon the promised Messiah, about his being anointed to bring good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release to the oppressed, and the proclamation of the year of Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19). Then, as the

eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, he began his sermon, "Today, as you listen, this text has come true" (4:21).

In other words, the appearance of Jesus on the scene has changed everything fundamentally. Nothing could ever be the same again, for the kingdom of God has come. Whereas the Baptist called people to repentance because the kingdom was at hand, Jesus could say that the kingdom had already come upon the people (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). It was no longer necessary, Jesus said, to go and look for the kingdom or to shout "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!", for the kingdom was already in their very midst (Luke 17:21).³ On another occasion Jesus said to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Luke 10:23-4)

All this happened and was said while Jesus was still on earth. For his disciples, Jesus' words and deeds (particularly his miracles) underscored the reality of the fundamental newness of the time they lived in. And yet they had difficulty in really understanding the radicalness of the change. They only began to understand it at a later stage, on the basis of two events: Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. These two events were regarded as "first fruits" of the new age (Rom. 8 and 1 Cor. 15) and as tangible evidence of the fact that the new age had invaded the old. Of course, they believed that the kingdom would come in its fullness only at Christ's return but the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit in the church were to them signs that it made sense to begin living according to the standards of the new age. So Paul could write to the Corinthians, "If anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun" (2 Cor. 5:17 New English Bible).⁴

Those who recognised the decisive turning point in history, the new age, became members of the Jesus community. Once again, they did not yet have the kingdom in its fullness, but still, the difference between them and the others was crucial. The disciples, too, still lived in the unredeemed world, but they walked with their heads held high; they knew the kingdom was coming, because it had already come. So they lived in the creative tension between the "already" and the "not yet" - between what had already become a reality and what was yet to come. They hoped for the full manifestation of the kingdom, not because they despaired about the present time, but precisely because they had already

³ Most translations render Luke 17:21 as follows: ". . . for the kingdom of God is within you". This can hardly be regarded as correct, particularly in view of the fact that Jesus is here addressing the Pharisees and it is unthinkable that he would have said that they had the kingdom of God within them. In addition it has to be pointed out that, according to the gospels, people could be in the kingdom of God, not, however, the kingdom in people. The sentence has therefore to be rendered: "... for the kingdom of God is among you" (as the New English Bible has it), or: "... is in your very midst". This is fully in harmony with the rules of Greek grammar. In this translation, of course, the kingdom refers to the person and presence of Jesus, whom the Pharisees fail to recognise.

⁴ Once again the New English Bible captures the meaning of the original far better than most other translations, which interprets this text as though it is referring only to what happens to the individual. The Living Bible is a prime example of this tendency. It translates: "when someone becomes a Christian he comes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!" Paul is, however, not just thinking in individual categories. The coming of Christ has cosmic significance (see Eph. 1:19-23); it has inaugurated a fundamental change in the very fabric of the universe. Indeed, the old order has passed, and a new order has come.

tasted the first fruits of the new age. Christian hope is both possession and yearning. It is hope-in-the-process-of-fulfilment.

So, if the disciples prayed for the sanctification of God's name and the coming of his kingdom, they did not do this - as the other Jews tended to do - on the basis of a feeling of despair about the drab present; no, for them these petitions were an expression of absolute certainty that God would complete what he had already begun, and so they prayed with imperturbable trust.

All this ought to have profound significance for the Jesus community of today also, and for its lifestyle. We are not living in a world which has been surrendered to the Evil One, but in a world in which God has already revealed the beginning of the new era. We, too, are called to transform this world into the likeness of God's kingdom, because we are already enjoying its first fruits. We can, with confidence, move into society, into the world around us, claim all of it in the name of Christ, and make a stand against evil in all its forms. The way in which we approach the realities around us, indeed, our entire lifestyle, will reveal whether or not we truly believe that the decisive victory has already been won.

"Your name be hallowed"

We may now take a closer look at each of the first three petitions. We have already pointed out that they are intimately linked to each other, that they are, in a way, the same prayer expressed in three different ways. The last of these petitions - "Your will be done" - is followed by the words, "on earth as it is in heaven". Probably this addition is to be presupposed in each of the first three petitions:

Your name be hallowed, on earth as in heaven!
Your kingdom come, on earth as in heaven!
Your will be done, on earth as in heaven!

If this interpretation is correct, then the meaning is that, "in heaven", God's name is already hallowed, his kingdom already inaugurated, his will already done. What is already accomplished "in heaven", should now also come true on earth: this is the essence of the disciples' prayer. However, even if these three petitions are to be taken together, it is still necessary to look more closely at each of them.

The first petition, then, is "*Your name be hallowed*". The disciples who prayed these words, knew that God's *name* stands for God's *person*, or for God himself. They also knew of the commandment not to "take God's name in vain", that is, not to misuse or profane it (Ex. 20:7). They were aware of the prophets' lamentations about the profanation or desecration of God's name by the people of Israel: Israel profaned God's name by forcing people who had been freed to become their slaves once more (Jer. 34:16), by shedding blood and worshipping idols (Ezek. 36:20-23: there are no less than five references here to the profanation of God's name by Israel), and by trampling on the heads of the poor and denying justice to the oppressed (Amos 2:7).⁵

What is striking about these texts is that none of them refers to acts of pagans, they all refer to what God's people were doing. They all say that Israel was desecrating the name of God before the eyes of pagan nations particularly because of what they, God's covenant people, were doing to their fellow human beings. The obverse - at least to some extent - would then be: God's name is hallowed, is kept holy, when we Christians treat other people justly. It is high time Christians rediscover this social perspective on holiness. "For centuries, Christians did not consider this a central concern. Holiness was concentrated on the individual person, on complete mastery of one's passions, on purity of heart, on elevation of the spirit, on charity to one's neighbour, and on reverence to the ecclesiastical system (Boff 1983:49).

These individual dimensions of holiness certainly have their legitimate place, but the spectrum of holiness is wider than that. God's name is offended and profaned before non-believers not only by our private misconduct but also by our social actions. We constantly have to ask ourselves: What image of God do we project through our deeds and conduct? Is his name hallowed before non-believers through what we do and are? Or is it profaned?

These were the crucial questions for the first followers of Jesus. To sanctify God's name was, in most instances, no easy matter. It meant, after all, witnessing to God's name; and such witness was often given at the risk of one's life. To witness to God was to glorify him - in case of necessity even to the shedding of blood. "The sanctification of the name

⁵ It is significant that in the Old Testament, contrary to what many Christians today believe, the profanation of the name of God does not refer to using the name of God as a swearword.

became almost synonymous with martyrdom" (A Monk of the Eastern Church, quoted in Crosby 1977:52). Thus the first Christians uttered this prayer in the face of the reality of persecution and in the fervent hope that the terror would soon end and God's name be hallowed "on earth as in heaven".

This anticipation of eschatological fulfillment, however, increasingly passed into the background as time went by. In *Didachē* 10:2 (written towards the end of the first, or at the beginning of the second, century) we read, "We thank you, Holy Father, for your holy name which you have caused to lodge in our hearts". Here we already have an allusion to what was to become the popular understanding in a later period: that God's name is hallowed when we "keep it in our hearts". To sanctify his name was gradually becoming a synonym for private devotion. In 1 Clement 59:2-3 (a letter which dates from roughly the same period as the *Didachē*), the holiness of God's name is seen almost exclusively in the context of conversion to the Christian faith and as an antonym for "ignorance". Clement's readers are here urged to ask, "with instancy of prayer ... that the Creator of the universe may guard intact unto the end the number ... of his elect ... through ... Jesus Christ, through whom he called us from darkness to light, from ignorance to the full knowledge of the glory of his name" (cf. Schweizer 1978:151). These references to the sanctification and glorification of God's name in the *Didachē* and 1 Clement indeed have their legitimacy, yet at the same time they miss much of the primordial force of the original meaning. We today are urgently in need of recapturing something of the original meaning of this petition as it was understood and prayed in the first community around Jesus of Nazareth: "Father, may your name be hallowed by us, in that we confess it publicly even at the risk of persecution and in that we treat other people in such a way that they see our good deeds and praise you, our Father, in heaven" (cf. Matt. 5:16).

"Your Kingdom come"

We encounter the expression, "the kingdom of God", for the first time in late Old Testament writings (Lohmeyer 1965:97). The idea, however, is an ancient one, and can be traced back at least to the time of the Davidic empire. It signifies, first of all, God's royal rule over Israel, but increasingly also his reign over all the nations, indeed, over all of creation.

At one point in the Old Testament era there was the belief that the royal rule of God would become manifest in the lordship of the kings of Israel (2 Sam. 7:12-16). "The king would bring justice to the poor, restore the rights of widows, and defend the orphan ..." (Boff 1983:56). Due to the corruption of power this never happened. So, at another stage, it was thought that God would reconcile and rule the world from the temple, with its worship, priestly orders and sacrifices (cf. Ezek. 40-43). But the trappings of the temple liturgy was only too often devoid of any genuine expression of repentance and justice (cf. Am. 5:21-24; Isa. 1:17).

Still others - particularly during periods of foreign domination and oppression - preached that the kingdom of God was an entirely future entity and would reveal itself in a total reversal of the present order. The tables would be turned completely; Israel would be on top and all its enemies at the bottom. Here, the kingdom of God meant Israel's restored kingdom, Israel ruling over all the others, slaves becoming masters and masters slaves, the oppressed becoming the oppressor and vice versa (Boff 1983:56-7).

This third view was the dominant one during Jesus' earthly ministry. His own disciples interpreted God's kingdom in similar terms. Even after his resurrection they could still ask him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus, however, rejected this interpretation (Acts 1:7). He refused to be hailed as a political leader (John 6:15), or to make himself one by the use of force (Matt. 26:53). One of the three temptations to which the devil subjected Jesus was precisely this: that he would receive all the kingdoms of the earth and their splendor if he were prepared to bow down and worship Satan (Matt. 4:8-9).

But Jesus consistently rejected these and similar efforts at establishing a political kingdom (Crosby 1977:164-5). His understanding of God's kingdom was akin to that of the prophets. Yet whereas the idea of the kingdom was - on the whole - peripheral to the prophets' preaching, it was in the very center of Jesus' proclamation. According to the witness of both Mark and Matthew he began his public ministry with an announcement about the nearness of the kingdom, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). We have already indicated that the structural center of Matthew's gospel is the sermon in chapter 13, a chapter that contains no less than six parables about the kingdom of God. This once again underlines the importance of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry. He announced a new and special breaking-in of the royal rule of God. The emphasis, throughout, is on the nearness of the kingdom; as a matter of fact, it has already arrived in Jesus' person and ministry. "Thus the Gospels see the miracles of Jesus as a means of redeeming the creation from the destructive forces of illness, demonic possession, and even death. The miracles are not just illustration stories about faith, they are acts of redeeming the creation, pushing back the frontiers of Satan ... In praying for the coming of that kingdom we (therefore) pray for a redeemed, a healed, a mended creation" (Stendahl 1980:76). The parables explicate this further; the kingdom is likened to a hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44), a precious pearl (Matt. 13:45), a seed that grows (Matt. 13:31), a yeast that transforms everything (Matt. 13:33). Frequently the kingdom is likened to a banquet, to which everybody is invited, particularly

those who are marginal to society (Matt. 22:1-14), and, very explicitly, those who do not belong to the traditional people of the covenant, the Jews (Matt. 8:11).

We said that Jesus rejected the suggestion of a political kingdom. And yet his ministry brought him into conflict with the powers that be. When Pilate tried to set him free, the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12; cf. Luke 23:2). Was this a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus' claims and ministry? Perhaps not. The book of Revelation, in particular, portrays the early church as being in opposition to the emperor and his claims. Emperor Domitian, for instance, institutionalised the close link between religion and politics by applying to himself the title *dominus et deus noster*: "Our lord and god." Such claims the followers of Jesus could not but resist, even at the risk of death. They viewed themselves as residing in Babylon, but they also believed that Babylon was, in reality, already fallen (Rev. 18:2) and that another kingdom was dawning. So they transferred to God and Christ words that formed the ideological cement holding the empire together, words like "victory", "Lord of earth", "invincible", "glory", and "power" (Crosby 1977:60-1).

In this kind of context it was inevitable that a petition like "Your kingdom come" would develop political undertones, that it was, in effect, a subversive prayer (Crosby 1977:59). It expressed a discontent with the way things were, a fervent desire to see things change. The powers that be, on the other hand, always have a stake in the status quo, so they try to maintain it. This happened in the first century also. Both Roman and Jewish authorities, both political and religious forces did everything in their power to prevent this upstart from Galilee and his band of simple fisherfolk from upsetting the well-ordered proprieties of society. For this is exactly what they were doing: just look at the type of people to whom the kingdom of God is promised! Not the rich and the powerful, as one would have expected, but: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God!" (Luke 6:20; Matt. 5:3 has "the poor in spirit"). "Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the cause of justice, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs!" (Matt. 5:3,10).

The kingdom, then, does not come when the privileged become more privileged, when the powers that be become more powerful. No, it comes when the unprivileged also become privileged, when the weak are blessed. The criterion that signals the arrival of the kingdom is when the poor receive the good news, when those who suffer for the sake of justice see justice being implemented. "When persons live as they should in the world, the kingdom of God is anticipated, hastened, and made concrete within history" (Boff 1983:62). As a matter of fact, "kingdom" and "justice" in a sense condition each other; if we set our minds on the one, we also set our minds on the other, and that makes every other concern less important: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all the other things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33).

The obverse, of course, is equally true: if we disregard justice, we bypass the kingdom as well. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father . . ." (Matt. 7:21). "Jesus cannot know those who claim membership in his kingdom if they do not incorporate now on earth, in their prayer and ministry, the effort to realize the signs of the kingdom ... " (Crosby 1977:67). In the Old Testament it was the covenant between Israel and her God that represented a commitment to create the conditions of the kingdom. The fundamental rite of the covenant was the Passover sacrifice and meal, and since the first Passover, in Egypt, was celebrated at the moment of passing over from oppression to freedom, all subsequent Passover festivals carried the same notion (Crosby 1977:119).

The petition "Your kingdom come" is, of course, also a prayer for the final and complete manifestation of God's kingdom. As we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are therefore reminded that the ultimate and glorious kingdom is still to come. But as we pray, we also commit ourselves to establish, here and now, approximations and anticipations of the kingdom. Once again: the kingdom will come, since it has already come. It is both bestowal and assignment, gift and conquest, present and future, celebration and promise (Boff 1983:16). We therefore have the firm assurance that its coming cannot be thwarted. "Even rejection, the cross and sin are not insuperable obstacles to God. Even the enemies of the kingdom are at the service of the kingdom ..." (Boff 1983:60). Thus, in praying this prayer, we are lifted up into God's agenda, we ourselves become committed to working for the coming of the kingdom.

"Your will be done"

References to God's will are significantly more common in Matthew than in the other two synoptic gospels. It is, in fact, a central concern of Matthew (Grundmann 1968:201). It is also striking that Luke omits this petition from his rendering of the Lord's Prayer.

The third petition forcefully reminds us of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46). Indeed, the words used in Greek are exactly the same. There are also other parallels between these two prayers. "Thus the Lord's Prayer is not only the prayer that Christ gave us. It is hallowed, filled with meaning from his own prayer. We pray with him and he with us ... It is (moreover) perhaps significant that the disciples sleep through this momentous struggle of Jesus Christ. It is as if Matthew wanted to say: When you pray 'Your will be done' you should not think that God depends only on you, for you were asleep when the petition 'Your will be done' was prayed in the most decisive manner. And yet we are invited to pray as he prayed . . ." (Stendahl 1980:77).

Precisely the profound parallel between this petition in the Lord's Prayer and our Lord's agony in Gethsemane should, in addition, remind us that it is integral to our Christian lifestyle to look for God's will rather than our own, even if there follows - perhaps even literally - a sacrifice of our own will. Let me add that praying this prayer has nothing to do with fatalism (Schweizer 1978:152). There are, of course, Christians who interpret this petition in fatalistic terms: "O God, I have given up hope. There does not seem anything else I can do about this problem. So, Lord, let your will be done!" But this is not a Christian attitude. We can only pray this prayer if we are prepared to endorse God's will and make it our own - as Jesus did in Gethsemane.

Like the other petitions in the Lord's Prayer, this petition also reflects a double tension: between heaven and earth, and between future and present. God's will is already being done in heaven; the supplication of the disciples is that it be done on earth also, as in heaven. God's will be done fully and universally in future, at the consummation of the kingdom; the disciples hope and pray that it will be done in this age also, as in the age to come. They wait for that day with patient impatience and quiet restlessness.

On earth and in this age, then, God's will is still opposed by all kinds of forces. Humankind is still rebelling against God's will. This is the harsh reality of which those who pray the Lord's Prayer are aware. At the same time this petition becomes the challenge to them that they at least should do God's will even if the rest of humanity does not. They know about the urgency of this petition: all the passages in Matthew that refer to the Father's will (except the one stating that it is not his will that any of "these little ones" should perish - Matt. 18:14) deal with God's will as something that is to be done *now* (Matt. 7:21; 12:50; 21:31; 26:42 - cf. Grundy 1982:106).

If we ask more specifically *what* God's will is, the answer of Matthew's gospel is that we should do everything Jesus has commanded us. In the Great Commission at the close of Matthew's gospel, Jesus exhorts his apostles to make disciples of all nations. One of the chief ways of doing this, he says, is "to teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). This may sound very legalistic to us. We should, however, keep in mind that, throughout Matthew's gospel, a fierce polemic against Pharisaism is reflected. One can gather this particularly from the passages in Matthew where the concept *justice* is being used. This term is used more frequently in Matthew than in any other gospel (six times, compared to once in Luke and twice in John; Mark does not use it), and the whole

point Jesus is making - according to Matthew - is, first, that the Law demands justice, and, secondly, that the justice of his disciples should *surpass* that of the Pharisees.

As a matter of fact, the "way of Jesus" is referred to, in a nutshell, as "the way of justice" (Matt. 21:32). This way manifests itself in the twofold commandment, "Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself", which may truly be called a summary of the entire Christian message. Matthew's gospel thus reveals to us a whole chain of synonyms: God's will is to love God and neighbor, is to practice justice, is to be disciples of Jesus, is to keep everything he has commanded us. Whereas the first two petitions express mainly (though not exclusively) what God is doing: hallowing his name, causing his kingdom to come, the third petition therefore more explicitly accentuates what Jesus' disciples have to do. God's will is carried out by the deeds and words of his people.

The last four petitions

The Lord's Prayer starts - at least in English - with the word "our". Then all references to the first person plural vanish from the prayer: the first three petitions deal exclusively with God's concerns: his name, his kingdom, his will. Then all of a sudden the scene changes. In the rest of the prayer all references are to "us", "we", "our". No less than eight such references appear here. So this is clearly a turning point in the Lord's Prayer. The first part is directed toward God. The tone is solemn and the phrases are cadenced. There is no elaboration of any sort. In the second part our gaze is turned toward humankind and its needs. The phrases are longer and their tone conveys the affliction that is so much a part of human life. In the first part, God's concerns are dealt with; in the second part, human concerns. Yet there is no unresolved tension, no competition between the vertical and the horizontal, between the concerns of God and those of humankind. Both meet under the rainbow of prayer (Boff 1983:74).

Let us turn, for a moment, to the "we" of the second part of the Lord's Prayer. If we compare this prayer with contemporary Jewish prayers such as the Eighteen Benedictions or the *Qaddish*, we notice that there, too, the first person plural is used frequently. The "we" or "us" of those prayers is very clearly circumscribed: it refers to the people of Israel, to those who expect the Jewish messiah, to those who live in the land promised to Abraham, or the Jews in the dispersion. The "we" of the Lord's Prayer, however, refers to those who are with Jesus of Nazareth, who follow him as his disciples. But unlike those who pray the Jewish prayers, their circle is not exclusive. The Lord's Prayer "disregards all divisions and distinctions, all bonds and conditions which have their basis in time and space ... ; it elevates 'us' above the limits of any land and people . . .". "So 'we' are the nucleus of that community which represents God's eternal world" (Lohmeyer 1965:285, 290). There are thus no boundaries or divisions between those who pray the Lord's Prayer: they are simply bound together as "us" "we" "our".

The petitions that follow cover, in principle, all our human needs, but in such a way that none of us can ask for the provision of our needs in isolation from others. No one can pray: "Give me today my daily bread, and forgive me my debts . . ." A genuine relationship with God calls for maintaining a relationship with others. A person not only lives, he or she "lives-with". To speak of "person" is to speak of relationships, ties, alliances, mutual responsibilities (Boff 1983:87). There is an African proverb that gives expression to this in a profound way: *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*: A human being is a human being through (other) human beings.

"Give us today our daily bread"

The fourth petition forms the heart and center of the Lord's Prayer (Lohmeyer 1965: 159, 274; Grundmann 1968:205). The petition is the threshold leading from the kingdom of the longed-for consummation to the realm of present human need (Lohmeyer 1965:157). God wants us to be concerned not only with his affairs: his name, his kingdom, his will, but also with human affairs and needs.

Jesus puts the petition for bread first, even before the prayer for forgiveness of sins. This should not surprise us: a person with an empty stomach does not philosophise about guilt and innocence. Neither should we find it strange that Jesus' first temptation in the desert also concerned the matter of bread. The tempter said to him after he had been going without food for forty days, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3). So the devil does not begin with theological speculations about the Fall or original sin or predestination, but with a very tangible reality: Jesus feeling hungry (Baarslag: 111,123).

What does "bread" in this petition stand for? It is a symbol of all human food that we cannot do without (cf. Lev. 26:5; Ps. 146:7; Prov. 30:8; Eccles. 9:7). So, it simply stands for basic or essential food here, but normally, in the Bible, this is related also to water (Deut. 9:9), clothing (Deut. 10:18) oils (Ps. 104:15) and wine (Eccl. 9:7; Ps. 104:15) (Boff 1983:75,83). Luther was therefore, on the whole, right when he paraphrased the petition for bread as including "everything necessary for the preservation of this life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government and peace". The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 125, explicates our petition in similar fashion, namely that it supplicates God "to provide for all our bodily need, that we may thereby acknowledge you to be the only fountain of all good, and that without your blessing neither our care and labour nor your gifts can profit us . . ." In our modern world this prayer may therefore give expression to a great variety of needs: the privilege of employment, of receiving a fair wage, of having political rights, of receiving medical help, of having the liberty to confess one's faith.

At a very early stage, however, the Christian church began to *spiritualise* the petition for bread. This was particularly a result of the influence of Greek patterns of thinking. Some preachers interpreted the "bread" in our petition as referring to the Word of God as the "bread of life". Others took it to be a reference to the bread with which we are nourished in Holy Communion.

I believe that this spiritualising interpretation is wrong, if it suggests that the prayer for bread is to be understood only in spiritual terms. Primarily "bread" refers without any doubt to our bodily needs, particularly to the food we need for sustenance. It would, however, indeed be possible to add to this primary interpretation a secondary one: that bread is also to be understood spiritually, particularly as the bread of the Lord's Supper. But we can only accept the secondary interpretation if we, at the same time, uphold the first. In this petition ordinary bread is the original, spiritual bread the copy; it would be totally wrong to proclaim the copy to be the original. Perhaps, however, the material and the spiritual are not all as far apart as we may be inclined to think. "The bread which (Jesus) broke for his disciples at the Last Supper was earthly bread, and yet it was more: his body given for many in death ... Every meal his disciples had with him was a usual eating and drinking, and yet it was more: a meal of salvation, a messianic meal" (Jeremias 1964:26). For Jesus, earthly bread and the bread of life were not divorced from or opposed to each other. The same was true of the New Testament church: their daily fellowship meals (the agape) were the

customary meals for sustenance and yet at the same time the "Lord's Supper". It provided them with both bodily and spiritual nutrition (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-33). The daily bread was a token of the messianic banquet and the messianic banquet a reminder of the sanctity of the daily bread. Celebrating the Lord's Supper and saying grace at meals are distinct from but also in continuity with each other (Stendahl 1980:78).⁶

It is at this point that there is an intimate relationship between the material bread we pray for and the celebration of the Lord's Supper on the one hand, and working for justice and equity on the other. The apostle Paul censures the rich Christians of Corinth for eating their fill while fellow-Christians do not have enough to eat, and he does this within the context of the Lord's Supper. He refers to this kind of conduct as a "showing contempt for the church of God" (1 Cor. 11:22). We cannot refuse people access to such basic resources as food and still think that we ourselves can have access to the body and blood of Christ (Crosby 1977:127).⁶

This is strong language, but not stronger than the language of the Old Testament prophets. The prophet Isaiah rebukes the people of Israel for being very faithful in the keeping of their religious duties – offering sacrifices and prayers, fasting, burning incense, regularly attending the temple ceremonies - yet at the same time neglecting their duties towards their fellow human beings: protecting and helping the poor, the fatherless and the widows. Because of this neglect, God refuses to accept their religious worship: their offerings are meaningless, their incense detestable, their festivals a burden to God, their prayers clogging his ears (cf. Isa. 1:10-23). Once again, therefore, we find here an urgent plea for establishing an intimate relationship between our worship to God (e.g. in celebrating the Lord's Supper) and justice towards people. To participate in the Lord's Supper without being concerned about those who do not have access to the bare necessities of life, is tantamount to not worshipping the living God at all. We cannot eat the bread that is broken without accepting responsibility to do something about the brokenness of the world around us (Crosby 1977:130).

The intimate connection between the messianic banquet and the daily bread, between the Lord's Supper and people's material needs, between religion and justice, is also central to Jesus' great farewell speech, Matt. 25:31-46. "The most holy act of all - to serve Jesus Christ - consists of feeding the hungry and caring for those who suffer and are persecuted . . . Thus the point of this parable is not to satisfy our self-centered curiosity about the last judgment ... Rather it is Jesus assuring the beleaguered and persecuted that they are so precious in his eyes that the whole world will be judged by how they, the oppressed, have been treated. So precious, so decisive, so `religious', so `theological' is the food for the hungry" (Stendahl 1980:78).

In attempting to refute this interpretation of the petition for bread, some people might call our attention back to the first temptation of Jesus in the desert. Jesus' reply to the tempter was, "Scripture says, `A person does not live on bread alone; he lives on every word that God utters'" (Matt. 4:4). Does this not mean, these people say, that our material needs are not as important as we might think? That God's word is our "bread"?

⁶ The Gospel of John is the only one that does not report the institution of the Lord's Supper as part of the passion history. This is a significant and indeed inexplicable omission, until we turn to John 6, the story of the feeding of the five thousand, and to the discourse that follows there, on Jesus as the bread of life. The bread that the people was given to eat, alludes to the "eating" of the body of Christ. This is, of course, sacramental language, more specifically: eucharistic language. After this, John deemed it unnecessary to report on the "official" institution of the Lord's Supper: he had already linked it intimately to the ordinary eating of people who are hungry.

My reply would be, "No!" Jesus indeed said, "Human beings do not live by bread alone", but he never said that to hungry people. Then he fed. What is more, the interpretation of Jesus' reply to the tempter that we have just referred to, misses the whole point of that passage. It was not a temptation to value the material more highly than the spiritual, but a temptation to abuse Jesus' strength, his gifts, his relation to the Father. It was a temptation to bypass the cross, to use worldly means and methods, to make Jesus conform to the pattern of this world (cf. Rom. 12:2) (Stendahl 1980:79-80).

The bread we pray for, is qualified and elucidated in three ways: it is referred to as our bread; we ask God to give it to us today; and it is called our daily bread. This last qualification ("daily") has caused students of the Bible an uncommon degree of trouble. The point is that the Greek word used here (epiousios) is recorded nowhere else in the Greek language. It is only found in the Lord's Prayer, here in Matthew, and also in Luke. So we have to try to establish its meaning with the aid of etymology and from the context. Then three interpretations seem possible: "necessary" bread, "today's" bread, and bread "for the coming day" (cf. Lohmeyer 1965: 141-6; Schweizer 1978: 155-6). The last of these is the most likely. Prayed in the morning, it would then refer to the day that has just begun; prayed in the evening it would have the next day in mind. "This is the language ... of a poor man who in the morning does not know how he will nourish himself and his family beyond the day ... (As such, it) expresses not only the external need of the poor, but also the inner freedom of those who pray, who have cast their cares ... trustfully on God's goodness" (Lohmeyer 1965:151). Prayed in the evening, it means: "Grant that we may lie down to sleep, not with a sense of abundance or surety against hard times, but simply without despair, knowing that the coming day has been provided for" (Schweizer 1978:154).

It is therefore clear that the Lord's Prayer was originally prayed by and in the context of people who, on the whole, had little material resources. They were the ones taught by Jesus "not to be anxious about tomorrow" (Matt. 6:34) and not to worry too much about what to eat and what to wear (Matt. 6:25). They were hoping and praying only for the "bread" that was necessary for existence, for survival.⁷

It is perhaps not easy to establish what all this means for us today and our lifestyle. We too are anxious people; as a matter of fact, we are often extremely anxious and filled with worries, but not, in the very literal sense, about whether we shall have anything to eat or to wear tomorrow.⁸ Perhaps, therefore, this prayer means at least two things for us: first, that we cannot simply take for granted the luxuries we enjoy as though we have a right to them, and secondly, that our affluence puts us in a position of responsibility towards the less privileged. What that responsibility comprises in detail is something we have to work out for ourselves. This may take many forms: paying better wages to those in our employ, giving more generously to people in need, working for justice in society at large, etc. It means that we shall increasingly find it impossible to do what the rich man in the parable

⁷ After Judea and Galilee had become Roman provinces (in 63 B.C.), a system of large estates spread gradually throughout the country, at the expense of the peasants who had held the land in common. These peasants gradually became the "day labourers" we often meet in the gospel parables, people who were working on the estates and who were utterly dependent, for the retaining of their jobs, on the moods of the estate overseers. The standard wage was a silver denarius a day, which was barely enough to keep a small family at a subsistence level. If such a labourer did not find work for several days, he was thrown into a state of utter wretchedness. It was in this kind of context that the Lord's Prayer was first prayed.

⁸ Our concern, frequently, is not whether we shall have anything to eat and to wear tomorrow, but, rather, what we should eat and wear!

did; he enjoyed his banquets in full sight of the misery of Lazarus, apparently untouched by it.

Basil the Great, a fourth century theologian and bishop, wrote the following: "The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked. The money that depreciates in your treasury belongs to the poor!" (Quoted by Boff 1983:84). I must admit that I find these words, written sixteen centuries ago, not only strangely contemporary, but also uncomfortable and disquieting. I become even more uneasy if I ask myself why it is that some people have so much and others so little. Is it perhaps true that some have exploited the others, one way or another? But "when the bread that we eat is the result of exploitation, it is not a bread blessed by God. It may supply the chemical needs of nutrition but fail to nourish human life, which is human only when lived within the framework of justice and fraternity. Unjust bread is not really our bread; it is stolen; it belongs to someone else" (Boff 1983:77-8). So, perhaps, one way of paraphrasing this petition is to do it in the words of a Latin American prayer, "O God, to those who have hunger, give bread; and to us who have bread give the hunger for justice" (quoted by Stendahl 1980:78).

"And forgive us our debts ..."

The petition for bread, I pointed out earlier on, is further elucidated in Matt. 6:19-34 (captions in the New International Version: "Treasures in heaven", and "Do not worry"). The fifth petition is echoed in the next passage, 7:1-6 (caption: "Judging others"). This petition is linked to the fourth by a simple "and". The same poverty and need which there oppress a person's body here plague his heart, his relationships. Just as, materially, he cannot live without the bread that God gives him today, so too he cannot, spiritually and socially, live without forgiveness. The same grace that restores his body uplifts his heart (Lohmeyer 1965:178).

Forgiveness, in one form or another, is a key idea in virtually all religions of the world. It was also deeply imbedded in the Old Testament, and in the Judaism of Jesus' time (cf. the sixth petition of the Eighteen Benedictions). In a very special sense, however, the age of the Messiah was expected to be an age of forgiveness. Forgiveness was viewed as the one great gift of this age (Jeremias 1964:27).

In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, forgiveness was the point of his entire ministry. There were three categories of sinners in Jesus' time: (1) Jews, who could always count on God's mercy and forgiveness; (2) Gentiles, who could come to Israel's God but without much hope of being heard and forgiven; (3) Jews who had become like Gentiles: prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors - they were lost and had no claim on God's mercy. Precisely those in the last two categories were now the ones who were hearing the good news of forgiveness. This is portrayed in a variety of ways, e.g. by means of Jesus' miracles and, particularly, through his parables of mercy: those of the prodigal son, of the lost sheep, of the lost coin, of the workers in the vineyard, of the Pharisee and the tax collector, and several others. Most of these parables were so palpably different from anything in contemporary Judaism that none of Jesus' listeners could possibly have missed their meaning (cf. Jeremias 1963:124-46). This is, after all, why Jesus incurred derision as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). He called a tax collector to be one of his disciples (Matt. 9:9), he promised the kingdom of God to pagans (Matt. 8:11-12), and he restored a leper to the community (Matt. 8:4) (Schweizer 1978:155).

The gospel is understood as good news only if we grasp this new idea introduced by Jesus: God is primarily the God of sinners, and the Messiah is he who liberates us from our debts and relieves us of the burden of our consciences (Boff 1983:92-3). Those who pray this prayer have realised that they cannot pay their debts. They turn to God and tell him about their embarrassing predicament. A striking feature of the gospels is, however, that there were many who did not realise that they were guilty, in particular the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. They regarded themselves as righteous and without any need for conversion, and therefore also with no real need for forgiveness. This was the illusion of the Pharisee in the parable of Luke 18:9-14. He honestly believed that he had no reason for requesting God's forgiveness. It is for this reason that the principal parables of Jesus dealing with forgiveness and mercy are directed not to tax collectors, prostitutes and similar marginal groups, but to those who assumed that they were spiritually healthy and therefore thought that they were not in need of a "doctor" (cf. Mark 2:17). They were the pious ones who constantly criticised Jesus for the lavishness of the mercy of God he proclaimed.

What is it that we ask God to forgive? It is at this point that the greatest variety appears in the various translations of the Lord's Prayer. In the different versions of the Bible in English the Greek word *opheilēmata* is translated as "debts" or "wrongs" or "trespasses" or "sins".

The 1933 Afrikaans Bible has "skulde", the 1983 translation "oortredinge". Thus there appears to be a considerable degree of confusion here.

We shall return to this translation problem when we look at the second part of this petition ("As we forgive those . . ."). For the time being all that needs to be said is that the Greek word primarily means monetary debts. It is an expression drawn from the business world. From this primary meaning a secondary one developed: whatever a person is or says or does he or she is and says and does as a loan from God. "Debts" do not refer to the individual details of a person's life, but to a person in his or her totality before God. It includes the notion of duty. Even the most devout person falls short in this respect. Far more often, however, he does not even attempt to give back to God what he has received from him; rather, he embezzles God's gifts to him, or he repays them to alien masters, or he treats them as though they belong to him and as though he can dispose of them in any way he wishes, in the spirit of the rich fool in the parable (Luke 12:13-21) (Lohmeyer 1965:169-73). None of these considers himself as standing in any kind of relationship to God. Thus none of them receives forgiveness, for forgiveness of debts here basically implies a restoration of fellowship with God.

"As we also forgive ... "

The second part of the fifth petition contains a "striking reference to human activity. Such a reference occurs only at this point in the Lord's Prayer" (Jeremias 1964:27). So important to Jesus and his community "was a readiness to forgive that a summons to forgive was incorporated into their prayer, where it is actually out of place" (Schweizer 1978:155). It also does not occur in the corresponding petition (the sixth) of the Eighteen Benedictions: "Forgive us ... for we have sinned; pardon us ... for we have offended; you are pleased to forgive and to pardon". The principle of mutual forgiveness as a crucial element in the Lord's Prayer is given additional stress by what follows immediately after the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, "For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, then the wrongs you have done will not be forgiven by your Father" (6:14-15).

Let us now look more carefully at this second part of the fifth petition, making a number of observations about it, at the same time constantly referring back to the first part of the petition.

1. First, it is of the utmost importance to realise that God's forgiving us is not made dependent on our forgiving others. We do not pray, "Forgive us our debts if we forgive others . . ." Our forgiveness of others under no circumstances earns us the right to be forgiven by God. We are not bargaining with God in the Lord's Prayer. Far from it. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35) sheds light on what really is at stake here. After being forgiven, he did not forgive. "The lesson is crystal clear: if we ask for unrestricted pardon and receive it without reservation, subject to no conditions, we shall also have to give unrestricted pardon ... Thus there is no business deal here ... We cannot maintain two attitudes, one toward God and the other toward our neighbour ... In other words: if we do not totally forgive our neighbour, then it is a sign that we have not fully requested the Father's forgiveness and we have thus made ourselves incapable of receiving the unrestricted forgiveness of God. If we have really had the radical experience of forgiveness for our sins and our debts, if we truly have felt the mercy of God at work in our sinful life, then we are also impelled to forgive without limits, without reservations ... We have no right to God's forgiveness if we do not want to forgive our neighbours" (Boff 1983:94-5). Just as it is God's nature to be generous and to forgive all sins, so it is now the nature of a child of God to forgive others. Thus we have here, in another form, the twofold commandment of love: to God and neighbour (Lohmeyer 1965:284).
2. Perhaps it would even be wrong to observe any kind of comparison here between our forgiving and God's. It would be a case of comparing entities that are fundamentally incomparable. Are our debtors as dependent on us for our forgiveness as we are on God's for his? No! Are we equally merciful and gracious to them? No! Does our forgiveness determine their lives as much as God's forgiveness does in our case? Once again: No! Thus, human forgiveness can and must be understood simply as a reflection - perhaps only a pale reflection - of divine forgiveness (Lohmeyer 1965:181-2). Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the wrongs that others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. This becomes even clearer if we try to reconstruct the Aramaic original that lies behind the Greek text of Matthew. We would then not translate "as we have forgiven . . .", as though we have already done so, but rather "as we (herewith) forgive . . ." In other words, in the very moment that we petition God to forgive our debts we are reminded of our own need to

forgive others. Mark's gospel, which does not contain the Lord's Prayer, reflects precisely this in chapter 11:25, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him (forthwith, at that moment) . . ." (cf. Jeremias 1964:27-8).

3. The verse just quoted from Mark (11:25) reveals in yet another way that we cannot divorce our worship of God from the way we treat others. That verse says that we have to forgive others in the very act and moment of worshipping God. There is a saying in the Sermon on the Mount which goes even further: If you bring your gift to the altar, in others words, as you approach God in worship, and, while there, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, you should leave your gift where it is before the altar, go and make peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift (Matt. 5:23-4). I said that this verse goes further than the one in Mark: there I continue with my prayer and simultaneously forgive my debtor, here I interrupt my worship and go to him to be reconciled; there I remember that I have a grievance against another and I pardon him; here I recall that another has a grievance against me, and I go to him to beg for his forgiveness. Decisive in this latter case is therefore not whether I am hurting but whether the other person is hurting. In either case, however, the meaning is clear. It does not matter who is indebted to whom. Jesus is speaking to all - to those who are in debt and to those who hold the debt. The point is that there can be no union with God if we are not in union with others and they with us (Crosby 1977:140).

4. I have pointed out that the Greek word translated as "debts", "trespasses", "wrongs" or "sins" primarily referred to monetary debts. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament the word used in the Lord's Prayer for "debts" almost always has this meaning, and the word used for "forgive" the corresponding meaning of "cancel", "wipe out", or "settle" (cf. Deut. 15:1-11) (Crosby 1977:138). These were, therefore, hardly religious concepts in the narrow sense of the word. The word translated "debtors" in the second part of our petition comes from the same word "debts". Literally and on the face of it the phrase "as we forgive our debtors" can therefore be understood to mean "as we cancel the debts of those who owe us money".

This may sound far-fetched to us, unless we believe - as a growing number of scholars do - that Jesus saw himself as the one who had come to reinstate the Jubilee. According to Lev. 25 every fiftieth year was to be a year of Jubilee. That year had to be characterised by four constitutive elements: abstention from normal work (i.e. leaving the soil fallow); the return to each individual of his family's property; the release of those who had become bonded slaves; and - significant for our present discussion - the remission of debts (cf. Yoder 1972:64-77).

When Jesus first preached in the synagogue of Nazareth he quoted from Isa. 61:1-2, which included the words, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19). That expression was an unmistakable reference to the year of Jubilee. What is more, Jesus mixed into this quotation from Isa. 61 a much shorter quotation from Isa. 58:6, "To release the oppressed". This was clearly an allusion to the freeing of bonded slaves, one of the elements of the Jubilee. Moreover, the chapter from which these words were taken, Isa. 58, was widely accepted as a Jubilee text during the first century (Albertz 1983).

If there is any validity in this argumentation there can be little doubt that Jesus' disciples understood the words "as we forgive our debtors" not purely religiously but also as an injunction that had to do with the realities of social and economic life. We know that the first Christians sold their properties and shared the proceeds on the basis of each one's needs. The aim was not to give up the right to material goods but to enable those denied access to them a chance to share in their benefits, for the goal of equity (Crosby 1977:156). They prayed "as we forgive our debtors", and interpreted this to mean, "as we practice the Jubilee". Indeed, the Jubilee depicted a lifestyle Jesus wanted fulfilled in his community.

5. There is yet another important reality in this context: the possibility of a debt or a wrong the offender is totally unaware of. This was the problem of the Pharisee in the parable to which we have already referred (Luke 18:9-14): he was under the illusion that he was innocent; he judged himself to be holy when in fact he was quite hard-hearted. In other words, he was a sinner without realising it. He thought he had no reason for requesting forgiveness.

This attitude is possible both in our relationship to God (e.g. the Pharisee in the parable just referred to) and in our relationship to people (e.g. the rich man of the parable in Luke 16:19-31 who was totally indifferent to and perhaps even "honestly" unaware of the plight of Lazarus at his gate). Such people are oblivious of any guilt they might have. In their own minds they are innocent in the sense of being free from any consciousness of guilt or sin. This is, however, no excuse. Indeed, it aggravates their guilt. The Pharisees who believe themselves to be blameless and righteous before God are not, because of this, less guilty, but more guilty. The rich man who is unaware of what he has been doing to the poor Lazarus, is not less culpable because of this but, on the contrary, more culpable. The people in Jesus' last parable in Matthew (25:31-46) who did not give the hungry something to eat and the naked something to wear for the simple reason that they never really consciously "saw" those unfortunate victims of society, are not acquitted by Jesus for not being aware of the others' needs; on the contrary, they are pronounced guilty and sent into eternal punishment.

So this kind of innocence is no innocence at all; it is pseudo-innocence. These people plead innocence, because they did not know. But they should have known. They should have seen to it that they know.

What about us? How "innocent" are we? Today two-thirds of the world's population are suffering from hunger, chronic sickness, disintegration of family life, shortage of housing, of medical facilities, of educational opportunities. But the hearts of many of the other third, including many Christians, have become insensitive to the plight of those on the margins. They are unaware of what happens to the poor and the exploited. They are

"innocent", but it is the kind of innocence God does not recognise. Allan Boesak entitled his doctoral thesis *Farewell to innocence*. His argument is that the privileged groups in our country can no longer claim that they are innocent, yet many still employ every conceivable stratagem to prevent themselves from becoming aware of what is really going on. On the whole, I believe, Boesak is right. Only a couple of weeks ago a pastor attacked a colleague in Die Kerkbode because the latter had dared to suggest, in a sermon, that there were traces of injustice in our society. The letter writer challenged the preacher. He was unaware, he said, of any injustice in South Africa. I am sure all of us can cite many similar examples of pseudo-innocence, of good and pious people who are simply totally unaware of their guilt towards their fellow human beings. So, as we pray, "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors", let us ask God to make us aware of the guilt of which we are unaware, thus wiping out our pseudo-innocence. This may, indeed, be our most terrible debt.

6. Lastly, forgiveness lays the foundation for relationships, for community. Where the communion between God and the person who prays is threatened or disrupted, forgiveness means that God removes the hindrance created by human beings and restores the communion. Thus forgiveness presupposes the idea of a moral community between the person who forgives and the one who is forgiven (Lohmeyer 1965:175). This holds true for both our "vertical" and our "horizontal" relationships. In the case of the latter, of course, it will more often than not be a matter of mutual forgiveness: we are sinning against each other; it is hardly so that all the sinning always comes from one side and all the forgiving from the other. It is here that we discover that the imagery of remitting financial debts is not adequate. For if I pay back my debts, I usually terminate my relationship with my debtor. Repayment of debts does not establish communion: it destroys it. In the case of the forgiveness of our wrongs, however, a deeper relationship develops. This relationship is not dissolved when God forgives us or we each other; on the contrary, the act of forgiveness only binds us more deeply to God and to one another. It becomes all the more permanent and indissoluble (Lohmeyer 1965:170-1).

If we look at it this way, Peter's discussion with Jesus in Matt. 18:21-22 appears in a new light. Some rabbis had said one should not forgive anybody more than three times: that was the limit. Peter thought he would be much more "Christian", so he asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" But Jesus replied, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven". This means, of course, that our forgiving never finishes; our communion is indestructable and has to be restored again and again.

Thus the followers of Jesus who pray for forgiveness are bound together and to the Father. They are the nucleus of the new community which anticipates the consummation of God's kingdom. They pray the messianic prayer and share in the messianic meal. And as they pray, forgive, and live as a mutually forgiving and forgiven community, the reconciled world begins to emerge, the kingdom is inaugurated, and we begin to live under the rainbow of God's grace.

"Lead us not into temptation ...

We might call the Bible the "Book of Temptations". In its first chapters we read about the temptation of the first man and woman and on its last pages there are descriptions of the great temptation "that is to fall upon the whole world and test its inhabitants" (Rev. 3:10). And between this beginning and this end there is a continuous chain of stories about temptation (Lohmeyer 1965:198).

Human nature comprises a combination of life in the flesh and life in the spirit. There exists in each one of us not only a call to altruism, to commitment, to service, and to self-sacrifice, but also a penchant to egotism, to vengeance, and to self-service. The fact of belonging to two dimensions of reality causes tension and suffering; the two realities cut across a person's entire being (Boff 1983:98-104).

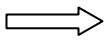
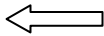
Temptation presupposes this tension which exists in people, between what they are and what they ought to be, between their present state and their future destiny. So, here at the end of the Lord's Prayer a yearning makes itself heard, a yearning for the world in which this ambiguity affecting our entire life will vanish. The petitions grow in intensity until they culminate in this cry of anguish. This request - this tormented cry of the soul - presupposes a bitter awareness of the frailty of human nature, of the danger of betraying our hope and of becoming unfaithful to God (Schweizer 1978:156; Boff 1983:97).

It is noteworthy that Jesus teaches us to pray to be kept from temptation. A devout Jew would pray instead for God to test him so that he might demonstrate his total obedience to God (Schweizer 1978:156). The point is, of course, that the word "temptation" can connote either enticement to sin or testing of faith (Grundry 1982:109), and the pious Jew we have just referred to would certainly be thinking of the second meaning. This understanding of temptation is frequently found in Scripture. The author of Ps. 26 prays, "Test me, O Lord, and try me" (vs. 2). In James 1:2 we read, "Count it all joy ... when you meet various temptations". There are also numerous sayings of Jesus which call upon his disciples to take up the cross after him, or which promise them suffering. There is even an ancient tradition, not recorded in our Bibles, that Jesus, just before entering Gethsemane, said to his disciples, "No one can obtain the kingdom of heaven who has not passed through temptation" (Jeremias 1964:30).

Clearly, then we need temptations. And if they are beneficial, why should we pray not to be led into them? Should we not, rather, just pray for victory in temptation? The danger, after all, does not consist in having temptations, but in yielding to them. We should therefore not ask God to exempt us from temptation but to protect us when we confront it.

There are indeed scholars who interpret the sixth petition in the Lord's Prayer along these lines: Lord, strengthen us in temptation; help us to overcome when we are tested!

On closer look, however, we shall notice that this is not what our petition says. If we compare this petition with the next one - the last - we shall notice that the two petitions parallel each other in every detail:

Lead-us-not-into		temptation
Deliver-us-from		the evil one!

In both instances the verbs refer to movement from one position to another: "leading into", and "rescuing from". The movements are, of course, in opposite directions. The first is a prayer not to be led from outside, from God's side, so to speak, into a situation of

temptation; the second sees the evil one, the tempter, actually coming closer to us, and we cry out in anguish, "O Father, snatch us away from him!"

The plea, "Lead us not into temptation!", therefore refers to something other than testing. It is not concerned with the successful withstanding of temptations, but with preservation from them. It is not a testing to strengthen us, for that sort of testing is God's gracious gift to us (Lohmeyer 1965:203-4). Whoever prays the Lord's Prayer obviously does not have a great degree of self-assurance; he is not outstandingly pious and no religious superstar. He does not ask God for the opportunity to prove his faith; he asks not to be put to the test (Schweizer 1978:156). As a matter of fact, he does not even pray for strength. This is a non-heroic prayer. "Not: when temptation comes, give me strength! Rather: we know that if Satan tightens the screws we have no chance" (Stendahl 1980:80). If temptation is no longer grace, but anguish and terror, then, instead of being tested by God through temptations, we become a prey for the evil one. Thus, on the Mount of Olives, before he was arrested, Jesus said to his disciples, "Pray that you may be spared the hour of testing" (Luke 2:40). In other words, "Be realistic about yourselves and about your ability to resist temptation". Paul shows the same non-heroic realism: "When you are tempted, God will provide a way out" (1 Cor. 10:13). This petition thus warns against spiritual bravado, against going out of the way to look for challenges and even martyrdom, while at the same time it accepts the suffering that is necessary.

Perhaps the deepest reason why in this petition the disciples plead so fervently not even to be exposed to temptation, is to be looked for at a yet deeper level. We must remember that the Lord's Prayer in its entirety has a strong eschatological character. This means that it was prayed - both in Jesus' own time and in the time of the primitive church - in the context of persecutions and of fervent anticipation of the end of the world. The disciples believed that they were living in the last days and that the final battle between Christ and the powers of evil was imminent. So, when praying this prayer, they were not just thinking of the petty temptations we all encounter in our normal workaday life. They were thinking of the final great testing which stood at the door: the disclosure of the mystery of evil, the revelation of the Antichrist, the final trial at the end, the terrible danger of apostasy, of denying Christ under the pressure of persecution. Testing here is not the work of God wishing to purify us, but the work of the devil who attempts to destroy us once and for all.

This dimension of temptation may sound strange and even unreal to us. We cannot imagine what it means and what it will entail, for we live in a society in which all goes reasonably smoothly, remote from the terror of persecution and the stark reality of martyrdom. Among the several books I read on the Lord's Prayer during the last months was one written by the German New Testament scholar, Ernst Lohmeyer. It is at the same time the most learned treatise on the Lord's Prayer that I know of, and the most profound reflection on it. Lohmeyer suffered in various ways in Hitler's Germany and, immediately after the war, in 1945, was appointed principal of the University of Greifswald where he had previously taught. Greifswald is a city in East Germany, then part of the Russian zone. During the night before the official re-opening of the university he disappeared. It is generally accepted that the Russians took him away. Nothing certain is known of his fate, but it is assumed that his life was ended somewhere in Russia in September 1946. One of the last books he wrote was this one on the Lord's Prayer, and his exposition of this petition - "Do not lead us into temptation" - belongs to the most profound and penetrating passages of his book (Lohmeyer 1965:191-208). How did Lohmeyer himself experience the time of testing into which he was thrown? We do not know with any certainty, yet I believe that he faced it in the spirit of his own exposition of this petition. For him, it must have been the ultimate temptation, it must have been like standing face to face with the

evil one. And perhaps he recalled the words he himself had written not long before: "All the powers of evil still reign on the earth, 'all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them' still belong to the devil, but children can already pray to their Father as though they no longer belonged to this estranged world of hostile powers and temptations; the last temptation, which is to decide and has already decided the battle between God and his adversary in favour of heaven, is imminent ... Temptation here is the attempt of the ungodly powers to obtain a final decision in the battle with God over the persons of the praying community who use the word 'we' to describe themselves. The temptation is beyond any possible human strength ... But above the solitariness of this temptation is the community of this group who speak as 'we', for only the children of God can be so overwhelmed, so tempted, by all the powers of earth and hell, and yet stand almost in their Father's heaven ..." (Lohmeyer 1965:205,207).

The plea not to be led into temptation is indeed an anxious prayer. But this anxiety is swallowed up in the serenity and faith of those who have already called upon the Father for the hallowing of his name, the coming of his kingdom and the consummation of his will, who have already known and tasted the victory of God through Jesus Christ, and who hear his word, "Courage! The victory is mine; I have conquered the world" (John 16:33 NEB) (Boff 1983:107).

"But deliver us from (the) evil (one)"

After what has been said about the sixth petition we can be considerably briefer about the seventh (and last).

The verb which we usually translate as "deliver", literally means "rescue" or "snatch away". Evil is here regarded not as an idea but as a reality, as a lurking beast of prey, ready to pounce upon us. God is asked, so to speak, to jerk us away from him, to place us out of his reach.

Bible translations vary about the last word of this petition. Do we ask to be rescued from "evil" or from "the evil one"? The original Greek word can mean either of the two. The Western church (Roman Catholic and later also the Protestant church) has tended to favour the first translation. Evil was regarded as an impersonal force, an idea. The Eastern church (Orthodox) interpreted differently; they saw this as a reference to the evil one, to Satan. There can be little doubt that in the context in which we find this word in Matthew (Luke does not have this petition) it should be understood as referring to "the evil one". Only the first gospel knows the devil simply as "the evil one" (cf. 5:37; 5:39). None of the gospels, in any case, characterise him as a mythical monster. They describe him according to what he is and does: "the tempter", "the (false) accuser", "the enemy", "the evil one". While people are evil, he is the evil one, while they are enemies, he is the enemy, while they tempt each other, he is the tempter. Throughout he is the absolute embodiment of evil human possibilities. Another more terrifying fact that emerges is that he has become the ruler of "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them". His real seat and his real kingdom is therefore here on earth, for the gospels nowhere suggest that he has set up his throne "in hell" (Lohmeyer 1965: 215-20).

Masquerading as lord of the universe he meets Jesus in the desert and confronts him with a threefold temptation (Matt. 4:3-10). What is significant is the way in which he approaches Jesus. "Just as Satan of old in Genesis 3 argued from the gracious intentions of God ('could it really be true that God has forbidden ... ?' - Gen. 3:1), so here Satan identifies with God's intention for Jesus to be the true Son of God. Satan proposes an effective missionary strategy with miracles and public relations that would prove the divine uniqueness without a place for doubt" (Stendahl 1980:79). It is something truly amazing that is narrated here! The two - Jesus and Satan - "talk together like rabbis" (Lohmeyer 1965:224), confronting argument with counter-argument, quoting Scripture against Scripture.

Precisely this subtlety of Satan's approach, precisely his pious appeal to Scripture and his ostensible concern for Jesus, shows how diabolical he is. By just giving a specific divine word an almost imperceptible twist, he lets it say what he wants it to say.

Precisely here, then, is the danger to which we too are exposed, just as Jesus was in the desert. The evil one seldom attacks us head-on (although that also happens); he usually comes to us as an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14). His stratagems are many and varied, his influence pervasive. He channels the yearnings of our heart in the direction he wishes them to go, he weaves the finest webs into which he lures us, and before we know where we are, we have accepted his value system and look at reality through his eyes. Without having noticed it ourselves, we have become imbued with pride, greed, selfishness, a craving for power, honour, and glory. Satan has slyly crept into our minds and made our hearts insensitive to our fellow human beings and their needs. He has maneuvered us into a corner out of which we find it impossible to escape. He has even provided us with the rationalising techniques to justify why we are where we are and what we are.

This is the kind of enslavement that threatens the followers of Christ, that undermines their morale and re-shapes their lifestyle. Therefore, as we pray, "Deliver us from the evil one!", we do not think only of the danger of succumbing in the hour of his ultimate and total onslaught (we certainly think of that too, and pray to be upheld in that moment), but also of the evil one's policy of quiet infiltration, by which he almost imperceptibly erodes the foundations of our life of faith. So when, in a moment of unusual perceptiveness, we are granted the ability to see with unmistakable clarity the really diabolical nature of these compromises to Satan's value system, we pray the Lord's Prayer, this final petition becomes a paroxysm, an anguished cry: "O Father, save us from the evil one, from his plots and his ambushes!" It is, however, not a cry of despair, nor of agony, for we already know that all attempts of the evil one to snatch us away from God are doomed to failure, all his carefully contrived machinations will ultimately and utterly be foiled.

Prayer and lifestyle

We have come to the end of the Lord's Prayer. We are, of course, used to conclude it with the doxology, that is with the words, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen". These words do not appear in the original, neither in Matthew's version of the prayer nor in Luke's. We do find them, though, in the *Didachē*, and since then (beginning of the second century) it has been customary to add them when praying the Lord's Prayer (although the Roman Catholic Church usually omits the doxology and retains only the "Amen").

Clearly the first Christians, at a very early stage, felt the need for a doxology after the rather abrupt ending of the Lord's Prayer as it was handed down to them. So they took over a few lines from David's last prayer, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (1 Chron. 29:11). This addition in any case witnesses to a great sensitivity particularly towards the way in which the first Gospel was conceived. For the insertion of the doxology here anticipates the way in which Matthew concludes his gospel. He reports Jesus as sending the apostles into all the world to make disciples of all nations, framing the "Great Commission" with Jesus' assurance of his divine kingship and of his abiding presence, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18,20). Like the doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer these words are reminiscent of David's final prayer in 1 Chron. 29.

Thus, in their daily prayers and communal worship the early Christians added the doxology. In its oldest form, however, faithfully preserved by Matthew and Luke, the Lord's Prayer contained no doxology. Neither did it contain any thanksgiving, nor, for that matter, any lament over need and oppression. "Here is no heart moved by passion or soul excited by joy or sorrow, tribulation and exaltation, such as we often find in the Psalter ... In a holy quietness, which is nevertheless determined by every power and every need between heaven and earth, it speaks ... naturally, in each and everything putting its requests before God in simple trust" (Lohmeyer 1965:275-6).

The Lord's Prayer thus displays an exceptionally economical use of words and phrases. The terseness of its style is further underscored by the symmetric (or chiasmic) structure of the different petitions to which we have referred at the beginning:

	Our Father in heaven!
A	1. Your name be hallowed
B	2. Your kingdom come
C	3. Your will be done on earth as in heaven
D	4. Give us this day our daily bread
C ¹	5. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
B ¹	6. And lead us not into temptation
A ¹	7. But deliver us from evil!

The structure can now be explained in somewhat more detail. If the seventh petition expresses fear of the evil one, the first speaks in reverence of the holy one who overcomes even the evil one. Already in the Old Testament the hallowing of God's name implies the conquest of God's enemies and the deliverance of God's people. Again, the second petition gives expression to the promising nearness of God's kingdom, whereas the sixth highlights the threatening nearness of temptation. The third petition speaks of the divine will which should be done on earth as in heaven, while the fifth speaks of the divine will which people fail to do (Lohmeyer 1965:274).

At the same time the first three petitions, taken together, are both contrasted with and linked to the last three. The first petitions revolve around the great concerns of God: his name, his kingdom, his will. The last three petitions hold our human concerns up before God: our world of debt and temptation and abandonment to the evil one. Between these two sets of expressions we have the petition for bread as a transition from one world to the other: bread in its double meaning of our physical needs (which links it to the second set of petitions) and of our worship of God symbolised by the bread of the Lord's Supper (which links it to the first). Thus, despite the undeniable differences between the two sets, they are intimately linked to each other, for God's name is hallowed now, his kingdom begins to come now and his will is done now, in that people receive what they need from him, are forgiven by him (and thus are free to forgive others), are enabled to withstand temptation, and are delivered from the evil one (Schweizer 1978:158). They still live in this world but they are no longer of it; for it has been overcome, with its threefold powers of debt and temptation and the evil one (Lohmeyer 1965:287).

All of this is a tangible reality in the Christian's experience, not just a faint flickering on a distant horizon. All evangelists are unanimous in their witness that Jesus' public ministry, from the first moment, revealed the fact that a new age had dawned. The first word the adult Jesus pronounced in Luke's gospel was the word *today* - "Today, in your very hearing, this text has come true" (4:21). In Mark, his first words were, "The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the good news" (1:15). In Matthew, his first words were similar to those in Mark (Matt. 4:17), but even before he wrote down those words, Matthew quoted Isa. 9:1,2, "The people that lived in darkness saw a great light; and for those living in the land of the shadow of death a great light has dawned" (4:16).

This then is the solid conviction that lies behind each of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer: God has determined to intervene. He is not just announcing a future event; he speaks of the present. The best thing, no, the only thing we can do is change our lifestyle and adjust to the new situation. Because of our hope and our confidence, the darkness of the present world is no less dark, but it is less absurd. The dangers have not been removed, but our courage has been strengthened (Boff 1983:24,75).

Those who pray the Lord's Prayer remain a vulnerable and insecure community, leading a precarious existence. Still, they risk praying; they boldly take it upon themselves to pray this prayer, fully aware of the fact that praying does not just mean simply transferring the burden to God; rather, it means becoming privileged and empowered to carry the burden with God. This is the risk of praying the Lord's Prayer: that ultimately even more will be expected of us than we first thought of asking God to do. The reason for this is simple: As we pray, our own calling and responsibility become ever clearer to us (Karres 1969:97). Our praying, then, is not an instrument to change God into a servant of our wishes, but, rather, to change us into servants of his love.

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The Lord's Prayer, the most often recited passage of Christian scripture and practice, is Jewish to the bone. No portion of the Bible is more frequently quoted by Christians than the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. In churches of all denominations in all parts of the world, it remains a shared element in worship and private devotion and one of the strongest cords binding Christians to their Jewish heritage. The wording of this prayer is not distinctively Christian but thoroughly Jewish. Why are there two versions of the prayer? The prayer appears twice in the New Testament. A longer version, Matt 6:9-13, is located at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:29), in the context of Jesus in "The Lord's Prayer is 'the' Christian prayer. It comes up more than any other text in Christian liturgies since the first century. And its context in Matthew and Luke gives explicitly Christian meanings to terms such as Father and kingdom." "It is distinctly Christian. In the New Testament, it is Jesus who gives us the prayer. Throughout the Christian church—whether Catholics, Protestants, or Eastern Orthodox—people pray that prayer. You will not find it in a Jewish synagogue." "It is a Christian prayer. Jesus was certainly influenced by certain Jewish m The Lord's Prayer is probably the best-known prayer in Christianity. According to the New Testament, the prayer was given by Jesus of Nazareth as a response to a request from the Apostles for guidance on how to pray. The prayer is excerpted from the book of Matthew Matthew 6:9-13), where it appears as part of the Sermon on the Mount. A similar prayer is found in Luke 11:2-4. Luke's version does not begin "Our Father in Heaven," but rather simply with "Father" (which would be Abba in Aramaic).