

*The Social Form Implied in the Lord's Prayer*  
*Michael Brewer*

One of the first things to be noticed in contemplating the Lord's Prayer is that it immediately extends beyond the personal needs of an individual supplicant. Rephrasing it into a personal supplication is actually unthinkable; the phrase "My father, who art in the heavens" is already repugnant, but "Give me this day my daily bread" is even more so. Anyone who knows the Lord's Prayer will instinctively cringe away from these expressions of egotism set before the spiritual world.

The larger we make the circle included in the words "our" and "us" in the Lord's prayer, the truer we are to its intent. Ultimately, it is meant to be prayed on behalf of all creation; but it especially includes all of humanity, those on earth but also those who are not at present on earth. And through its inclusion of humanity it brings to expression the picture of how the structure of human society is built.

When, at the end of the First World War, concerned people asked Rudolf Steiner for guidance on how to rebuild society, he responded by describing what we may know as the Threefold Commonwealth or the Threefold Social Order. It is tempting to classify his indications as yet another blueprint for a Utopian society, but those who have done so have failed to realize that Rudolf Steiner actually did nothing except describe things as they are. Human society is threefold, and the crises that arise from time to time spring largely from people's failure to recognize the fact. Each realm of society, the spiritual-cultural life, the sphere of rights, and the economic life, has its own laws which operate like laws of nature; and when one sphere encroaches with its laws upon another sphere, then certain pathological conditions arise in society.

The seeds of the threefold social organism are already to be found in Genesis. At the beginning of human development, God gives to humanity three tasks. The first task was the naming of the animals. Then, with the creation of Eva, the second task was for Adam and Eva to take up mutual responsibilities towards each other. Finally, with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the third task was to toil at raising crops for food. Furthermore, Adam and Eva have three sons who are named in Genesis: Cain, who becomes a farmer; Abel, who becomes a shepherd; and Seth, who establishes the line of the patriarchs. Thus we recognize, not once but twice, the archetype of the threefold social organism. To give things names and then to know their names is a fundamental phenomenon of the spiritual-cultural life. The basis for the economic life is in the cultivation of the soil. In the relationship of Cain and Abel we have the archetype for the recurring problem in the relationship of the economic life to the spiritual-cultural life. And it is the task of Seth, the third son, to take responsibility for the whole.

It is then possible to recognize how the petitions of the Lord's Prayer can help us to shape the threefold social organism. The first petition, "Hallowed be thy name", gives us the underlying impulse of the spiritual-cultural life. The source for the spiritual-cultural life is the world of ideas, and all ideas are aspects of the name of God. For the ideas to enter into the spiritual-cultural life they must be taken up as ideals. To bring our ideals to expression we need freedom; and each expression of an ideal contributes to the hallowing of God's name.

The next petition reads "Thy kingdom come." The moment we speak the word "kingdom" we find ourselves in a political-legal context. Every kingdom has its laws. By calling for the approach of the kingdom of our Father in the Heavens we are resolving to accept the laws of that kingdom.

Next come the words "Thy will be done." To begin with, we could imagine this as a rather passive acceptance bordering on fatalism—one speaks of "acts of God"; if something happens that I cannot control, I call it "God's will." The matter becomes more complicated when I add the effects my own actions into the whole of the world processes. Can other people consider my deeds as an aspect of God's will? This can become an essential question for each of us, and the prime area of concern that it raises for us is in the economic life, where universal brotherhood is the ideal that we strive for.

The words that follow—"as above in the Heavens, so also on the earth"—are mostly linked onto the previous sentence: "Thy will be done." The King James translation binds them even more strongly together: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." As we consider the social implications of the

Lord's Prayer, we can see that the words "as above in the heavens, so also on the earth" apply equally to all three of the petitions that we have spoken so far. The first observation that we can make is that in the Heavens all of the three petitions are fulfilled already: our Father's name is hallowed, His kingdom is there, and His will is done. The question is not about the Heavens; it is about the earth. And this can lead us to a new understanding of what we are saying with the first petitions of the Lord's Prayer. To say them consequently, we must at the same time make the threefold resolution: Let us hallow Thy name; Let us accept the laws of Thy kingdom; let us do Thy will. With that we can proceed to the second half of the prayer.

Where the first part was directed to the attributes of our Father, the second part of the prayer is concerned for our needs as human beings. For each of the petitions, we express a need not on behalf of ourselves as separate individuals but as members of humanity, or even as members of creation.

The first of these petitions is "Give us this day our daily bread." An alternative translation is offered in most translations: "Give us this day our bread for the morrow." We are brought with these words into the realm of production, distribution and consumption—in other words into the economic realm. The true price for anything which has been produced is that amount which will enable the producer to make another article like the former. What we need economically at the end of one day is that which will enable us to live and work tomorrow. But more is implied: if we mean what we say with this petition, then we cannot intend to get our daily bread as the result of our own work. It is to be received as a gift, given to us by all those around us who are doing God's will.

The second petition is the longest: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." This is the one sentence which, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also commented on after He had given the Lord's prayer. The prayer asks for forgiveness, but it places a condition on receiving forgiveness: in order that we may receive forgiveness, we must be able and willing to forgive. And while the forgiveness for which we ask is from our Father in the Heavens, the Forgiveness expected from us is towards our fellow human beings. When we are fully capable of this, a whole new impulse can enter into the legal life of society. Too much of our legal life is still based on the principle of revenge or fear; forgiveness is the law of the kingdom which is to come.

The third petition, "Lead us not into temptation", places before us the danger of the spiritual-cultural life. The common reading of this sentence today is to reduce the stress level: the New English Bible renders it "Do not put us to the test." But instead, let us ponder the phenomenon of temptation. To begin with, the archetypal image of temptation is the one in the Garden of Eden. The temptation that occurred there had to do with knowledge, and the opening of the senses. Knowledge can be understood in the widest possible sense, ranging from carnal knowledge to what we mean when we say know-how to the understanding of the world around us. From the time of the temptation knowledge began to be a part of the personal makeup of the human being, but in such a way that it could be considered as a possession. Instead of letting the world speak for itself, we take control of the world. The spiritual-cultural life is always related to knowledge, and it stands under the tendency to yield to temptation. But it is not our Father in the Heavens who leads us into temptation. When we accept His leadership, we are led away from temptation. Again, this prayer is closely linked to a resolution: Let us accept our Father in the Heavens as leader.

The fourth petition, "But deliver us from the evil", reaches beyond life on earth to a realm where as social beings we are powerless. On earth we have the possibility to receive our daily bread in accordance with our needs rather than our desires and to help that our sisters and brothers may also receive theirs. We can forgive and accept forgiveness. We can also struggle with the temptations which come to us as we grow in knowledge. But this world is only a reflection of a world in which powerful beings are struggling to use us for their purposes. The threefold social organism on earth in its present form is the karmic result of our social interactions in past lives, and what we do now will in turn lead to the social form that we will find in future lives. And to bring the future conditions about we need the constant help of our Father in the Heavens.