

The Hidden Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer as it appears in the Gospel of Luke

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As far back as my memory goes, I can recall the strength of the Lord's Prayer, which to begin with I associated with christenings. Later I learned, or so I thought, that this prayer was given by Jesus to the disciples under the circumstances described in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. Only when I first read a modern translation of the New Testament did I discover, first, that the Lord's Prayer was also given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew), and second, that the prayer in the Gospel of Luke was quite different. This came as a shock to me, and for years I used the King James translation, where I experienced the prayer as "complete", even if a few of the words were somewhat different. Only much later have I learned to accept the prayer as it appears in the Gospel of Luke, and have since been trying to understand its significance as a prayer.

The situations in which the two prayers were given can serve as a starting point. The Sermon on the Mount is a unique event in the gospels: Jesus has withdrawn from the crowd onto the mountain; his disciples come to him and he gives them an esoteric lesson. At the midpoint of this lesson he gives what we know as the Lord's Prayer, and immediately explains the sentence about forgiveness. These words, the focal point of the esoteric lesson, have become perhaps the best known of all the words that Jesus spoke.

By contrast, the direct circumstances surrounding the prayer in the Gospel of Luke are commonplace or even trivial. "He was praying in a certain place", and when he finished one of his disciples asked him to teach them to pray as John had taught his disciples. Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer, and then speaks about prayer, taking as his starting point the parable of the importunate neighbor. The prayer is given openly, at the request of a disciple. But although it was thus originally open and exoteric, within a few centuries of the writing of the Gospel of Luke the prayer was hidden, covered up by words imported from the Gospel of Matthew. Only through the critical work of the nineteenth century has it come to light again, and even now it receives little attention.

That the prayer was there to come to light hangs on just a few threads. A few of the oldest manuscripts show it in the form quoted later in this article. Origen (d 254) in his work *On Prayer* quotes both of the prayers in full, and declares that they are clearly two distinct prayers, though they have sections in common. In his detailed consideration of the Lord's Prayer he uses the prayer from the gospel of Matthew as his main source, with parenthetical references to those points where corresponding sections are different or absent in the prayer in the Gospel of Luke. His homilies on the section of the Gospel of Luke containing the Lord's Prayer are too fragmentary to be of any further help.

Tertullian (d 220) is the other early source, in the fourth book of his work against the doctrine of Marcion. Marcion founded a heretical sect in the second century A.D., and used a version of the Gospel of Luke. In the fourth book of Tertullian's polemic he challenges Marcion using the Gospel of Luke, and in the section of the gospel containing the Lord's Prayer he works line by line. Although Tertullian wrote in Latin, it is sufficiently clear that he was working with a version of the prayer that was at least similar to the version quoted by Origen.

What happened afterwards is not difficult to imagine. In the time before the printing press every book had to be copied manually, and at each copying the judgment of the copier was called upon. The result was a tendency to render parallel passages in the different gospels more and more nearly identical. When copiers were confronted with apparent inconsistencies or missing phrases, the frequent assumption was that the more detailed version was the better. It is this kind of judgment that we can see being applied to the prayer in the Gospel of Luke. In some manuscripts the prayer is entirely replaced by the prayer from the Gospel of Matthew. (Meanwhile, the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew received an additional sentence at the end: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.")

With the first printed versions, the first choices had to be made about which version of the text was the most authoritative. But at that time many of the earliest manuscripts were not available. Where choices had to be made, they were usually between alternative words and phrases and did not involve the rejection of any material. This approach was the basis of translations of the Bible such as Martin Luther's translation into German and the King James translation into English.

Nineteenth century examination of the Bible has had mixed results. Where the methods have been used to test the gospels as documentary evidence of the life of Jesus, the work has been problematic. For example, attempts have been made to reason back to hypothetical documents on which the synoptic gospels are based, and to assume that apparent inconsistencies mean that one or more of the gospels are incorrect. But when the work is confined to bringing the texts as close as possible to their original forms, then the work has been valuable. Such work can in fact, as in the example of the Lord's Prayer, emphasize the different characters of the four gospels rather than trying to reconcile the differences.

So the prayer in the Gospel of Luke reappears (actually, for the general public, it appears for the first time) in the translations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But the commentators have made little of it. In *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, for example, the chapters on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are written by the same author, and the respective sections referring to the Lord's Prayer are cross-referenced. Because the prayer in the Gospel of Luke is shorter it is considered "probably more original"; in the section on the Lord's Prayer in the commentary on the Gospel of Matthew it is suggested that "Had Luke known the longer form, he would have used it." More recent commentaries can be more helpful: a work such as the *Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Berlin, 1961) offers a rich background for the prayer. But even here we do not get a living sense of the significance of the prayer. Likewise, in the commentary by Joel B. Green there is no reference at all to the various renditions of the Lord's Prayer in different manuscripts and translations of the Gospel. Instead, he takes the version quoted by Origen as if it had been the only one ever written.

Also from an anthroposophical background little work has been done on the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Luke. All of the references by Rudolf Steiner to the Lord's Prayer use the text from the Gospel of Matthew. Friedrich Rittelmeyer's book on the Lord's Prayer also refers to the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew; so does Heinrich Ogilvie's book. In his book on the gospels Emil Bock does not discuss the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Luke at the point where he writes about the circumstances in which Jesus gave it. At various points in this book he refers to one sentence in the Lord's Prayer as it is rendered in a few manuscripts and quoted by Gregory of Nyssa (4th Cent.). His main interest is the variance of this line, which I will discuss later.

In my searching for work on the prayer as a whole I have found three works. Friedrich Gädeke devotes two pages to it in his book *Meditative Studien zum Lukas-Evangelium*. (The book includes his translation of the Luke Gospel into German.) He begins his discussion by noting the four sections of the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew which are not included in the prayer in the Gospel of Luke: "Our", "who art in the heavens", "thy will be done as above in the heavens, so also on the earth", "but deliver us from the evil". He points out that the prayer that does not include these words is thereby more inward and more personal than the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew. Gädeke's main concern is with the character of the prayer as a whole. He goes beyond the work of Origen in distinguishing it from the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew, but does not work with it in detail as the others have done with the latter prayer.

Rudolf Frieling writes briefly about the prayer from an approach opposite to that of Gädeke. The passage is not easy to find; it is in an essay on the Transfiguration story as it appears in the different gospels. Rather than focusing on the words lacking in Luke, he focuses on the words included in Matthew. He shows how the prayer in Matthew assumes more of a royal character through the words which are present there but absent in Luke.

Finally, Jürgen Franck has written an article in *Die Christengemeinschaft* in the issue of February 1986 on the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Luke. He refers to the same rendition of it as Emil Bock, and develops how the first part of the prayer addresses the threefold nature of God, while the second part addresses the needs of the threefold human being. It is a remarkable essay in its attempt to treat the Luke

version on its own merits. The one trace of a following of the Matthew structure is the fact that he allows the word *Father* to stand on its own, corresponding to *Our father, who art in the heavens* in the Gospel of Matthew.

Taking the Luke prayer into its own context in this way while admitting that the Matthew prayer exists is an interesting exercise. The most complete work that I have found in this direction is the one just mentioned. I would like with the present essay to make a somewhat different contribution.

First, we will observe is its place in the gospel. We find it at the beginning of the eleventh chapter. Towards the end of the ninth chapter we find that Jesus has begun his (final) journey to Jerusalem. The situation of the prayer is thus near the beginning of the journey. (At the other end of the journey comes what Rudolf Steiner describes as the archetypal prayer: “not my will but thy will be done.”) At the end of the tenth chapter is the visit with Mary and Martha, where we face the question of balance between the outer and the inner life. Then Luke changes the scene. We find Jesus praying in a certain place, and when he is finished, one of the disciples asks him, “Teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” Jesus replies with the following prayer, which we will look at in five parts:

1. Father, hallowed be thy name.
2. Thy kingdom come.
3. Give us each day our daily bread.
4. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive those who trespass against us.
5. And lead us not into temptation.

Immediately after the prayer, Jesus tells the remarkable parable of the importunate neighbor who comes at three in the morning asking to borrow a loaf of bread. From his further discourse, we learn that this is a parable about the efficacy of prayer. Jesus goes on to speak more specifically about prayer and meditation: “Seek, and you will find; ask, and it will be given to you; knock, and it will be opened to you.” The prayer is surrounded by events, images and words to do with the inner life.

Let us consider the five parts of the prayer, and to the extent that we compare this prayer to the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew, let us use as our starting point what is here in the Gospel of Luke rather than what is “missing.”

The first sentence reads: “Father, hallowed be thy name.” We can notice three things already. First is the personal relation to God. Addressing God as father was a recent development in the Jewish world at the time of Christ, as was still rather uncommon. In the Old Testament, God is never addressed as father. To speak the first word of the prayer truly, we must speak it as children of God; that is, we must be among those who have received the Christ. The second thing is the concept of being hallowed. In the Old Testament, especially in the books of Moses, what was holy was unapproachable, even dangerous. Only those who were consecrated could touch the holy things and survive. The last thing which is still held holy in that way (after all, the temple was destroyed) is in fact the name of the Lord, which is written but never pronounced aloud. This is the third element in the first sentence: the name. In addition to the holy name already mentioned, there is another aspect, which throws further light on the name that is to be hallowed. On the one hand there is that name “that no one knows but himself” of the rider on the white horse in the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation; on the other are the words of God to Moses in Exodus, “I am the I am.” Thus, we are addressing as father the one who has given us the ability to say I. That we can say I reflects the fact that we have been formed in his image.

The second sentence exists in three alternatives. The one quoted above: “Thy kingdom come”, is to be found in the earliest manuscripts and in the work of Origen. It is also used in all of the common translations that I have seen. One manuscript reads: “Thy kingdom come upon us.” (This is the only support that I can find in Luke or Matthew for the German translation “*Dein Reich komme zu uns.*”) Gregory of Nyssa (4th cent.) and a few manuscripts read: “Thy holy spirit come upon us and cleanse us.” This is the version used in the three published German translations by priests of the Christian Community: Emil Bock, Heinrich Ogilvie, and Friedrich Gädeke. In the two published English translations by Christian Community priests, Jon Madsen uses the second alternative and Kalmia Bittleston uses the first. The third reading gives the

prayer a very different character from that of the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew; but the reading is itself of a rather different character from the content of the rest of the prayer in the Gospel of Luke. I will here consider the words “Thy kingdom come”. The theme of the approaching kingdom of heaven recurs throughout the New Testament, to the extent that we might question the necessity of praying for something that is bound to happen or is already happening. But it may matter whether it comes asked for or unasked for. In images such as that of the thief in the night we can see the danger of something good coming upon us when we are not prepared for it. Praying for the kingdom to come can be a part of our preparation to receive it when it comes.

The third sentence, “Give us each day our daily bread”, by its subtle difference, can help us to know the Lord’s prayer in each gospel better. In the Gospel of Matthew the request is for “this day” and the word for “give” requests a single act. In the Gospel of Luke the request is for “each day” and the word for “give” requests an ongoing activity. (In both prayers the phrase “our daily bread could also be rendered as “our bread for the morrow.”) In praying the prayer in the Gospel of Luke we are asking for an eternal relationship with God.

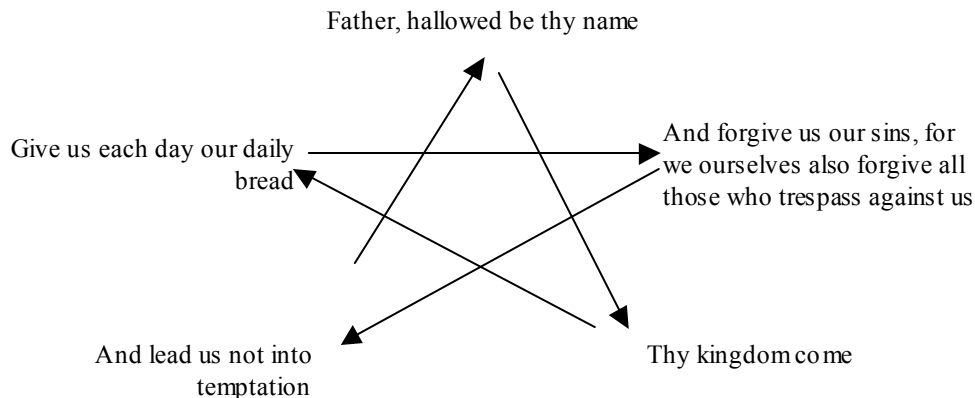
The fourth sentence, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive all those trespassing against us”, is also different from the corresponding sentence in the Lord’s Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew. To make clear the extent of the difference, we can retranslate the latter: “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgave the trespassers against us.” This time it is the action on our part that is continuous in Luke and particular in Matthew. And we may notice the emphasis in Luke: “ourselves”, “also”, “all.” When we pray the prayer in the Luke gospel, we commit ourselves to forgive universally and eternally. The other issue is the word “sins” instead of “trespasses.” The word behind “trespasses” is a word which can also refer to financial and property debts. Such debts and their forgiveness was an integral part of the law of Moses. As used in the prayer it can be extended into the realm of moral obligations, including but not limited to those obligations which arise from our having sinned. We incur a moral obligation in fact every time we breathe in good air and breathe out bad air. The word behind “sin” carries with it a background relating to error—in the New Testament, moral error. Sins arise from decisions we make. Thus, in asking for forgiveness of our sins, we are asking God to accept our personality with its shortcomings. It is not surprising that the supporting commitment should be eternal and universal.

The last sentence, “And lead us not into temptation”, is, whether one meets it in the gospel of Matthew or Luke, one of the most problematic in the gospels. Newer translations avoid the issue: “Do not put us to the test,” says the New English Bible; “Do not bring us to the time of trial,” says the New Revised Standard Version. But the moment when we were led into temptation was when God made space for other beings to lead us—beings whose names are not hallowed. The request is first of all that God become a leader for us. (This must also be a resolution on our part.) Then we may be confident that we will not be led into temptation. And we will learn to understand the intent of Christ Jesus when he says to his disciples: follow me.

Having considered the sentences one by one, we must now weave them back into a whole. What I offer here is not to be thought of as the correct method, but as one way out of many to understand what underlies the prayer.

We will take as our starting point the verbs: be hallowed, come, give, forgive, lead. “Be hallowed” has a different quality from the others. It has the gesture of creating a still space. “Give” and “forgive” are closely related as words both in German and English. Although the Greek words are not related, there is still a complementary gesture: offering and releasing. “Come” and “lead” both imply gestures of movement. They are also complementary—the former draws near; the latter moves on, bringing us with it.

To integrate these gestures into one prayer, let us imagine how we would express them—after all, we have been formed in God’s image. The gestures of giving and forgiving, of offering and releasing, come to fullest expression through the hands. But in the gestures to do with movement—coming and leading—the feet play an essential role. Finally, the initial gesture of creating a hallowed space directs one to the revelation contained in the countenance, the face. The ordering of the gestures—face, foot, hand, hand, foot—builds in the human-divine form a pentagram:



Thus the prayer draws us toward the archetypal form of God, in whose image we have been formed. And as the prayer is answered, the image of God can become more and more of a reality in us.

A comparison of what the two prayers have to tell us in regard to our daily bread can also give us a further hint of how each prayer can be prayed. In the Gospel of Matthew the request is for this day, and the word for “give”, $\delta\omicron\varsigma$, is particular. In the Gospel of Luke the request is for every day, and the word for “give”, $\delta\iota\delta\omicron\upsilon$, could be translated as “continue to give”. While either prayer can of course be prayed at any time, these differences give the prayer in the Gospel of Matthew a morning quality as compared with an evening quality in the prayer in the Gospel of Luke.

The prayer which Jesus gave when one of his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray has been effectively hidden for more than a thousand years. Even now, when it can be found in the newer translations of the New Testament, I suspect that few people who have read it have taken into their life of prayer. But a consideration of its content, form and gestures suggest to me that if it were brought into the contemplative life of more people today, this would be a help for future human and world evolution.