

## THE LORD'S PRAYER : II <sup>1</sup>

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**A** YEAR ago I spoke on this subject in a Rylands Lecture, which has since been printed in the BULLETIN.<sup>2</sup> In that lecture I was mainly occupied with questions about the use of the prayer in the early Church and the extent to which this use for liturgical or catechetical purposes had modified its original form. As a result of the discussion it was possible to suggest that the earliest recoverable form of the Lord's Prayer was something like this :

Father, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our bread for the coming day.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass  
against us.

And lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from the evil.

Today I should like to leave questions of textual, literary and historical criticism on one side, and consider the prayer as a religious exercise or " means of grace ". I propose to ask what kind of religious belief is presupposed in the person who utters this prayer sincerely. What kind of God is it to whom this prayer can be addressed ? What kind of attitude towards God is to be engendered by the devout use of the prayer ? What hopes and desires are expressed in its petitions ? It is with such questions as these in mind that we are to study the text of the Lord's Prayer.

It begins " Father, hallowed be thy name ". I think that the opening address, " Father ", and the first petition, " Hallowed be thy name " are a single sentence, and that the full significance

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 7th of December 1955.

<sup>2</sup> BULLETIN, xxxviii (1955), pp. 99-113.

of it cannot be appreciated unless it is seen on the background of Jewish feeling and practice regarding the name of God. In the Decalogue the commandment was given, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain".<sup>1</sup> Jewish interpreters tended to understand the commandment as forbidding the indiscriminate use of the divine name to strengthen asseverations, even if the asseverations were in fact true. And that went with a deepening reverence which prohibited the use of the personal name of the God of Israel, except under special restrictions in the course of the Temple worship. One result of this reverence for the name of God was that in the reading of Scripture the so-called Tetragrammaton—YHWH, usually represented in our English versions by "the LORD", sometimes erroneously transliterated Jehovah—was never pronounced. Instead, the word *Adonai* was used; and it is this word that is rendered by "the LORD" in our Bibles. In the Synagogue *Adonai* was the perpetual surrogate for the divine name. The use of it, rather than the utterance of the Tetragrammaton, was one way of hallowing the name of God.

I suggest that in the opening words of the Lord's Prayer Jesus is putting forward a new surrogate for the Tetragrammaton, a new way of hallowing the name of God. Instead of saying "*Adonai*—Lord", his disciples are to say, "*Abba*—Father". On this change there are a number of things to be noted.

First is the fact that *Abba* was an expression in the commonest everyday use. It would be heard constantly in every family circle in Palestine, for it was the normal form of address by children to their fathers. It was as familiar as "Dad" in this country or "Papa" on the Continent. All over the world *Abba* and its equivalents are the natural expression of the trust and confidence of the child in his father, as well as of the filial respect due to the head of the family. And when Jesus tells his hearers that it is necessary to humble oneself and become like a child in order to enter the Kingdom of God,<sup>2</sup> he is not suggesting that

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xx. 7; Deut. v. 11; cf. Lev. xix. 12 and Strack-Billerbeck, *Komm.* i. 326 f.

<sup>2</sup> Mark x. 15; Matt. xviii. 3 f.; Luke xviii. 17.

the child is the possessor of virtues which his elders have lost, and that adults should take lessons in morality from their children. He is pointing to the plain fact that the child is dependent on his father and that in any decent family the relation between parent and child is that of care and protection on the one side and dependence and trust on the other. This means that the primary condition of entry into the Kingdom of God is total trust in God springing from a sense of total dependence upon him. The total love of God, which is required in the first and greatest commandment,<sup>1</sup> springs naturally from this trust and dependence.

At the same time this close and intimate affection, expressed in the word *Abba*, is not allowed to degenerate into cheap and easy familiarity. It is true that Jesus himself used the word in his prayers.<sup>2</sup> It is true that, as the Lord's Prayer itself witnesses, he meant his followers to use it in their prayers. It is true that in the earliest days of the Church the members did use it.<sup>3</sup> It is also true that Jesus exercised a certain reserve in speaking about these matters. In the Synoptic Gospels what he has to say about God as Father is said to his disciples : it is not broadcast to the general public.<sup>4</sup> This fact illuminates and is illuminated by the first clause of the Lord's Prayer, "May thy name be hallowed". The name of God for the devout Jew was the ineffable name, for which he substituted the word Lord (*Adonai*). That name is still to be hallowed even when the new substitute Father (*Abba*) takes the place of Lord. The God who is addressed as "Father" is also Lord, "Lord of heaven and earth",<sup>5</sup> and the opening words of the Lord's Prayer speak in one breath of simple trust, confident love and deepest reverence. The God who is addressed in this way is the supreme Lord,

<sup>1</sup> Deut. vi. 4 ; Mark xii. 29 f.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 36 ; cf. Matt. xi. 25 ; Luke x. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 15 ; Gal. iv. 6. On the whole it seems probable that Gentile Christians in the earliest days were encouraged to use the Aramaic word *Abba*, even though it was a foreign word to them, perhaps because the example of Jesus himself sanctioned the use.

<sup>4</sup> The evidence for this statement is set out in my book, *The Teaching of Jesus*, Ch. IV.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xi. 25 ; Luke x. 21.

before whose glory the angels veil their faces : he is also the Father who knows and cares for his children individually.

Next we have the double petition, "Thy kingdom come ; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". We may, I think, feel confident that these two clauses are closely linked together. Tertullian<sup>1</sup> thought otherwise and wished to interpret the coming of the Kingdom entirely in terms of the end of the world and the winding up of the existing order. But in order to carry through his interpretation he had to make an arbitrary inversion of the order of the petitions so that the doing of God's will on earth precedes the coming of the Kingdom. For such a change there is no manuscript authority whatever. I venture to think that Tertullian was wrong, and that the teaching of Jesus as a whole shows three distinct ways of looking at the Kingdom or Sovereignty of God. There is one sense in which it is eternal, a basic relation between the Creator and his creatures. It is simply there, and there is no more sense in asking whether it is past, present, or future than there is in asking whether the Fatherhood of God is past, present, or future. In another way of looking at it the Sovereignty of God, his kingly rule, is a present reality. It is something which men and women can receive, enter into, enjoy, here and now : and in two principal ways. First by experiencing its beneficent powers : "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then surely the Kingdom of God has come upon you."<sup>2</sup> In other words, "If I by the power of God take men and women, set them on their feet, and enable them to have a life really worth living, that shows clearly that the Sovereignty of God is a present reality among you". Secondly, the Sovereignty of God is experienced as a present reality where the Rule of God is accepted by the individual as his supreme loyalty. The teaching of Jesus is full of the unconditional claims which the present Kingdom makes on its subjects here and now. It is central to the Gospel account of the matter that the present Kingdom is closely identified with the person and work of Jesus the Messiah : his beneficent activities are the gifts of the Kingdom ; his claims on his followers are its demands.

<sup>1</sup> See BULLETIN, xxxviii (1955), pp. 108 f.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 20 ; Matt. xii. 28. Cf. Luke x. 8-12.

The third way of looking at the Kingdom is concerned with a consummation that lies in the future. This consummation may be regarded as the final and complete victory of the Kingdom of God over the Kingdom of Satan. It marks the subjection of every will that is hostile to the will of God.

Which of these three senses is involved in the double petition, "Thy kingdom come ; Thy will be done on earth as in heaven ?" It seems to me that all three senses are present. The will of God that is *done* in heaven—one might almost say as a matter of course—is the eternal Sovereignty of God, which is shown by the order and regularity of the movements of the heavenly bodies<sup>1</sup> no less than by the implicit obedience of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. The present Kingdom is implied in, "Thy will be done on earth", which, as the early Fathers were quick to realize and point out, meant, "Thy will be done for me and by me". The final consummation is implicit in the petition, "Thy Kingdom come". The real presence of the Kingdom here and now points forward to and requires a completion. The fact that in the present time some knees bow and some tongues confess inexorably demands the coming time when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess.

This interweaving of eternal, present, and future in a single religious experience can be illustrated by two observations. The first concerns the petition, "Thy Kingdom come". It is clear enough that when the Lord's Prayer was taken into liturgical use in the primitive Church, this petition was taken in with it. But strangely enough we have another petition in equally early use in the Church, a petition which says not, "Thy Kingdom come" but "Our Lord come". This petition appears in its original Aramaic form in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians,<sup>2</sup> as *Marana tha*, meaning, "Come, our Lord". It is implied in the prayer of the Seer in Revelation xxii. 20. It appears again in the eucharistic prayer in the *Didache* :<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for example Ps. xix ; *Psalms of Solomon*, xviii. 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 22. *μαρانا θα* = מָרְנָא תָּא. This, I think, is the correct division of the letters. Cf. Dalman, *Gramm.*<sup>2</sup> 152, n. 3, 357, n. 1 ; Billerbeck, *Komm.* iii. 493 f. The alternative division *Maran atha*, "Our Lord is coming", established itself early. Cf. Wordsworth and White, *N.T. Latine*, ii. 278, ad 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Didache*, x. 5 f.

“Remember, Lord, thy Church to deliver it from all evil and to perfect it in thy love ; and gather it together from the four winds—even the Church which has been sanctified—into thy Kingdom which thou hast prepared for it ; for thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever. May grace come and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If any man is holy, let him come ; if any man is not, let him repent. Marana tha. Amen.”

It seems to me that we may put “Thy Kingdom come” and “Our Lord come” side by side in a kind of theological equation. Then we can say that the completed victory of the Lord Jesus is the same thing as the final consummation of the Kingdom of God. And “completed victory” in this context means what it says : as St. Paul says about the Risen Christ, “He must go on reigning till he has put all enemies under his feet”.<sup>1</sup> The final consummation is the completion of something that is already really present ; the completed victory is the end of a campaign in which the decisive battle is already fought and won. There is genuine continuity between the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and the final triumph of his cause.

We can go a step farther and say that the equation of the two petitions points to an equation of Christ and the Kingdom of God. We know that this equation was made by Origen when he used the word *αὐτοβασιλεία* of Christ ; and there is a real sense in which it is true to say that wherever Christ is, there is the Kingdom of God both in the beneficent power which it manifests and the absolute obedience which it demands. This truth is nowhere more clearly visible than when we put side by side the petition, “Thy will be done on earth as in heaven”, and that other prayer in Gethsemane “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee ; take away this cup from me. Nevertheless not what I will but what thou wilt”.<sup>2</sup> That is the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. And it is to be noted that when we come to the top level of obedience in God's Kingdom it is no longer a matter of detailed obedience to commandments in a Code of Laws ; it is not even loyalty to some lofty idea of conduct ; it is a personal relation, the total submission of will to will, total expendibility in the service of the Heavenly King.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 36.

With that the first main part of the prayer is completed. It has been addressed to a God who exists in transcendent holiness, yet is near to his children ; whose presence means life and health and peace ; whose rule demands complete devotion and unhesitating obedience. He is a God who must be revered and obeyed : he is also, and first, a God who can be trusted and loved.

We now pass to the expression of man's dependence and trust in the requests made for provision to meet his most urgent needs.

The first is for daily bread, the material provision that is necessary for God's servants that they may carry on their daily tasks. It seems clear that the meaning of the Greek word translated "daily" is something like "for the coming day". The petition was put originally into the mouths of men who were accustomed to working by the day, and seldom having in hand enough money or food to cover their needs for a long time ahead. It is a prayer not for security but for sustenance : for a job to do tomorrow and the physical resources to do it. But we should misinterpret it if we narrowed it down to mean that we must all live from hand to mouth. It is legitimate, surely, that the obedience which undertakes a task that will last a month or a year should be able to pray for provision that will last as long as the task. What is desired is such freedom from anxiety as will enable the whole man to concentrate himself and his powers on the work that has to be done.

In this connexion it would be appropriate—and I can only mention the fact—to consider the bearing of this petition both on the practice of Jesus and his disciples, and on the community of goods practised by the first Christians in Jerusalem—and, so far as we know, by no other primitive Christian community. It is a fact that Jesus and his disciples seem to have sat very light to material possessions. When the disciples were sent out they were instructed to rely for food on the people to whom their mission was directed. Jesus was constantly guest in other people's houses. When he and the Twelve were in Jerusalem at the close of the ministry, and he needed a Roman denarius to make a point in an argument, he had to borrow it. The primitive

Church in Jerusalem, it would seem, adopted the practice of realizing the capital assets of individual members in order to provide for the daily needs of the community as a whole. There is matter here for closer study ; and I do not venture more than a suggestion. It is that, as Jesus sees it, all work that is respectable is and must be service. The motive behind the service is gratitude to God and man : " Freely you have received ; freely give." It must also be the response to human needs seen sympathetically. Such service is not a commodity to be bought and sold in the world's markets. It has no price. But those who give it have to live. What they receive is not payment but sustenance ; and the sustenance should be such as will enable them to do the best of which they are capable. Since ultimately all such service is rendered to the community as a whole, it is for the community to sustain those who render it. And that is as far as I dare to venture into the field of Christian Economics.

" Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." I have little to add here to what I said in the previous lecture. The point that needs to be kept constantly in mind is that where forgiveness is concerned we are never confronted by a simple linear relation between God and man. It is always at least a triangle : God, my neighbour, and I. In the matter of sin and forgiveness, man never appears before God as an isolated individual, but always as man in society. His sins have repercussions on other people and other people's sins have repercussions on him. He appears before God linked up with his neighbours in countless ways. Any effective forgiveness must penetrate this barbed-wire entanglement of human estrangements and wrongs. And if it is to do so there must be wire-cutting on man's side as well as God's. So long as we remain completely hard and unforgiving, the barbed-wire entanglement remains impenetrable.<sup>1</sup>

" Lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from the evil." This petition has always caused great perplexity to devout souls. The question is asked, " But would God lead us into temptation?" Is it consonant with what we believe about God to suppose that

<sup>1</sup> I would draw attention to some admirable remarks on forgiveness in E. Stauffer's *New Testament Theology*, p. 178.



he would expose us to such grave dangers? The early Fathers were well aware of the difficulty. Tertullian, for example, paraphrases and says the meaning is, "Do not allow us to be led into temptation, namely by him who tempts". That is, "Do not allow us to be tempted by the Devil". Ambrose says, "Do not allow us to be led into temptation . . . which we are not able to endure". Cyril of Jerusalem, on the other hand, argues that we must not seek to be exempt from temptation. This is shown by the following clause, "deliver us from the evil", which would be superfluous if "lead us not" meant total exemption from temptation.

There are two main questions which must be answered before we can be sure of the force of the petition as a whole. The first concerns the meaning of the word "temptation". As it is used nowadays it is practically confined to the one sense of outward enticement or inward urge to do something morally wrong. But the Greek word *πειρασμός* has a much wider range of meaning. It can mean temptation to do wrong; it can also, and quite commonly, mean "trial", "testing", especially the difficulties and dangers that may face the good man who is trying to do his duty to God and his neighbours. An excellent example of this meaning of the word is in Ecclesiasticus ii. 1 ff.

My son, if thou comest to serve the Lord,  
 Prepare thy soul for temptation (*εἰς πειρασμόν*).  
 Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure,  
 And make not haste in time of calamity.  
 Cleave unto him, and depart not,  
 That thou mayest be increased at thy latter end.  
 Accept whatsoever is brought upon thee,  
 And be longsuffering in varied humiliations.  
 For gold is tested by fire,  
 And acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.

Here it is plain that what is called "temptation" is the whole mass resistance of the baser elements in mankind to the claims of God. This resistance shows itself in contempt for God's servants, opposition to them, open persecution of them; all of which is directed towards undermining their loyalty to God and breaking their resolve to obey his commands. The evidence of the Gospels supports this interpretation of the word. In the

explanation of the parable of the Sower, St. Mark (iv. 17) has "affliction or persecution" and St. Luke in the parallel passage (viii. 13) has "time of testing" (*πειρασμοῦ*). In Luke xxii. 28 Jesus says to the disciples, "You are the men who have stood by me in my trials" (*ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου*), that is, in all the hardship and opposition in which his ministry has involved him. Again, at the moment when all the hostility of his enemies is coming to a head, he says to the disciples in Gethsemane, "pray that you may not come into testing" (*ἵνα μὴ ἔλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν*),<sup>1</sup> where the meaning seems quite clearly to be, "pray that you may not have to bear the fiercest assaults of the enemy". This saying is particularly instructive because it comes so close in its wording to the petition of the Lord's Prayer, and because the whole story shows how Jesus meant a petition of this kind to be prayed. He had just done so; and his prayer had said two things: "Take away this cup", expressing the perfectly natural human revulsion against suffering and death; and "Not my will but thine", expressing unconditional loyalty and obedience to God.<sup>2</sup> We may conclude that "temptation" in the Lord's Prayer stands for those forces which would entice or drive God's servants into disloyalty to him; and since to fall into such disloyalty is to fall into the greatest misfortune possible, it is very right and proper that one should ask to be spared the trial. At the same time it is of the very nature of the case that he who prays this prayer should be ready and willing to undergo the trial, if need be, in the service of the Kingdom. In that event the second part of the petition, "Deliver us from the evil", appears in its full significance.

The Greek verb here translated "deliver" is commonly used in the Greek Old Testament to describe God's deliverance of his people either from personal enemies or from difficulties and perils. The idea conveyed by the word is that of being snatched out of present and pressing dangers rather than of being helped to evade them. The deliverer brings one through, not round, the place of peril. The classic statement of the matter is in the twenty-second Psalm, verses 4-8:

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 38; Matt. xxvi. 41; Luke xxii. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 36; Matt. xxvi. 39; Luke xxii. 42.

Our fathers trusted in thee :  
 They trusted and thou didst deliver them.  
 They cried unto thee, and were delivered :  
 They trusted in thee, and were not ashamed.  
 But I am a worm, and no man ;  
 A reproach of men, and despised of the people.  
 All they that see me laugh me to scorn :  
 They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,  
 Commit thyself unto the Lord ; let him deliver him :  
 Let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him.

It is significant that in St. Matthew's account of the Crucifixion words from this passage are put into the mouth of those who mocked Jesus : " The chief priests, along with the scribes and elders, mocked him and said, ' He saved others ; himself he cannot save. King of Israel is he ? Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He has put his trust in God ; let God deliver him now, if he is so fond of him : he certainly claimed to be God's son.' " <sup>1</sup>

These passages—and many others—show plainly enough what is meant by deliverance, and who is the Deliverer. At the Crucifixion the deliverance did not come in the way suggested by the mocking bystanders ; but it did come ; and it came as victory, not escape. Victory over whom or what ?

This question brings us to the last of our problems of exegesis : is " the evil " in this petition to be understood as the evil one or the evil condition ? Grammatically both possibilities are open, and there is nothing in the actual wording to show which is intended. In the Church there has been no unanimity.<sup>2</sup> The Eastern Fathers generally construed the Greek words as masculine and understood the deliverance to be deliverance from the power of Satan. In the west Tertullian<sup>3</sup> clearly understood " the evil " to mean the Devil. In Cyprian's comment on the clause<sup>4</sup> the Devil is still prominent ; but we can discern the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvii. 41 ff.

<sup>2</sup> For a full account and careful discussion of the evidence from the Bible texts, early versions, and early Fathers see F. H. Chase, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church* (1891), pp. 71-176. Much of the early patristic comment is given in English in H. Smith, *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*, ii (1926), pp. 270-80. See also Haussleiter in *Hauck-Herzog Realenc.* xx. 444 ; G. F. Diercks, *Tertullianus De Oratione* (1947), pp. 127 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *De Oratione*, viii ; *de Fuga*, ii.

<sup>4</sup> *De Oratione Dominica*, xxv-xxvii.

tendency to take "the evil" as referring to his hostile acts rather than to himself.<sup>1</sup> This tendency to make "the evil" refer to evil things rather than to their author gained ground in the West and became firmly fixed in the Authorised Version and the Book of Common Prayer. But the personal interpretation continued to be maintained ;<sup>2</sup> and it was adopted as first choice by the Revisers of 1881, the rendering "evil" being relegated to the margin in Matthew vi. 13 and to second place in the margin at Luke xi. 4. Which is right ?

If we consider only the dictionary meanings of the word *πονηρός*, there seem to be three possible interpretations of the clause :

- (a) *τοῦ πονηροῦ* is masculine and means the evil person *par excellence*, the Devil.
- (b) *τοῦ πονηροῦ* is neuter and means evil action.
- (c) *τοῦ πονηροῦ* is neuter and means misfortune.

Of these (c) may be left on one side as most unlikely. Looking at (b) two possibilities emerge : the evil action may be wrongs committed by him who prays or wrongs suffered by him. If we understand the petition to be for deliverance from the power of sin, we should have to understand *πειρασμός* in the preceding clause in the sense of moral temptation. But this, though possible, seems less likely than the trials to which the loyal servant of God is exposed. We should, therefore, understand that the primary reference is to the hostile attempts to frustrate the servants of God in their work for him and to detach them from his service. But hostile activities imply a hostile agent ; and deliverance from the threats and assaults of the enemy is deliverance from the enemy himself. Conversely, deliverance from the enemy is deliverance from his attacks. We may

<sup>1</sup> *De Oratione Dominica*. xxvii. "in nouissimo enim ponimus : *sed libera nos a malo*, comprehendentes aduersa cuncta quae contra nos in hoc mundo molitur inimicus, a quibus potest esse firma et fida tutela, si nos Deus liberet ?"

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Suicer, *Thesaurus s.v. πονηρός* ; Grotius, *Annotationes in Libros Evangeliorum* (1641), p. 147 ; Calvin, *Harmonia* (1572), p. 91. Calvin allows that both the masculine and neuter interpretations are possible : the word "evil" may mean Satan or sin. He adds : "Nec de ea re mouendum est certamen : quia idem fere manet sensus, nos scilicet diabolo & peccato esse expositos nisi nos tueatur dominus & eripiat."

conclude that whether *τοῦ πονηροῦ* means "the Devil and all his works" or "the evil forces at work in the world and the will that lies behind them" is not in practice a question of very great moment. The whole petition says in effect to God: "If possible let us serve thee in peace and quietness; but keep us faithful, come what may."

So we may sum up the second part of the Lord's Prayer as asking for the means to do the work that falls to us, forgiveness for errors and failures in our duty to God and man, and protection against all that might lead us into complete dereliction of duty and apostasy from God. The God who is approached in these petitions is one who is able and willing to provide for the needs of his creatures; one who is always ready to welcome the true penitent, the penitent, that is, who has discovered that the basic evil of sin is that it estranges men from God and from each other and locks them up in the prison of their own selfishness; a God, finally, who is able and willing to defend his own and to give them victory over evil.

When we look at the Prayer as a whole, it points to a God who is to be loved, honoured, obeyed, and trusted in all circumstances. When we look at the ministry of Jesus we see the prayer prayed and the answer given; and it becomes plain that the best exposition of the Lord's Prayer is the life, death, and resurrection of him who taught it.