

THE "LORD'S PRAYER" AND THE DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

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1. Introduction

Prayer is the language of our relationship with God. This relationship must express itself throughout our life, because every iota of our being is linked to God. Prayer is principally not 'saying' something before God, but 'being' in the dynamic presence of God. In other words, prayer is more a matter of 'being with' God than of 'talking' to God. It is essentially a relationship culminating in our communion with God. The foundation of Christian prayer is Jesus' own experience of prayer and his teachings about prayer. Before he taught his disciples about prayer, first he lived the life of prayer. Some important prayer moments in Jesus' life, which reveal his deepest personality, are mentioned in the Gospels, and these are typical of his life-style. For example, in Mk 1:35 we read: "And in the morning, a great while before day, he [Jesus] rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed."¹ The expression, "*he prayed*" is used here absolutely, that is, without any predicate.² It is not mentioned, as in Mk 14:35, what he prayed for. Hence, the simple clause "he prayed" implies that Jesus was in a personal relationship with his Father; that he

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¹As a general rule, the text of RSV is followed here and hereafter, because of its avowed faithfulness to the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek original. Wherever it is found necessary, the NRSV text is also used.

²Mk 6:46; Lk 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18 are some other instances of such absolute use. In many other instances where Jesus is presented as praying, his prayer has assumed different forms; for example, there are prayers of praise and thanksgiving (Mt 11:25-26; Lk 10:21), prayers of intercession (Lk 22:31-32; 23:34), submission (Lk 22:42) and surrender (Lk 23:46).

was in communion with his Father. This personal relationship with God is what we call prayer. Jesus is thus the supreme paradigm or example for it and he demands from his disciples the same kind of relationship with him: "And he appointed the twelve, *to be with him...*" (Mk 3:14). "To be with him," means to have fellowship with him, to have communion with him, to have a deep and intimate relationship with him.

The purpose of all prayer is to enter into a deep relationship with God (vertical relationship). But we cannot enter into real relationship with God unless we try to enter into a healthy relationship with our fellow brethren (horizontal relationship). This is what Jesus brings out beautifully in Mt 5:23-24.³ God is more interested in our relationship with others than with our sacrifices (see also Is 1:15-17; Mic 6:8). This twofold communion with God and the neighbour is very well seen in the "Lord's Prayer." The first three "you-petitions" help us to enter into a vertical relationship with God as Father and King and the last three "we-petitions," especially the first two "we-petitions," help us to enter into a horizontal relationship with our brethren. Devotion to God and devotion to one's neighbour go together. When a person breaks his contact with others, his contact with God is also broken, and in such a situation there cannot be any real prayer (see Lk 18:9-14). One can approach God in prayer and worship only when one is united with one's neighbour in love. Lord's Prayer is, indeed, an ideal prayer where Jesus teaches his disciples not only to establish contact with God and their neighbour, but also how to deepen that contact with both.

The most basic form of prayer that we find in the Gospels is petition: "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Mt 7:7).³ Almost all the sayings of Jesus on prayer recorded in the Synoptic Gospels are about prayer of petition; thus, the expression "to pray" in the Gospels is almost synonymous with "to ask."⁴ The effectiveness of such a prayer is affirmed

³In the Gospels we find Jesus strongly encouraging his followers to use petitionary prayer. The prayer of petition is essentially the recognition and acceptance of our weakness and nothingness - an existential emptiness which only God can fill, Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, New Edition, Eng. trans., New Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, 71.

⁴George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Speaking to Abba," in *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.*, vol. 3: *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, ed. Scaria Kuthirakkattel, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2003, 48.

repeatedly in forceful language: "Ask, and it will be given to you"; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Mt 7:7 = Lk 11:9). Here Jesus speaks with a firmness that allows no restriction or limit or condition; his affirmation that prayer is heard is universal and absolute.⁵

2. Jesus as the Teacher of the "Lord's Prayer"

For the Christians, Jesus is the greatest teacher of prayer. The whole spiritual experience of Jesus based on his prayer life was the dynamic force of his activity. Any prayer of Jesus, especially, Lord's Prayer, helps us enter into the mind and heart of the Master himself. The Lord's Prayer is, indeed, "the Christian prayer *par excellence*." It has an enduring quality because it possesses intensely divine aspects as well as intensely human aspects. It recalls to our mind our most fundamental relationship with God and at the same our most abiding needs. This prayer contains the important themes of Christian faith – the Fatherhood of God, the hope for the perfect reign of God and perfect doing of God's will, humans' utter dependence on God for everything that relates to their daily sustenance, forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the powers of evil and sin. The Lord's Prayer, indeed, has been a teacher of Christian faith from early times. Lord's Prayer contains in nutshell the central elements of Jesus' teaching. According to Tertullian, the Lord's Prayer is truly "an epitome of the whole Gospel."⁶

3. The Influence of OT and Judaism on the Lord's Prayer

It was in the first century Jewish Aramaic environment of Palestine that Jesus had taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer. The words and language Jesus used in this prayer are to be understood against their OT and Jewish backgrounds. Prayer is an essential element in the religious life of Israel, because her whole history is permeated with the spirit of prayer. Israel was characteristically and pre-eminently a praying people. Jesus might have been very familiar with the prayer forms of the Hebrew Bible and inherited the prayer culture of the OT religion. Though we cannot see exact parallels between the Lord's Prayer and the prayers of the OT, here and there we can find some correspondences between them. The description of God as

⁵Soares-Prabhu, "Speaking to Abba," 48-49.

⁶*On Prayer*, chapter 2, Eng. trans., in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963, 681.

"father" is a recurring trait of the OT prayer. For example, in Dt 32:6 and Is 63:16 God is called the "father" of Israel and Israelites implicitly his children. The petition "hallowed be your name" finds its echo in some of the OT texts, such as Lev 22:32, "I will be hallowed among the people of Israel"; Is 29:23, "they will sanctify my name" (see also Is 29:23; Ezek 20:12; Sir 36:4). The prayer, "your kingdom come" is echoed in Dan 2:44, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." The clause "*Your will be done*" occurs in a different form in 1 Macc 3:59-60, "It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and the sanctuary. But as *his will in heaven* may be, so he will do." The thought of the petition, "give us today our daily bread," is expressed differently in Prov 30:8, "feed me with the food that is needful for me." In the same way, the idea contained in the petition, "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," is well expressed in Sir 28:2, "forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray." The petition, "but deliver us from evil," finds its echo in Ps 59:2, "deliver me from those who work evil."

As a Jew, Jesus might have been familiar with the prayers of Judaism, too. In Jesus' time the tradition of prayer among the Jews had been gradually expressed in various regulations. All the Israelite men were obliged to recite every morning and evening the *Shema Israel*. Another great prayer of Judaism is "*Tephillah*," which is also known as "the Eighteen Benedictions" or the *Amidah*. According to rabbinical injunction, prayer must begin with the praise of God and only thereafter should follow the petitions about the needs of the praying person.⁷ "The Eighteen Benedictions" fall into three parts: the first part, consisting of three Benedictions, gives praise to God for his sovereignty, power and holiness; the last part, consisting of three Benedictions, gives thanks to God for his goodness and it closes with a prayer for peace. The middle section, consisting of twelve Benedictions, forms a series of petitions for the needs, spiritual and material, of the community and of its individual members. Thus, the Eighteen Benedictions show the pattern of rabbinical prayer: *praise, petition, and thanksgiving*. The Lord's Prayer has the same three parts. The first part offers praise to God by asking that his name be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done. Then come petitions for

⁷Herbert Jai Singh, *The Lord's Prayer*, Bangalore: ISPCK for the CISRS, 1985, 70.

human needs, and finally, the doxology, which, again, praises God. In the original text of the Lord's Prayer there was no doxology; probably it was added later in order to provide a third part to the Lord's Prayer.⁸ "Eighteen Benedictions" is the chief prayer of Judaism and every Israelite, including women, children, and even slaves, is required to recite it three times a day, in the morning, the afternoon and the evening. This reminds us of the important directive given by *Didache* concerning the recital of the Lord's Prayer: "Three times a day thus shall you pray." Jesus, in his boyhood and adulthood, might have prayed these prayers of Judaism. When we compare the Lord's Prayer with other Jewish prayers current in the first century, especially, the Kaddish⁹ and the Eighteen Benedictions, we can easily find that there are some formal similarities between them, but the present form is due to Matthew and his community.¹⁰ These similarities only add depth and radiance to the Lord's Prayer.

Against this background, it is worth-mentioning the similarities between the Lord's Prayer and the Jewish prayers in their structural form.¹¹

Our Father who art in heaven	Our Father, our King (<i>Rabbi Akiba</i> ¹²)
Hallowed be your name	Exalted and hallowed be His great Name (<i>Kaddish</i>)
Your kingdom come	May He establish His kingdom (<i>Kaddish</i>)
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven	Your will be done in heaven above (<i>Tosephta Berakoth</i> 3:7)
Give us this day our daily bread	Satiate us out of Your goodness. Bless our year like the good years (<i>Eighteen Benedictions</i> , No. 9)
And forgive us our debts as we also have	Forgive us, our Father, for we have

⁸Gordon J. Bahr, "The Use of the Lord's Prayer in the Primitive Church," in Jakob J. Petuchowski and Michael Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, eng. trans., London: Burns & Oates, 1978, 152-153.

⁹*Kaddish* ("Holy") is an ancient Aramaic prayer, which formed the conclusion of the service in the synagogue and with which Jesus might have been familiar from childhood.

¹⁰M. Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol.8: *Matthew-Mark*, Senior NT ed. L.E. Keck, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 202.

¹¹Adapted from Herbert Jochum, "Teaching Lord's Prayer," in Petuchowski and Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 186-187 and Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Jewish Prayer Texts of the Rabbinic Period," in Petuchowski and Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 30-39.

forgiven our debtors

And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil

sinned (*Eighteen Benedictions*, No. 6)

Look at our affliction, and champion our
cause. And redeem us speedily for the
sake of your Name (*Eighteen
Benedictions*, No. 7).

However, the Lord's Prayer, as it exists now, has no equivalent counterpart either in the Old Testament or in Judaism and it has its own uniqueness and excellence. It is noted for its "simplicity, conciseness, clarity, and spiritual comprehensiveness."

4. Two Forms of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13 = Lk 11:2-4)

We have two forms of the Lord's Prayer: the familiar longer version of Matthew (6:9-13) and the shorter version of Luke (11:2b-4). It is Matthew's version that has always been used in our daily prayer and in our liturgy. When we compare the texts of Matthew with that of Luke in parallel columns we can find the characteristic differences:¹³

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father who art in heaven,

1. Hallowed be your name.
2. Your kingdom come.
3. *Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*
4. Give us *this day* our daily bread.
5. And forgive us our *debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*
- 6a. And lead us not into temptation,
- 6b. *but deliver us from evil.*

Luke 11:2b-4

Father,

1. Hallowed be your name.
2. Your kingdom come.
3. Give us *each day* our daily bread.
4. And forgive us our *sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*
5. And lead us not into temptation.

First of all, the most striking difference is that the Lord's Prayer in Matthew is longer than in Luke. In Luke, God is addressed simply as "Father"; in Matthew there is the addition of "our" and "in heaven." In Luke the third petition of Matthew is omitted. In the fourth petition Luke has changed "this day" of Matthew to "each day." In the first clause of the

¹²Rabbi Akiba, B. Taanith 25b. This is the earliest recorded version dating back to 2nd century.

¹³The Matthean and the Lucan texts that are given below are adapted from RSV and NRSV based on the Greek text.

fifth petition Luke has used "sins" in the place of Matthew's "debts," and in the second clause of this petition Luke has employed the expression "everyone indebted to us" in the place of Matthew's "our debtors." Again, in the place of Matthew's past tense, "as we also have forgiven," Luke has used the present tense, "for we ourselves forgive." In Matthew, the sixth petition is extended as to include "but deliver us from evil."

If we ask, which version, whether of Matthew or Luke, is original, it is difficult to answer. According to Joachim Jeremias, the shorter text in Luke is to be regarded as the original one and the text in Matthew is to be considered as an expanded one basing on the Lucan text and his argument is that "no one would have dared to shorten a sacred text like the Lord's Prayer and to leave out two petitions if they had formed part of the original tradition."¹⁴ The two petitions that are omitted in Luke are the third ("Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven") and the second part of the sixth petition in Matthew ("but deliver us from evil"). J. Jeremias takes the second part of the sixth petition in Matthew as the seventh petition. The Lord's Prayer as given by Matthew has a better rhythm and its wording is more Semitic, and, hence, his language in many places is the more original. The difference in the Matthean and Lucan forms of prayer shows that the first Christians were convinced that the fidelity to Jesus' thought was more important than the exact material reproduction of his words. This also holds true regarding the Eucharistic words.

The concluding doxology, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen" (see the RSV and NRSV margins), appears in some of the later manuscripts of Matthew. Probably the ancient church added this doxology for ending the prayer with praise and for liturgical reasons. The doxology is modelled after the prayer of David in 1 Chron 29:11. The Lord's Prayer is also found in the *Didache* and is almost identical with the Matthean version with some minor changes.

5. The Different Contexts of the Two Versions

a. The Matthean context

The context in which the Lord's Prayer is given in Matthew and Luke differs from each other. Matthew inserts the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon

¹⁴*The Prayers of Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, No. 6, London: SCM Press, 1967, 90.

on the Mount, which has been delivered by Jesus early in his public ministry. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus, first of all, teaches, by means of six antitheses, the new radical approach his disciples should adopt in their relationship with their fellow-humans (Mt 5:21-48). Next, Jesus teaches his disciples what should be their new relationship with God and how they should express this new relationship in their religious observance or piety (6:1-18). Jesus gives a general warning not to exhibit their "piety" before others to be seen; the practice of piety is to be directed to God alone (Mt 6:1). The three different forms of piety in Judaism are *almsgiving*, *prayer*, and *fasting* (see Tobit 12:8) and Jesus accepts these as central to the religious life of his disciples, too. They are treated in three passages (Mt 6:2-4, 5-6, 16-18), which have a parallel structure. Each passage has a negative part (6:2, 5, 16), followed by a matching positive part (6:3-4, 6, 17-18). Mt 6:7-15 is a long digression on prayer and interrupts the carefully balanced structure. This digression on prayer is probably an insertion by Matthew, made up of independent sayings of Jesus, including the Lord's Prayer.¹⁵

Let us take the long section on prayer (Mt 6:5-15) as it is given in the Gospel text. This section could be seen as a catechesis on prayer meant for the instruction of the newly baptized in the Matthean community and the Lord's Prayer forms a part (and indeed, the heart) of this instruction on prayer.¹⁶ The Matthean Church, mostly consisting of Jewish Christians, already knows the art of prayer from their childhood and, therefore, they need only to be warned and admonished about the *quality* of prayer and the dispositions required when praying. They are to be taught about the right attitude and spirit of praying. In the Matthean context, the Lord's Prayer is a model prayer of how a faithful Christian should pray: brief, to the point, and sincerely. The Matthean version, with its additions, is clearly most appropriate for Jewish Christians. Indeed, there is nothing in it that a pious Jew of the first century or even today could not say.

b. The Lucan context

The Lucan version of the Lord's Prayer is sometimes called the "*Lord's Prayer for Gentile Christians*." The Lucan Church consisted mainly of Gentile converts and they *had to be taught* (Lk 11:1c, "Lord, teach us to

¹⁵Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 200.

¹⁶Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 88.

pray") and encouraged to pray (see Lk 11:5-13).¹⁷ Luke's setting for the prayer is very different from Matthew's. He probably gives the original context and gives the Lord's Prayer apparently much later in the public ministry of Jesus and in response to a specific request from one of the disciples, who asks Jesus to *teach* them to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray (Lk 11:1bc). Besides, Luke presents the Lord's Prayer in the living context of Jesus' own example of praying (11:1a). This shows that the teaching on prayer should not be separated from the life of prayer. Only a praying person can give an impressive lesson on prayer to others.

6. The Immediate Context of the Lord's Prayer

The significance of the Lord's Prayer is to be seen in the context of Jesus' teaching on prayer in general (6:5-15). In prayer the disciples of Jesus are to be different from "the hypocrites" (the Pharisees) and Gentiles. The hypocrites make a display of their prayer, which the disciples have to avoid (6:5). What the disciples are asked to do is to direct their prayer to God alone and not to others; it is such God-oriented prayer that is genuine and will be heard by God. Unlike the Pharisees, the disciples have to go to their "room" (6:6). The corresponding Greek word *tameion* means "inner room" (Mt 24:26), or "private room" (Lk 12:3). Scripture and early Christian writers refer to this "inner room" as symbolising the "heart," which is the core of our innermost being where man can be alone with the Alone and it is here Jesus tells his disciples and us to pray to our heavenly Father.¹⁸ The picture of the "inner room" takes us to the mystery of 'interiority', the "cave of the heart," which is characteristic of the Indian approach to the divine.¹⁹ It is in this interiority of the spirit, in this "cave of the heart," that God dwells and man establishes communion with Him.

¹⁷This section, Lk 11:5-13, consists of the parable of the friend at mid-night (vv. 5-8), which functions here as an encouragement to pray and an admonition to persevere in prayer, even if one's prayer is not heard immediately, and the sayings about the efficacy of the prayer (vv. 9-13).

¹⁸George A. Maloney, *Sparks from the Burning Bush: Growth in Deeper Prayer*, Second Indian Reprint, Bangalore: I. J. A. Publications, 2000, 137.

¹⁹Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point Within the Cave of the Heart*, trans. Sara Grant, Bombay: The Institute of Indian Culture, 1969, 24; see also V.F. Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 2004, 96: "The Indian accent is that God is sought in the depth of one's own self."

Prayer, in the Indian tradition, is seen as an inward journey – an *antar-yātra*, a pilgrimage to the centre of being.²⁰ This is the Indian (Eastern) approach of interiorization, where one discovers and realizes the Real within one's own interior depth, in the innermost recesses of the being.²¹

In Mt 6:7 Jesus criticizes the Gentile way of praying to God. They recite long prayers thinking that their many words will be heard (6:7). What is highlighted here is the pagan attempt to manipulate God through a flood of words. But Jesus tells his disciples that they should avoid this kind of 'praying'. Besides, they should realize the truth that what they need is already known to God (6:8; see also Is 65:24). Prayer does not inform God about our needs; God already knows the needs of his people (Mt 6:32; Lk 12:30). The stress on economy of words in prayer is already found in the OT (see Ecclesiastes 5:2; Sir 7:14). It is in this context that Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer as an example (or model) of a short prayer with complete trust in God's knowledge and providence.

7. Analysis of the Lord's Prayer as Given by Matthew

According to the Matthean form, first there is an invocation ("Our Father who art in heaven") and then the body of the prayer. The body of the prayer falls into two main parts: the first three "you-petitions" (6:9b-10) and the last three "we-petitions" (6:11-13).²² The first three petitions are concerned with the action of God in its cosmic dimension and the last three petitions are concerned with various human needs and God's providential care. The first three petitions are closely related and are prayers to God to act. Only God can sanctify his name; only God can establish his kingdom on earth; only God can create an order in which his will is done by all on earth as in heaven.

²⁰Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, revised ed., Delhi: ISPCCK, 1984, 65. See V. F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality: Christian Initiation into Indian Spiritual Traditions*, Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 1995, 27: "The classical Indian spirituality is primarily an inward journey in search of the depths of one's own interiority."

²¹V. F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 19.

²²The first three petitions (vv. 9c-10) are more or less parallel in form and all of them end in *sou* ("your") in the Greek original, and, therefore, they are called "you-petitions." They all use divine passives, thus referring to the agency of God in the fulfilment of the petitions. The last three petitions (vv. 11-13) are called "we-petitions" because of the frequent use of the first person plural pronouns.

a. Mt 6:9a: "Pray then like this"

It is important to note how Matthew introduces the Lord's Prayer in his Gospel: "Pray then *like this*" (*houtos oun proseuchesthe hymeis*). The use of the adverb *houtos* in the very beginning of the Greek text is very significant. The word *houtos* literally means, "in this way," "in this manner," "like this." This emphatic use of the word implies that the Lord's Prayer is given as an example of *how* to pray, rather than a formula prayer to be mechanically repeated. It also distinguishes the prayer of the disciples from that of others. This might mean that Jesus wants to give his disciples a *model* of prayer and a *pattern* on which they could model other prayers. Lord's Prayer is not the personal prayer of Jesus, but, strictly speaking, the "Prayer of the Disciples" and this prayer is meant by Jesus as a brief summing up of his message, which his disciples have to take along on their pilgrimages and apostolic journeys.²³ This prayer, which springs from the heart of the Master and the one in which his heart continues to beat, is his gift to the disciples.²⁴ The Lord's Prayer is an example of the ideal prayer. An ideal prayer should have two important parts: one devoted to the praise of God and the other devoted to the petitions of humans. In other words, it should have a heavenly dimension as well as an earthly dimension. Jesus has not given his disciples any method or 'technique' for praying, but he has told them *what* to pray and *how* to pray and the attitude they have to adopt when praying. They are to pray for the coming of the Kingdom and they are to pray with an attitude of a child with full faith and trust in the heavenly Father. While this prayer can be said privately, it is essentially a corporate prayer – a community prayer.²⁵ The request of the disciples at Lk 11:1b, "Lord, teach us to pray", shows that Jesus' disciples recognized themselves as a community and that they request of Jesus a prayer, which would bind them together and identify them and in which they would bring to expression their chief and common concerns.

²³John M. Oesterreicher, "Abba, Father! On the Humanity of Jesus," in Petuchowski and Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 133.

²⁴Oesterreicher, "Abba, Father!" 134.

²⁵According to William Barclay, *The Lord's Prayer*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, 10, the highest form of prayer is always the prayer of the community. The Jews had always feared selfishness in prayer. It is significant to note that the words, *I, me, my, and mine* never appear in the Lord's Prayer.

b. The invocation: "Our Father who art in heaven" (6:9b)

The simple form of invocation "Father," as given in Lk 11:2, is the more original and it is Jesus' own typical way of addressing God (see Mt 11:25,26; Lk 10:21; 22:42,46). In the 1st century AD both Jews and Greeks addressed God as "Father" (see Wisdom 14:3; Sir 23:1,4; 51:10). Matthew or the Matthean community, in view of the Jewish Christian audience, adapted the simple Lucan form "Father" into "our Father who art in heaven." This addition well corresponds with the phrase, "on earth," which was again added by the post-Easter community to the Matthean version of the third "you-petition": "your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10b).²⁶

It was characteristic of Jesus to pray to God addressing Him as *Abba* ("Father").²⁷ The term "*Abba*" was so original with Jesus that it was transmitted to us in its Aramaic form in Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15; and Gal 4:6. *Abba* is a term of special affection and intimacy. It connotes the intimate personal relation of Jesus to God. For Jesus, "Father" means the One who loves (Jn 3:16; 14:23; 1 Jn 4:10), forgives (see Lk 15:11-32) and knows how to give good gifts to his children (Mt 7:11). Jesus many times spoke with God as a son would with his father in an intimate and filial manner (see Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-22).

In the Israelite tradition the title "Father" (Hebrew: *ʾāb*) is used as an appellation for its covenantal God and it originates mostly in the exilic or post-exilic period (Dt 32:6; Is 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; 31:9).²⁸ The "Father-Mother" figure of God is very powerfully expressed in Hos 11:1-4 and Jer 31:20. Hence, it was no new truth that Jesus was revealing to his audience. However, Jesus has given a new depth and dimension to the notion of Fatherhood of God. First of all, Jesus empowers us to address God with the same endearing title, *Abba*, which he used in addressing

²⁶Vögtle, "The Lord's Prayer," 106.

²⁷Joachim Jeremias rightly understands the Aramaic *Abba* as the *ipsissima vox Jesu* ("Jesus' own utterance"), that is, Jesus actually used the invocation *Abba* and it was not simply attributed to him by the early Church, *The Prayers of Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, No. 6, ET, London: SCM Press, 1967, 57.

²⁸According to A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, International Critical Commentary, Edinburg: Clark, 1896, 296, God as Father of Israel is an OT image; the concept of God as Father to individual people begins to appear in intertestamental Judaism.

God. We do not find *Abba* as a form of address to God in any prayer of the Old Testament nor do we find any prayer that begins with the expression, "Father" or "Our Father." This is what we find in the Lord's Prayer and this is something unique to it. Secondly, Jesus, through his teaching in parables, has emphasized more powerfully than in the OT the love, care, and mercy of God the Father.

According to Joachim Jeremias, at the time of Jesus, children were used to call their father *Abba*, and, thus, it was the language of children.²⁹ He also observes that there is no instance in Jewish prayer literature of the vocative *Abba* being addressed to God and this is because, to the Jewish mind, it would have been disrespectful and therefore inconceivable to address God with this familiar word.³⁰ "For Jesus to venture to take up this step was something new and unheard of. He spoke to God like a child to its father, simply, inwardly, confidently; Jesus' use of *Abba* in addressing God reveals the heart of his relationship with God."³¹ "*Abba, Father!*" was the ceaseless prayer of Jesus and the remembrance of the Father was constantly in the heart and mind of Jesus. "Father" was the first word Jesus uttered in the Gospels (Lk 2:49) and it was his last word on earth (Lk 23:46). Jesus' address to God as *Abba* implies not only his filial and familiar relationship with God but also his total obedience and surrender to the Father. In Jesus' prayers, *Abba* is not only an expression of obedience and trust but also a firm sign of his unlimited abandonment to his Father's will, which is all-powerful. This is what we see in his prayer at Gethsemane (Mk 14:36). If we take the clause, "all things are possible to you," as part of the address, "*Abba, Father,*" then we could translate thus, *Abba, Father, You are the all-powerful One!*³² This supreme power that rules everything in this world is the power of love. At Gethsemane this love of the Father has become a 'suffering love', a love that 'suffers' for the salvation of humanity. The title, "Father," expresses God's innermost being that is his love in which humans find security and peace.

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus authorizes his disciples to address God as "*Abba, Father*" after him. This means that Jesus gives the disciples "a

²⁹Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 59-60.

³⁰Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 60, 62.

³¹Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 62.

³²Oesterreicher, "*Abba, Father!*" 125.

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."³³ Jesus, thus, makes this invocation "Abba, Father" as the very centre of their life of prayer and makes it their most cherished *mantra*, keeping it constantly on their lips, in their minds, and above all, in their hearts. By so doing, they will not only follow Jesus' example but also will share in what is deepest in him and central to his life and mission in relation to the Father and to all humankind.³⁴ Since Jesus distinguishes between "My Father" and "your Father" (Mt 7:11,21; Jn 20:17) Jesus' use of *Abba* expresses a special relationship with God. Here we have to remember that we, the adopted children of God, need an additional power to address God as "Father" and this power is given through the Holy Spirit who is dwelling within us (see Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7).

The first consequence of the realization of the Fatherhood of God is the recognition of the true brotherhood of humanity. Since God has adopted us as sons, we can and we must adopt each other as brothers and sisters (see Mt 23:8-9). The use of the first person plural "we," "our," and "us" throughout the Lord's Prayer presupposes that "this fraternal inclusiveness is taken for granted through the fatherhood of God."³⁵ The Fatherhood of God would be infringed if it did not include love and care for our fellow brethren.

The invocation, "Our Father who art *in heaven*" brings both immanence and transcendence. The One whom we call *Father* is at the same time supremely great: "God is in heaven, and you upon earth" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). What is implied here is the deep sense of holiness and majesty of God.³⁶ We address God intimately as *Father*, but we immediately recognize his infinite greatness. The invocation, thus, fuses together the idea of fatherly love and kingly authority, intimacy and majesty.

³³Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 97.

³⁴Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, 126.

³⁵Jean Carmignac, "The Spiritual Wealth of the Lord's Prayer," in Petuchowski and Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 140.

³⁶Donald Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, 21.

c. The first petition: "hallowed be your name" (6:9c)

This petition is a prayer for the holiness of God to be acknowledged by all. The word "hallow" means "to honour as holy." The clause in its Greek original literally means, "let your name be sanctified." What is meant by "God's name"? The "name" in biblical language sums up a person's whole character; it stands for the person himself (see Acts 4:12). The "name" of God refers to what God is in himself and also to what God is to others. When we know God's name, he really becomes God for us, that is, he ceases to be a mysterious unknown power and becomes a person with significance for our lives, helping us and challenging us (see Jer 16:21; Ps 83:18; read Is 52:6 along with 60:16). The expression, "hallowed be your name," does not mean that the God needs some sort of sanctification; He is all holy; "holy is his name" (Lk 1:49). "Holiness is the very essence of God." Even though God is thrice "holy" (Is 6:3) and his holiness expresses the infinite 'distance' between Him and his creatures, it in no way excludes that intimate nearness which links creature and the Creator. For Hosea tells us: "I am the Holy One in your midst" (11:9). Here "we are faced with the problem of the transcendence of a God who is yet totally immanent, transcendent to his creation because He is utterly independent of it, yet immanent because the creation is totally dependent on Him."³⁷

The revelation of God's Name in Ex 3:14 constitutes the core of the first petition. God steps out of his transcendence and indefinability by means of his Name and thus acquires personal traits, which reveal a face that turns towards humans.³⁸ The passive *hagiasthētō* is to be interpreted as a divine passive, that is, God himself is requested to sanctify his name, and not the humans. Humans' way of sanctifying God's name is by acknowledging God's supremacy and rule in their life and co-operating in his plan of salvation. Hallowing God's name is in the first instance an act on the part of God himself (see Ezek 36:23). God hallows his name not by punishing his people who profaned his name, but by working redemption and salvation for his people (Ezek 36:24-29; 39:25-27). It is in this perspective that the first petition of the Lord's Prayer is to be interpreted.

³⁷Thomas Corbishley, *The Prayer of Jesus*, London: Mowbrays, 1976, 84.

³⁸Alfons Deissler, "The Spirit of Lord's Prayer in the Faith and Worship of the Old Testament," in Petuchowski and Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 7.

When we pray "*hallowed be your name,*" we are, thus, praying God to act, to reveal who he is, namely, to reveal himself as Saviour. However, God does not sanctify his name without the co-operation of humans. In this sense, both God and humans are responsible for the sanctification of God's name. God sanctifies his name by his mighty and saving acts and humans should hallow it by their acknowledgement of God as their Saviour and Master and by living in accordance with his will, by loving and serving our fellow humans who are in real need. But what takes place in today's world is the profanation of God's name. When the poor are crushed, when the widows are denied their rights, when unjust balances are used in business, when sexual immorality prevails (see Amos 2:7, "A man and his father go in to the same maiden, so that my holy name is profaned") it is God's name that is profaned.³⁹ Here again God must step in to hallow his name, and God's action of sanctification calls for a reciprocal action on the part of his people. This is what we pray for in this petition. Jesus has "hallowed the name of the Father" by *manifesting* it (Jn 17:6). Jesus' words and actions were such that when people saw him, they saw the Father (see Jn 14:9). A Christ-like character is the best way of hallowing the name of God.⁴⁰ The ultimate glorification and sanctification of God's name is a future reality and this will take place in the final coming of God's kingdom.

d. The second petition: "*Your Kingdom Come*" (6:10a)

The central message of Jesus' whole preaching is "*the kingdom of heaven.*" Though "the kingdom of God" is the central theme of Jesus' preaching, he has never defined it. "Kingdom" is a verbal noun and the phrase "*the kingdom of God*" means primarily "*God's reign,*" "*God's rule.*" When we pray, "*Your kingdom come,*" we pray for the acknowledgement of God's sovereign rule by all people in their lives. Only when his sovereign rule is acknowledged by all will God's name be wholly sanctified. The eschatological nature of the whole prayer is focused on this one petition. It is true that in each of the petitions, there is also a present dimension. For Jesus and his disciples, the kingdom was not only a future reality at the end of the world, but a present experience. God as a sovereign King loves justice (Ps 33:5), executes justice (Ps 99:4) and

³⁹Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament*, 24.

⁴⁰Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament*, 24.

sees to it that the weak and the orphan get justice (Ps 82:3). When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are praying for a kingdom where justice and love, so miserably denied in this age, will rule harmoniously.

To pray this prayer is to ask for something deeper and wider than the mere extension of the Church. The kingdom of God, understood as God's sovereign rule, has a very wider dimension than the Church or even the people of God. God as the Creator of the universe and the King of all the nations, his sovereignty may be advanced even in the so-called secular areas through those who are unconscious of being its agents. For example, the scientists who, though not believers in God, make new inventions against various diseases are, unwittingly, advancing the spread of the Kingdom. The politicians who lay the foundations of a peaceful society are advancing the Kingdom, inasmuch as God is a God of order and peace. The writers who, though not Christians, produce beautiful literary works with genuine human values, advance the Kingdom. Whatever humans do in advancing the boundaries of beauty, truth, and goodness (see Phil 4:8), there the Kingdom comes. Wherever the forces of sin, darkness, disease, and hatred are removed, there the Kingdom comes, and God enters in more fully to the world of his creation.⁴¹

The petition, "your kingdom come," could be interpreted as a prayer for others – those outside the circle of Jesus' followers – to experience God's rule in their lives; or it could be interpreted as a prayer for the disciples themselves to experience God's rule intensively in their lives and to come to its consummation in the future. But it is better that the prayer be understood in both the senses and we ask God to establish it in the life of every human being. When the Christians pray this prayer they look *up* and look *forward* – *up* to the God who reigns, and *forward* to the day when his Son Jesus Christ destroys completely the rule of evil powers and delivers the kingdom to God his Father (1 Cor 15:24).

e. The third petition: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10b)

Luke omits this petition, probably because it adds practically nothing to the preceding petition.⁴² The suggestion made by some authors that

⁴¹Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament*, 25.

⁴²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A, Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1993, 148.

Matthew has taken Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane ("Your will be done," Mt 26:42) and inserted it here has been rejected by Raymond Brown and others.⁴³ The will of God as sovereign King permeates all history; even human sin cannot thwart it. Joseph, in the OT, could tell his brothers, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (Gen 50:20). God's will is intensely a will for the salvation of humanity (Jer 29:11; Ezek 18:23,32; 1 Thess 4:3). It is only through God's intervening action that his will perfectly be done on earth. But this does not mean that humans have no commitment or engagement in history; in fact, the inevitable requirement of doing God's will is the co-operation of humans with God. The humans are God's earthly partners in the unfolding and realization of His will in history. The fulfilment of God's will demands loving even one's own personal enemies and this demand is only intensified in Jesus' words and actions.

Before teaching this prayer, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" to his disciples, Jesus certainly lived in its very spirit. First of all, Jesus learned its spirit from his own mother, Mary whose whole life was a *fiat* to God (Lk 1:38). Jesus' whole life was permeated with the spirit of this prayer: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4:34). One could ask here, what was concretely the will of God for Jesus? For him, the unmistakable will of God is to establish God's rule on earth, which was the work entrusted to him by his Father (see Lk 4:43). In this sense, the petition, "your will be done" repeats and intensifies the previous petition, "your kingdom come."

Doing the will of God could be understood both passively and actively; passively, it means to accept whatever may happen to one; and actively, it means to join in the struggle against powers of evil - political, social and moral.⁴⁴ In his life Jesus accepted God's will both passively and actively. Whatever sufferings he had to undergo in his life, he accepted them as the will of his Father (see Mt 26:42). Jesus' going out throughout Galilee "*doing good*" is the execution of God's will in the

⁴³Raymond E. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," in *New Testament Essays*, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965, 235. He takes support from H. Schürmann, see 235, note 69. Brown, however, suspects that Matthew might have used this petition to fill in the actual words of the prayer at Gethsemane, because we do not find this clause in the Marcan parallel in 14:39.

⁴⁴Corbishley, *The Prayer of Jesus*, 95.

active sense. The Gospels are full of stories of the way in which Jesus 'did good' by liberating people from different forms of suffering and distress. Hence, when we pray "Your will be done" we are reminded and challenged to join hand in hand with Christ in "doing good" by bringing wholeness in the life of our suffering brethren.

"Your will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven*": We need to make a distinction between the "absolute will" of God – what God desires simply because it is good – and the "permissive will" of God.⁴⁵ The "absolute will" of God is always related to his nature and to his eternal plan of salvation. In the "permissive will" of God the human actions are also involved. Whatever happens in the world happens because of the choices humans make and these human choices God certainly respects. At the same time humans are given the knowledge and the ability to make the right choices. When they do so, they are carrying out God's absolute will on earth. But often humans, because of selfishness, through greed or passion or insensitivity, make wrong choices and do their own will. In this case humans are thwarting the absolute will of God. Since God does not overrule humans' decisions and since God respects the freedom he has given to humans, the wrong choices humans make are tolerated or permitted by God. When, therefore, we pray that "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we are really praying for his absolute will (or purpose) to be realized. Hence, it is we who have the responsibility for carrying out God's absolute will by making the right choices, by acting in accordance with the deepest and most authentic needs of our nature. For, God's will is not something that goes contrary to our own truest will.⁴⁶

f. The fourth petition: "Give us this day our daily bread" (6:11)

After the three "you-petitions" which are wholly God-centred, we now come to the three "we-petitions" where our own specific needs are brought before God, asking Him for the basic things of life: food, forgiveness, guidance and deliverance from evil. The last three petitions can be understood as a prayer for our physical and spiritual well-being. In the first three "you-petitions" the eyes of the disciples have been turned towards God. Prayer should always begin, centring on God who is most holy, all loving, all-powerful. We should not rush into God's presence

⁴⁵Corbishley, *The Prayer of Jesus*, 91.

⁴⁶Corbishley, *The Prayer of Jesus*, 92.

with a list of our wants. Acknowledgement and praise of God's majesty and greatness, expression of awe before his holiness, sincere effort to align our wills with His – this is where we have to begin. Then we may turn to God with our petitions, which express our absolute dependence on God. He who is our Creator is also our Sustainer. We depend on Him for each moment of our existence and for each day's sustenance.

The Greek text of the fourth petition is important to note: *ton arton hēmōn ton episousion dos hēmin sēmeron*. Our understanding of the petition depends on how we interpret the unusual adjective *episousios*, modifying "bread." This Greek word occurs only here and in the parallel passage in Lk 11:3 and nowhere else in the NT. One could understand the Greek word *episousios* mainly in two ways. Firstly, *episousios* = *epi ousia*, means "for existence."⁴⁷ The meaning in this case is clear enough: "give us today the bread necessary for existence." For the poor people among whom Jesus lived and worked, it would be difficult to exclude the natural, this worldly meaning. The prayer represents Jesus' own solidarity with the poor and his concern that they have the minimal means of survival. Praying this petition, the Church unites with the hungry and poor of the world, and, hence, this prayer is a challenge and invitation to those who have bread to share with those who have not.

The second way of understanding of *episousios* = *epiousa* (*hēmera*), is "for the coming day" or "for the following day."⁴⁸ Bread "for the coming day" could be interpreted as bread for the "great tomorrow." Hence, the meaning of the prayer is "the bread of tomorrow, give us today"; this interpretation is supported by the fact that it produces a contrast between *episousios* and *sēmeron* in the petition. This is again paralleled in the following petition in the contrast between divine and human forgiveness. J. Jeremias and R. E. Brown interpret "the coming day" as the day of the eschatological banquet (see Mt 8:11) and understand this prayer as the prayer for the bread of the coming kingdom.⁴⁹ Since the

⁴⁷The Greek word *ousia* is derived from *ousa*, which is the present participle feminine of *eimi*, and means, "that which is one's own," "one's substance," "one's being," "one's existence."

⁴⁸The Greek term *epiousa* is the present participle of the verb *epeimi*, meaning "to come after," "to approach."

⁴⁹Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 100-101; Brown, "The Pater Noster," 240-243.

bread of the kingdom is promised to the Christians, they could pray for it as "our bread." The disciples should pray for the experience of the messianic banquet and the eschatological blessing day after day.

The material bread that God gives today symbolizes and foreshadows and causes one to desire for the spiritual, eschatological bread.⁵⁰ According to J. Jeremias, "there was no opposition between earthly bread and the bread of life, for in the realm of the *basileia* all earthly things are hallowed... For the disciples of Jesus, every meal, and not only the last one, had deep eschatological significance. Every meal with Jesus was a salvation meal, an anticipation of the final feast. At every meal he was the host, as he would be at the consummation."⁵¹

Here we should keep in mind the possibility that the Lord's Prayer was already in Matthew's time recited in connection with the Eucharistic celebration. Indeed, the word "bread" (*artos*), along with the verb "give" (*didōmi*), appears again only in the context of the feeding of the five thousand (Mt 14:19) and of institution of the Eucharist (Mt 26:26), the first one alluding probably to the Last Supper. Saint Jerome, in his Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate) used the word *supersubstantialis* (literally, "the bread above the substance") and the use of this Latin word enabled many in the early Church to see the petition as a reference to the Eucharist. But this interpretation brings in later concepts into the passage.⁵² It is better that we take a multiplicity of meanings for "bread": physical food, the word of God, and the Eucharist. Jean Carmignac rightly understands this petition for bread as a petition for threefold nourishment: nourishment for the body, the word of God and the Christ of the Eucharist.⁵³ Hence this petition embraces everything that Jesus' disciples need for body and soul. In the Lucan version we have the expression "each day" (11:3), which indicates the repeated needs of our daily lives. Each moment of our life we are in need of God's help for everything.

⁵⁰W. D. Davis and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, The International Critical Commentary Series, eds. J. A. Emerson et alii, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, 609.

⁵¹Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, trans. John Bowden. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1971, 200.

⁵²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 149.

⁵³Recherches sur le "Notre Père," 118-221, as referred to in Vögtle, "The Lord's Prayer," 99.

Thus, in this petition we express our total dependence on a loving Father who supplies for every need of our lives.

"Give us..." Who is 'us'? We should give it the widest possible interpretation. In this prayer we have to align ourselves with all our fellow-brethren all over the world who are hungry and in need of food.⁵⁴ We will be thoroughly misunderstanding the petition for bread if we consider it merely as a call to God's obligation to maintain and nurture us, instead of letting it obligate us to share our bread with our hungry brethren.⁵⁵ Thus, the prayer for "bread" carries with it a social dimension, namely, sharing one's bread with the hungry (see Is 58:7; Ezek 18:7). "Mere personal satisfaction of hunger without considering the others would be a breach of that fellowship."⁵⁶ It is significant that in this prayer, Jesus does not use the word *love* at all. But he does show an interest and concern for people that they get enough to eat. This active concern for others itself is love.⁵⁷

g. The fifth petition: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (6:12)

The second "we-petition" has two parts; the first part, "*forgive us our debts*" refers to divine activity and the second, "*as we also have forgiven our debtors*" refers to human activity. This kind of formulation as referring to divine and human activity placed side by side occurs only here in the Lord's Prayer. Since this petition is unique in its formulation, the Matthean Jesus wanted to put great emphasis on it.⁵⁸ This petition focuses on an important aspect of our Christian life: reconciliation among ourselves and with God the Father. In the first part of the petition we ask God's forgiveness for our "debts." The word "debt" usually means "what

⁵⁴Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, Eng. trans. Theodore Morrow, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985, 77, "When we present God with our own needs, he wants us to include those of our brothers and sisters. Otherwise the bonds of fellowship are severed and we live for only ourselves."

⁵⁵Vögtle, "*The Lord's Prayer*," 109.

⁵⁶Boff, *The Lord's Prayer*, 77. The bread that is meant to nourish the "human life," is to be the bread of justice blessed by God. Boff writes: "When the bread that we eat is the result of exploitation, it is not a bread blessed by God. ... Unjust bread is not really our bread; it is stolen; it belongs to someone else," *Lord's Prayer*, 77-78.

⁵⁷Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament*, 31.

⁵⁸Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 201.

is owed," or "one's due" (as in Dt 24:10; Rom 4:4). The religious use of the term "debts" to describe sins against God is common in Jewish writings.⁵⁹ Luke has changed "debts" (*ta ophelēmata*) into "sins" (*tas hamartias*), probably to make the petition more intelligible for his Gentile Christian readers.⁶⁰ The use of plural with the definite article, *ta ophelēmata*, indicates that a complete remission of all debts is intended. Since God is the addressee of this prayer what is requested is not only the remission of all debts regarding money and material things but also moral and spiritual debts, that is, guilt and sins.⁶¹ Only God can forgive all the debts, guilt and sins. When we pray, "forgive us our debts," we acknowledge and confess our sinfulness before God. Sin is an offence against God and our neighbour and it affects all our relationships. Hence, it must be forgiven in order that our relationships with God and our neighbour are re-established.

The second part of the petition, "as we also have forgiven our debtors," has no strict parallel in any of the Proto-canonical books of the OT; but we have one text parallel to this in Sir 28:2 where we read: "Forgive your neighbour the wrong he had done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray." This text of Sirach implies that "God's forgiveness is valid only for him who previously reconciled himself with his fellow men."⁶² Jesus' demand on the part of his disciples to forgive the debts of their fellow brethren is seen as an indispensable presupposition for the petition for divine forgiveness. One who asks for divine forgiveness should show his/her genuine preparedness for forgiving others. This part of the petition is one of most difficult one to interpret because of the conjunction "as" which seems to mean that "our forgiveness" of our fellow brethren is a motivation and reason for God to forgive our sins! But such an idea is not present anywhere in the Bible except here and in Mt 6:14-15, Lk 11:4 and Mk 11:25. This difficult clause has been approached

⁵⁹Davis and Allison. *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 611: In the religious sense, "debt" takes on the meaning of "sin" because "sin makes one indebted to God."

⁶⁰Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28A, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985, 906.

⁶¹Thomas Kaut, "Father and Tempter? The Lord's Prayer to the One and Only God," in *Melita Theologica*, 44,1 (2003), 3-30, 20.

⁶²Vögtle, "The Lord's Prayer," 107.

and interpreted by many scholars and it is helpful to see the different views expressed by some of them.

Joachim Jeremias, while dealing with the difficult question of the interrelationship between divine and human forgiveness, asks: "Does our forgiveness precede God's forgiveness? Is it the model for God's forgiveness?"⁶³ How could Jesus' disciples compare their poor forgiving with God's infinite mercy and forgiveness? According to him, this part of the petition is a declaration of readiness to forgive, which is seen by him as an "indispensable prior condition" (*conditio sine qua non*) for receiving God's forgiveness.⁶⁴ "How can one ask God for forgiveness, if one is not also prepared to forgive (Mk 11:25; Matt. 6:14-15; 18:35)? ... Forgiveness – one's own readiness to forgive and request for forgiveness where one has committed an offence – is *the* presupposition for the prayer of Jesus' disciples."⁶⁵ According to him, God can forgive only if we are ready to forgive (Mk 11:25) and the "willingness to forgive is, so to speak, the hand which Jesus' disciples reach out toward God's forgiveness."⁶⁶ In Luke the Matthean past tense is replaced by the present: "for we ourselves *forgive everyone* indebted to us"; this indicates the continuing aspect of our forgiving attitude. The reference to "everyone" indicates that we have to forgive all persons without exception.

Norman Perrin, the famous NT American scholar, makes an important observation that in ancient Judaism he has not seen any prayer that links a petition for divine forgiveness with a human preparedness to forgive.⁶⁷ Perrin argues that the aorist *aphēkamen* in the second part of this petition represents the Aramaic *perfectum praesens*, which indicates an action that takes place at the same time as the action of the previous verb ("forgive us") and must be translated "as we *herewith* forgive."⁶⁸ This means that the act of divine forgiveness and the act of human forgiveness are contemporaneous and go hand in hand. In the face of the divine forgiveness the human person accepts fully the responsibility to

⁶³Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 201

⁶⁴Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 201, see also 192

⁶⁵Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 201, 192-193.

⁶⁶*The Prayers of Jesus*, 103.

⁶⁷Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976, 47.

⁶⁸Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 152.

forgive his/her fellow brethren. "In the context of God's forgiveness men learn to forgive, and in the exercise of forgiveness toward their fellow man they enter ever more deeply into an experience of the divine forgiveness."⁶⁹ According to Perrin, Mt 6:14-15 does not come from the historical Jesus, but it appears to be the teaching of the early Church which legalizes the linking of the human preparedness to forgive with the reception of divine forgiveness.⁷⁰

George M. Soares-Prabhu, a renowned Bible scholar of India, acknowledges the fact that the NT consistently relates our forgiveness to God's forgiveness and tries to interpret the human readiness to forgive as demanded by the Lord's Prayer as a religious attitude rooted in the core Christian experience of an utterly forgiving God.⁷¹ Mt 6:12, along with Mt 6:14-15, Lk 11:4, and Mk 11:25, seem to make our forgiveness a precondition for God's forgiveness. But human forgiveness cannot be a condition for meriting God's pardon, but a paradigm for, or rather a concomitant of it.⁷² His explanation of the dialectical interdependence of the divine-human forgiveness is complementary to what Norman Perrin suggested in terms of "contemporaneity of the action." All forgiveness, like all love, originates from God, who has loved and forgiven us first (Mt 18:23-35; 1 Jn 4:7,21). When we forgive our neighbour, God's forgiveness is made perfect in us. That is, our experience of God's forgiveness is intensified, and our capacity to forgive is augmented. Our failure to respond to God's forgiveness closes us up to His forgiveness. Human forgiveness is, thus, both a consequence of our being forgiven by

⁶⁹Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 153. On the same page he writes that the recognition of this "contemporaneity of the action" is absolutely crucial to understand the teaching of Jesus. "This is not only the crux of the teaching of Jesus about forgiveness; it is also the key to understand the 'ethical' teaching of Jesus altogether: as men learn to live their lives in the context of their experience of the divine activity, so they must learn to live them in terms of the appropriate response to that activity. In the case of forgiveness, that response is to forgive; in the case of love, it is to love."

⁷⁰Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 151. According to Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 205, Mt 6:14-15 is entirely derived from Matthew's special material (M material), or more likely Matthean redaction.

⁷¹Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive," 57.

⁷²Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive," 57. Here Soares-Prabhu comes very close to the "contemporaneity of the action" suggested by Norman Perrin.

God, and (at a second level) a condition for it. Our relationship with God is normally mediated through human relationships. We love God by loving our neighbour; we experience God's forgiveness by forgiving our brothers and sisters.⁷³

Thomas Kaut, a translation consultant with the United Bible Societies and based in Bonn, Germany, approaches this petition from a different perspective.⁷⁴ The petition for divine forgiveness in the first clause is conditioned by the second clause, "as we also have forgiven our debtors." But none of the other petitions in Lord's Prayer is formulated in this way. The other petitions do not even allow for such a condition, except possibly the petition for bread, which could have been formulated as: "Give us this day our daily bread, as we also have given bread to those in need!"⁷⁵ But it does not do so.

The second part of the petition begins with the conjunction "as" and the corresponding Greek word "hōs" here means "inasmuch as," "since," or "on the ground that." Hence this part of the petition functions here as causal clause, which could be translated: "And forgive us our debts, *inasmuch as* we also have forgiven our debtors." This means that human willingness or even the past act of forgiveness serves as a precondition in order to receive forgiveness from God; even worse, the correlative function of the causal conjunction implies an equal measure of forgiveness: "Forgive us..., *inasmuch as we have forgiven.*"⁷⁶ Human forgiveness here tends to become a means whereby we earn God's forgiveness, as is happening in Mt 6:14-15.⁷⁷

Putting such precondition to receive God's forgiveness stands not only against the teaching of Jesus, but also against the Jewish and early Christian thinking.⁷⁸ According to Thomas Kaut, this clause was added

⁷³Soares-Prabhu, "As We Forgive," 57-59.

⁷⁴Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 3-30.

⁷⁵Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 9, note 15.

⁷⁶Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 22.

⁷⁷Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, 153.

⁷⁸Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 22. According to Philip B. Harner, *Understanding the Lord's Prayer*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, 104-105, Jewish prayers of the time did not connect God's forgiveness with human forgiveness. Indeed, Jesus did not make this connection in his teaching on forgiveness, the only exceptions being Mt 6:14-15, Lk 11:11:4, Mk 11:25 and the

later due to the use of Lord's Prayer in the liturgical services, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.⁷⁹ *Didache* alludes to the practice of confessing one's sins during the celebration of the Eucharist before the communion. In *Didache* XIV,1-2 we read: "On the Lord's Day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold Eucharist, *after confessing your transgressions* that your offering may be pure; but let none who has a quarrel with his fellow join in your meeting *until they be reconciled*, that your sacrifice be not defiled." It is probably this liturgical context of confessing one's sins and receiving forgiveness from God and extending, in turn, forgiveness to the brothers and sisters present in the liturgical assembly that this part of the petition in Lord's Prayer is referred to.⁸⁰

As is already mentioned, the clause, "as we also have forgiven our debtors" seems to imply that God's forgiveness of our sins and debts is conditioned by our forgiveness to our fellow brethren. And Jesus' own interpretation given to this petition in Mt 6:14-15 also implies this.⁸¹ But this seems to be at variance with Jesus' own teaching which reveals very powerfully to what extent, exceeding all human expectations, God is ready to forgive our sins. The parable of the "Prodigal Son" (Lk 15:11-32) illustrates very beautifully the loving mercy of God who forgives without demanding any condition from the son. The father of the parable was waiting for the return of the son and when he saw him even at a distance,

parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Mt 18:23-35. Mt 6:14-15 may be interpreted in the sense that God's forgiveness can become real for humans only when they are willing to forgive one another. But the parable of the Unforgiving Servant suggests that God's forgiveness precedes human forgiveness. First God forgives humans their sins, and then He expects them to forgive one another. The human forgiveness is a reflection and consequence of God's forgiveness.

⁷⁹Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 23. On pages 17-18, note 32, he also gives some syntactical and critical reasons for the interpolation of this clause. This is the only petition where the correlative conjunction "as" (*hōs*) is used subordinating the following clause to the main clause. Syntactical subordination is alien to Lord's Prayer. Secondly, the subject of this clause is human persons, "we" (*hēmeis*), whereas in all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer the only subject is God. Again, the predicate, "have forgiven" (*aphēkamen*) is the only non-imperative predicate in the Lord's Prayer.

⁸⁰Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 25.

⁸¹According to Kaut, the text of Mt 6:14-15 does not so much articulate a condition, but rather a *motivation*. "Father and Tempter?" 22, note 40.

he "had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20). When the father got a chance to love and forgive, he did it in its sublime form. This is how God is to us who are his children! The parable of the "Lost Sheep" (Lk 15:3-7) also brings out very well God's readiness to forgive without any pre-condition. When the sheep is lost (when the sinner goes away from God) it is God himself who takes the initiative in going after it "until he finds it" (Lk 15:4). The clause, "until he finds it" means that *until* the search is successful! This means again that before God every human person is immensely valuable and precious and that God wants him or her to be in his fellowship. God by his very nature is a loving and forgiving God without any condition. This is what we see in the beautiful prayer of Daniel: "We do not present our supplications before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive" (Dan 9:18-19; see also Ps 78:38).

God's unconditional forgiveness motivates and stimulates us to extend our forgiveness to our fellow humans. This is how Paul has understood; for he writes in Col 3:13b: "As the Lord has forgiven you (divine action in the past), so you must forgive" (corresponding human action in the present). Here the human forgiveness is seen not as a condition but as a consequence of the forgiveness received from God and the divine forgiveness is to be a model for humans.⁸² However, human forgiveness is by no means a precondition or a prerequisite to receive forgiveness for himself from God.⁸³

To conclude our study on divine-human forgiveness, God's boundless mercy is not comparable with man's limited capacity for forgiving others. Hence this petition does not mean that we compel God to look upon us with favour because of our forgiveness of others. It does mean, however, that when we have a non-forgiving attitude towards others, we put an obstacle between God and us so that his love and forgiveness cannot flow into us. Mt 6:14-15 emphasizes well the point of this petition in such a hyperbolic way that the need of human forgiveness can easily be understood by his disciples. The message of these verses is that it is unthinkable that we can enjoy God's forgiveness without in turn

⁸²According to Raymond E. Brown, "The Pater Noster," 248, "the Matthean 'as' simply means that the human forgiveness is the counterpart of the divine."

⁸³Kaut, "Father and Tempter?" 22.

extending our forgiveness towards others. "The binding of human forgiveness to God's ... expresses Matthew's dialectical understanding of forgiveness. God's forgiveness is unconditional, precedes human forgiveness of other human beings, and is its ground and cause. Yet prayer for God's forgiveness is unthinkable for one who is intentionally an unforgiving person."⁸⁴ This is what we find powerfully expressed in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Mt 18:23-35. Just as love does not become a reality until it "reaches another," so God's forgiveness of our sins cannot become a reality until it takes effect in our interpersonal relationship. In other words, a forgiven person is to be a forgiving person. Forgiveness is not a one-dimensional reality, a one-way journey. When we ask forgiveness from God and receive it from him, it must set us in motion towards our fellow brethren.⁸⁵ It calls for personal and social responses from us. What is stressed in this clause is the correspondence between our praying and our living. "Forgiveness may be one of the hardest of all gifts to offer to others. Had it been easy, it would not have needed so prominent a place in the prayer of Jesus."⁸⁶

h. The sixth petition: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (6:13)

This is the only petition in the Lord's Prayer that is formulated in the negative. The expression, "And lead not into temptation," could be taken as to imply that God himself tempts us. But the Letter of James had already rejected this misunderstanding (1:13). The expression "lead us not" here has a "permissive sense": "Do not let us fall victim."⁸⁷ If we interpret this petition in terms of daily deliverance from temptation, then the prayer is directed not to preservation *from* temptation but to preservation *in* temptation, as J. Jeremias puts it rightly.⁸⁸ If we take the second meaning, then this petition does not request that he who prays this prayer might be spared from temptation altogether, but that God might help him to overcome it. Here it is significant to note that the corresponding Greek word *peirasmos* could mean, either "temptation" as

⁸⁴ Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 204-205.

⁸⁵ Jan Milič Lochman, *The Lord's Prayer*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, 120.

⁸⁶ R. E. Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible*, London: SCM Press, 1986, 245.

⁸⁷ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 202

⁸⁸ *The Prayers of Jesus*, 105.

in Lk 4:13 or it could mean "test," "trial" or "ordeal" as in 1 Pet 4:12. God may "test" his children with hope of good outcome (Ex 20:20; Dt 8:2; 1 Thess 2:4; 1 Tim 3:10; Heb 11:17).⁸⁹

But scholars like J. Jeremias and R. E. Brown give also an eschatological interpretation to this petition and say that this petition does not merely deal with daily temptations, but also with the final temptation.⁹⁰ The two reasons they bring forward are: (1) the use of aorist tenses (*eisenenkēs* and *rhysai*), and (2) the use of the word *peirasmos* ("temptation"). Though the word *peirasmos* can refer to ordinary temptation (Lk 8:13), it has specialized reference to the eschatological trial. The everyday "*peirasmos*" is already a part of the struggle of Christian life, which will climax in the final "*peirasmos*" (see Rev 3:10 which contains an eschatological promise of Christ). Hence, this part of the petition is a request for the preservation from succumbing to the eschatological trial, and, thus, from apostasy, that is, falling away from one's relationship with God.⁹¹ Some others interpret this petition as a request imploring the divine help to prevent the disciples from succumbing to the power of sin.⁹² This interpretation has the value of making this petition relevant for the present and for the future. The petition reflects a spirit of total dependence on God, as does the whole prayer.

The second part of the petition is a prayer about deliverance from the power of "evil": "*But deliver us from evil*" - *alla rhysai hēmas apo tou ponērou*. The Greek expression, *apo tou ponērou* could mean either "from evil" *apo tou ponērou* (the genitive *tou ponērou* can come from the neuter *to ponēron* meaning "evil" or "what is evil") or "from the evil one" (coming from the masculine *ho ponēros*, "the evil one"). The Western

⁸⁹The action of the Holy Spirit and the presence of devil in Mt 4:1 give the verbal form *peirazō* a double connotation: Jesus is at the same being "tested" by God and "tempted" by the devil, see Davis and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 360. Paul gives us the assurance that "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested (*peirasthēnai*) beyond your strength" (1 Cor 10:13).

⁹⁰Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 105-106; Brown, "The Pater Noster," 248-251.

⁹¹Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 202.

⁹²Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol 2: 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996, 1056; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Exeter: The Pater Noster Press, 1978, 461-462.

Fathers support the former translation ("from evil") and the Greek Fathers, along with Tertullian, support the latter ("from the evil one").⁹³ The NRSV appears to have understood *peirasmos* as the final trial brought on by Satan's attack; hence, it has given a personal interpretation of *poneros* ("the evil one"). Deliverance from evil is not within humanity's grasp; for this the power and grace of God are needed. Hence, we pray God for his active intervention on our behalf.

i. Doxology: "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (addition to Mt 6:13)⁹⁴

This doxology, which some late manuscripts added to Matthew, corresponds very well with the prayer of Israel. The first and profoundest response of the people of Israel to God's saving acts towards them is the praise of His "glory" (*doxa*). This tripartite doxology is based on 1 Chronicles 29:11: "Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, *the power, the glory*, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is *the kingdom*, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all" (1 Chron 29:11). It is highly probable that this text from Chronicles forms the basis of the doxological ending of Lord's Prayer⁹⁵ and was probably added later in order to provide a third part to the Lord's Prayer.⁹⁶ As is already mentioned earlier, the Jewish prayer, the "Eighteen Benedictions" shows the pattern of *praise, petition, and thanksgiving*. The Lord's Prayer is also made to have all these three parts. The first part offers praise to God by asking that his name be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done. Then come petitions for human needs, and finally, the doxology, which again praises God. The Lord's Prayer, thus, reaches its climax in words of praise and adoration. "It teaches us to think of God as *Father* ('Our Father'), as *King* ('Thy kingdom come'), as *Governor* ('Thy will be done'), as *Provider* ('Give us... bread'), as *Pardoner* ('Forgive us our trespasses') as *Guide* ('Lead us...'), as *Deliverer* ('Deliver us from evil')."⁹⁷

⁹³Davis and Allison, *Matthew*, 614-615.

⁹⁴See Section 4, last paragraph.

⁹⁵Alfons Deissler, "The Spirit of the Lord's Prayer," 16.

⁹⁶Gordon J. Bahr, "The Use of the Lord's Prayer in the Primitive Church," in Petuchowski and Brocke, eds., *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 152-153.

⁹⁷Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament*, 40.

8. Some Critical Reflections

Before concluding our study on the Lord's Prayer, it is useful to make some critical reflections on this prayer. This we do by examining the Lord's Prayer from a vertical as well as a horizontal perspective. From a vertical perspective the Lord's Prayer appears to be wholly theocentric, because from the very beginning of the prayer till its last petition, it speaks only about God the Father; but on close analysis, one could find that it is a Trinitarian prayer. As we pass from this vertical dimension of the prayer to its horizontal dimension, what is striking is the emphasis that the prayer gives to *koinonia* or community aspect. The vertical dimension is the source and paradigm of the horizontal and the latter derives its meaning and identity from the former. But before we enter into these reflections, let us see whether the Lord's Prayer is the prayer only of the Christians or of the whole humanity. Here we touch upon its universal character.

a. The universal character of Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is generally understood as "the Christian prayer *par excellence*." Yet throughout the prayer it speaks only about the heavenly Father. Though the disciples are asked to pray for the coming of God's kingdom, the prayer as such does not point out that it has already become a present reality with the life and ministry of Christ. Nor does the Lord's Prayer even mention the coming of Jesus on earth. Thus, there is nothing in the Lord's Prayer that can show it to be a Christocentric prayer. But there are enough reasons for us to conclude that it is, indeed, a theocentric prayer. By formulating the Lord's Prayer wholly centred on the heavenly figure of "Father," Jesus has, so to say, put "an end to the false exclusiveness of the various religious traditions which focused their distinctiveness on the name by which they called upon God."⁹⁸ Anyone

⁹⁸Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 243. Often we classify the followers of different religions on the basis of the different divine names, which they use when addressing God such as Yahweh, Allah, or Brahma etc. Jesus has avoided using any particular name for God and addressed Him simply as "Father" which may be acceptable to all believers in God. But here we have to acknowledge with Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 247, that "the image of God as 'Father' inevitably lacks the sensitivity to those 'feminine' aspects of deity which the modern feminist movement has seen as of so great importance." The author continues, "during its history the Christian faith has, in other ways, given more place to the 'feminine' aspects of the

who sincerely seeks God can approach Him in the Lord's Prayer and for this there is no need for him to subscribe to any religious creed or dogma.⁹⁹

One of the prominent aspects of this prayer is the simplicity and intelligibility that is seen in the invocation of God as "Father." In a world, which associates all kinds of special powers and effects with the use of a great variety of divine names, the Lord's Prayer uses only a title, which displays a remarkable and inclusive simplicity.¹⁰⁰ The fact that Jesus taught his disciples to relate to God under the analogy of a human father highlights the essentially personal nature of the community he established. By addressing God as "Father" the character of divine-human relationship has been defined by the nature of human relationships. Here we must acknowledge that no one single analogy can possibly be expected to convey a full and completely balanced picture of God. Even the best and most valued analogy can only be a partial expression of the whole truth.¹⁰¹ Still, the analogy of "Father" is the best single expression possible to be used of God, which can bring to our mind some essential characteristics of the Supreme Reality to which we can relate ourselves in a meaningful way.

b. The Trinitarian dimension of the Lord's Prayer

Prayer brings humans before God and it helps to establish a relationship between them. It is in prayer that we look at the very depth of our being and discover the most authentic and fundamental orientation of our existence. It is in prayer that we gain access to the world of the transcendent, which normally remains inaccessible to the majority of people. It is in prayer that we enter into an intimate and personal relationship with God. This relationship between God and humans is a dynamic one because it is made not by humans but by the Holy Spirit who is the divine subject in us praying with us and for us. The Holy Spirit works within us as an immanent dynamic power (see Lk 9:1; 24:49; Acts

divine Creator. The Lord's Prayer is necessarily bound up to a certain extent with the first-century social world of Palestine Galilee."

⁹⁹Swami Prabhavananda, *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta*, New York: New American Library, 1963, 85.

¹⁰⁰Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 246. See also Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 203, "Abba, Father" was first of all Jesus' word to express his own relation to God. He then included his disciples, and then all human beings in this relationship.

¹⁰¹Clements, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 247.

1:8) helping us to establish and deepen our relationship with God. This is what Paul tells us in Rom 8:26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to prayer as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."

If prayer is a relationship, we can relate to God in different ways: as creatures to their Creator, as the saved to their Saviour, as children to their Father. Of all these, the most sublime is the one of the children to their Father. This is what Jesus has taught his disciples to pray for as they relate themselves to God. It is true that our sonship is not a natural one but an adopted one, which we have received in and through Jesus Christ who is the natural Son of God. Hence, when we address God, "Our Father who art in heaven," we are relating to God as Father in and through his Son. It is the Spirit of his Son who is in us makes us conscious of our sonship and helps us cry, "Abba! Father!" This is what we see beautifully expressed in Gal 4:4-6, "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Hence, for a Christian, how rich the expression, "Our Father," is and how it brings all the three divine Persons in our relationship with God.

This Trinitarian aspect of the Lord's Prayer is very well seen in the petitions that follow. The first petition, "hallowed be your name," could be seen as directed to God the Father. "Hallowed be your name," means, "may your name be sanctified." When God's name is sanctified among humans, it is also glorified in the whole creation. Jesus has said that he has come in his "Father's name" (Jn 5:43) and that the works he does, he does them in his "Father's name" (Jn 10:25). In Jn 12:28 Jesus prays for its glorification, "Father, glorify your name" (Jn 12:28). When we pray this petition, we are praying with Jesus for the glorification of the name of the Father.

The second petition, "Your kingdom come," though directed to the Father, it is equally directed to the Son, because it is in and through the Son that the kingdom of God is to come, be realized and be established in all its perfection and glory. If the term, "kingdom of God," means "God's Rule" or "God's Reign," this rule or reign of God is to find its realization in humans who submit themselves to the rule or reign of Christ in their lives. In the eschatological times, the kingdom of God will be one with the

kingdom of Christ (Rev 11:15; 12:10). When we pray "Your kingdom come" we are praying for the final days when Christ returns in all his glory and hands over the kingdom to God the Father, "Then comes the end, when he [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" (1 Cor 15:24).

The third petition, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is, of course, directed to the Father insofar as the will is the will of the Father. But the carrying out of God's will, which is essentially establishing the kingdom of God on earth, is to be done by humans on earth. For this carrying out of God's will, the humans need the power of the Spirit which is given to them generously by Christ: "And he called the twelve together and gave them *power* and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal" (Lk 9:1-2). Again, we see the risen Lord promising his disciples the supreme gift of the Father, "And behold, I send the promise of the Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49; see also Acts 1:8). In this way the first three "you-petitions" are related to all the three Persons of the Godhead either directly or indirectly. When we pray this prayer we are trying to establish a personal and intimate relationship with the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In the same way the last three "we-petitions" are also related to the three Persons of the Trinity. When we pray the first "we-petition": "Give us this day our daily bread," we think of *God the Father*, the Creator and Sustainer of all life (see Ps 104:14-15; Mt 6:25-33). When we pray the second "we-petition," namely, the prayer for the forgiveness of our sins, we think of *God the Son*, the Saviour of all humanity who redeemed us from our sins through his life, ministry, death and resurrection, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us" (Eph 1:7-8). When we pray the third "we-petition," the prayer for help not to fall into temptation and to preserve us in the eschatological hour of trial, we think of *God the Holy Spirit* who is our Helper and Guide: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will *guide* you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). In this way these three petitions bring us face to face with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and, thus, take our whole life to the triune God.¹⁰² Thus, the

¹⁰²Barclay, *The Lord's Prayer*, 21.

Lord's Prayer helps us to relate ourselves to all the three Persons of Godhead and in this sense Lord's Prayer could be seen as a Trinitarian prayer.

c. The community aspect of the Lord's Prayer

The community focus of the Lord's Prayer is very well seen in its use of the first person plural pronouns. The invocation, "Our Father, who art in heaven," at the beginning of the prayer already sets the stage for this communitarian aspect of it. Jesus wants the disciples to see the prayer as *their* prayer. Through the use of "our" in the invocation, the disciples are already placed into a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with one another. Addressing God as "Our Father" we establish a firm foundation for our interpersonal relationship that involves God, who is present in every person, and in every human relationship.¹⁰³

It is Jesus who brought us a new understanding of the nature of God and his personal relation to humanity. In his experience of God as "Father" he brought God down to earth.¹⁰⁴ As we have already seen, when we address God, "Our Father," it brings all the three divine Persons in our relationship with God. As we share in Jesus' experience of the Father, we enter into the dynamics of the Trinitarian experience.¹⁰⁵ In the Spirit we are united with Christ the Son and we become sons in the Son and we are able to say "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:4-6). This relationship or fellowship with God is so deep and personal that we experience God "in a communion of being," that is, "we are persons within the Person, a communion of persons in love."¹⁰⁶ The mystery of the Holy Trinity reveals that *Being* is essentially a *koinōnia* of love; it is communion, a reciprocal call to be; it is "being-together" and "being-with"; its essence is

¹⁰³Boff, *The Lord's Prayer*, 90.

¹⁰⁴Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith*, ed. Felicity Edwards, Indian edition, New Delhi: Indus, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers India, 1992, 218.

¹⁰⁵Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 223.

¹⁰⁶Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 225. Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ: Christian Meditation and Community*, ed. Robert Kiely and Laurene Freeman, London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1992, 50, writes: "In the doctrine of the Trinity the ultimate Reality is seen as Being in relationship or Being in love. The ultimate Reality is neither a solitary person nor an impersonal Absolute. It is a communion of persons in love."

a "giving" and "receiving."¹⁰⁷ Within the Trinity *koinōnia* points to the community of being and love and outside the Trinity it points to the communication of this love to us humans through grace. Love (*agapē*) is the inner principle of this *koinōnia*.¹⁰⁸

It is the communion of being, this "fellowship" (*koinōnia*) with the Father and with the Son that forms the basis of our fellowship with our brethren (1 Jn 1:3). "The interpersonal relationships within the Trinity are the model and exemplar of all interpersonal relationships on earth and ultimately also of all interrelationships in the whole creation."¹⁰⁹ The experience of a Christian is always a community experience.¹¹⁰ This is what we find realized in the early Christian community where the believers were "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) and they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (*koinōnia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The descent of the Holy Spirit formed them into a "community" of believers who "had everything in common (*koina*)" (Acts 4:32), even at the economic level. "Once there is the *koinōnia*, the common life in Christ, there is the beginning of community."¹¹¹ The *koinōnia*, the "being-together," of Christians is modelled on the "being-together" in the Trinitarian mystery of the Father and the Son in the Spirit.¹¹² God is not one Person, but a community of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is present to the Son and the Son to the Father. This mutual presence of Father and Son is the model and basis of our being present to each other within the human community. When we pray "Our Father" we proclaim that we all belong to this one human community and are present to each other. The very essence of the three Divine Persons in the Godhead consists in relating to each other in perfect communion, a communion that consists in total

¹⁰⁷ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, 135.

¹⁰⁸ Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, 146, note 1. In Jn 17:21-23 we find a twofold inter-communion: the *koinōnia* between the Father and the Son and the *koinōnia* among the Divine Persons and the disciples.

¹⁰⁹ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 254.

¹¹⁰ Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality*, 221, tells: "The Hindu experience is essentially individual and has no positive relationship to the community whereas the Christian experience, although certainly personal and individual, is always, implicitly or explicitly, a community experience."

¹¹¹ Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ*, 89.

¹¹² Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, 14, note 2.

mutual giving and receiving, in knowing and being known, and in loving and being loved. It is this Trinitarian communion that we have to manifest in our life through our words and actions when we pray "Our Father." We will, thus, begin to pray "Our Father" when we begin to realize God's presence in the depth of our being and the being of our fellow brethren.

9. Conclusion

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most central and valued treasures of the Christian community. It presents the message of Christ in a nutshell. It revolves around the great concerns of God, but in such a way that from the outset God is seen as concerned with humans. It orientates all our life to God and to our fellow humans. It is a prayer that unites us. In calling upon God as Father we are drawn into a familial relationship to one another. The prayer introduces us in the understanding of salvation, which cannot be realized without our co-operation. We cannot pray "your kingdom come" unless we co-operate in its realization. We cannot pray, "forgive our debts," unless we forgive first our brethren. Only when we are in right relationship with God and with our neighbour, we could pray the Lord's Prayer in an authentic and meaningful way. In this way the Lord's Prayer becomes *faith in action* and ceases to be a duty to be performed. "Kingdom" and "forgiveness" are the two key terms used in the Lord's Prayer and they direct our attention to the basic Christian experience – the experience of God reigning in our hearts and the experience of God's forgiving love (see Rom 5:8; 1 Jn 4:10). The Lord's Prayer is, thus, "centred wholly on the Kingdom" and it is wholly a "prayer for the Kingdom" and "like the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, all our (other) petitions are ultimately paraphrases of the one great petition: 'May your kingdom come.'"¹¹³ "Kingdom of God," as the perfect blossoming of the communion of all, should be the centre of all our aspirations and searches: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6:33). The Lord's Prayer is, thus, not only a call to pray, but also a call to express our faith, to express our deepest convictions and a call to live our Christian life meaningfully and dynamically orientating it to the inner life of the triune God and centring it on the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity.

¹¹³Soares-Prabhu, "Speaking to Abba," 47, 49.