

The Lord's Prayer

Edited by
Beth Langstaff,
Loren Stuckenbruck, and
Michael Tilly

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Beth Yvonne Langstaff-Föll
(20. June 1961 – 20. March 2022)

beata memoria et gratia collegae cuius vita bene vixit

Foreword

This volume examines the Lord's Prayer in conversation with Jewish tradition, situates it in relation to New Testament theology, and explores its reception history in early Christianity. The contributions in this volume are the fruitful result of an international symposium held at the University of Tübingen early October 2018 and, as a whole, demonstrate the richness of the Lord's Prayer and its relevance for both Jewish and Christian identity.

The conference was bilingual, with papers presented and discussions held in both English and German, and by design was as international as possible, assembling a group of scholars who represented different regions of the world: Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and North America. The three-day-long program of presentations was arranged along chronological and topical lines. The contributions of the first sessions dealt with the Jewish context of the Lord's Prayer. The subsequent presentations focused on the prayer itself and related traditions in the New Testament. The final lectures addressed the prayer's reception in early Christian tradition.

The editors of this volume wish to thank the following individuals and organizations, without whose assistance and financial support neither the symposium nor this publication would have been possible: the academic staff and assistants of the Institut für antikes Judentum und hellenistische Religionsgeschichte at Tübingen University, of the Institute for the Study of Christian Origins e. V. Tübingen, and of the Lehrstuhl für Neues Testament (Schwerpunkt antikes Judentum) at LMU Munich, who made the conference such a success and helped to prepare this volume for publication; the "Vereinigung der Freunde der Universität Tübingen e. V. (Universitätsbund Tübingen e. V.)"; the "Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg" for their generous donations which helped defray the costs of the symposium; and a number of individual donors for much-appreciated gifts, including Ottie Mearl Stuckenbruck (†) and First Christian Church, Johnson City, Tennessee.

We would like to thank Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey, chief editor of the WUNT series, for accepting this collection of contributions for publication, and we wish to express our gratitude to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, Katharina Gutekunst, Tobias Stäbler, and the editorial staff at Mohr Siebeck Verlag for all their professional help during the publication process.

This volume reaches publication during what has been a difficult time for those who have been involved in its preparation: on 20. March 2022, Beth Lang-

staff, who played an essential role in the editing of this book, passed away after a lengthy illness. Serving for many years as Director of the Institut zur Erforschung des Urchristentums in Tübingen, she inspired students, colleagues, and members of the public alike with her teaching, scholarship, and engagement with church and community. Her presence among us is sorely missed. With deepest gratitude for Beth's life and service, we dedicate this volume to her memory.

Tübingen, 17 May 2022

B. Langstaff (†), L. Stuckenbruck, and M. Tilly

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations for Biblical Writings and Ancient Sources as well as for secondary literature used in the English contributions are based on *The SBL Handbook of Style. Second Edition*, Atlanta/Georgia 2014. The abbreviations in the German contributions follow Schwertner, Siegfried M., *IATG3 – International List of Abbreviations for Theology and Border Areas*, Berlin/Boston 2017.

In cases where abbreviations were not listed in one of the two volumes, they were taken from the respective other handbook. In addition, the following abbreviations have been introduced:

ASSL	Astrophysics and Space Science Library
BEP	lat. Für BEΠ, Βιβλιοθήκη Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων καὶ Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συγγραφέων, Athen 1955 ff.
BzGENT	Beiträge zur Geschichte und Erklärung des Neuen Testaments
LTS	Lehr- und Studienbücher Orthodoxe Theologie
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
PULC	Princeton University Library Chronicle
StJuC	Studien zu Judentum und Christentum
ThH	Theologen Handbücher
VIOTh	Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Orthodoxe Theologie

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer belongs at the core of the Christian tradition. There is hardly any confession in which it is not more frequently recited in liturgical, group and private settings than any other text of the New Testament. In the absence of one single "Urtext", this prayer was variously passed down in three early Christian writings: in the Gospel of Matthew (6:9–13), in the Gospel of Luke (11:2–4), and in the Didache (8:2), that is to say, both inside and outside the later canon of the New Testament. Both the differences and similarities between these three versions – to say nothing of their textual (manuscript) variants – continue to provoke intense scholarly research and discussion today. Scarcely one word or phrase of this short prayer has not stirred controversy as, for example, the address of God as "Abba/Father", the so-called "you petitions" ("your kingdom come"), or the "we petitions" ("lead us not into temptation"/"give us this day our daily bread").

However, to consider the Lord's Prayer as merely an "(early) Christian" prayer is inaccurate; it was originally also a Jewish prayer (E. Lohse). For this reason, an analysis of the prayer as a whole and of its individual parts requires a fundamental and comprehensive consideration of both the religious literature and the liturgical practices – practices bound up with temple and synagogue – of ancient Judaism. Writings relating to Old Testament tradition, as for example Jesus Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) or the Psalms of Solomon, as well as the extensive writings of Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, all serve to illuminate the Lord's Prayer as having both a Jewish and an early Christian character. Research into the Lord's Prayer has also been vastly enriched by the textual discoveries of Hebrew and Aramaic writings from the Dead Sea. Our understanding of the Lord's Prayer is broadened not only by the prayer texts themselves which have been preserved in this context, but also by the special features of the liturgy and praxis of ancient Judaism expressed in these texts. The keyword "day", for example, raises the question as to how deeply rooted the content of the Lord's Prayer ("daily bread") and its early Christian praxis (praying the Lord's Prayer three times a day [Didache 8:3]) are in Jewish daily prayer and Jewish understanding of time. In addition, the importance of the "standing prayer" (or *Amidah*) commonly referred to as the "Eighteen Benedictions" (*Shemoneh Esreh*), which could not be directly addressed among the contributions in this volume, should not be neglected. Rudiments of this prayer, which according to tradition was to be recited three times a day, certainly go back to the first century CE. As such, the praise and petitions in the *Shemoneh Esreh*, not least the call for divine justice

against “Minim” (“heretics” or “secretarians”), demonstrate how the deployment of petitions and forms of prayer could function as identity markers among and between groups. It is hoped that the contributions of the present volume will stimulate further research that takes this important tradition into account.

In addition to the analysis of the textual traditions, their content, and their Jewish and Christian character, respectively, it is also necessary to consider, as precisely as possible, the form and function of the Lord’s Prayer as prayer, a prayer which goes out from the individual petitioner and the praying community. In the Lord’s Prayer, the prayer of supplication takes center-stage. The Lord’s Prayer as prayer provokes disparate questions, social-anthropological as well as theological, concerning the character of prayer – written, learnt by heart, spoken – and also concerning its (intended or unintended!) effect upon the praying person and the praying community: How was a prayer such as the Lord’s Prayer framed by the relationship of the petitioner to God as “Father”? What role did the Lord’s Prayer play in the self-understanding of the petitioner and with reference to the instruction of the community? To what extent, for example, was the reconstructable tradition of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew, Luke, and the Didache reworked in order to express and to propagate particular ideals of piety?

The reception history of the Lord’s Prayer in early Christianity still remains in large part to be written. Already in the second century CE, however, one can find clear traces of the Lord’s Prayer, and by the middle of the third century no less than three independent treatments of this particular prayer have been penned: Tertullian’s *De Oratione*, Origen’s *Peri Euches*, and Cyrilian’s *De Oratione Dominica*. The exposition of the Lord’s Prayer is prominent in all three texts. A promising approach is not only the comparison of these texts and their respective intended audiences, but also the way in which each of these authors treats the different textual traditions of the Lord’s Prayer. The reception history of the Lord’s Prayer cannot be limited to its textual interpretation and application, however; this prayer also took on a fundamental role in the liturgy and in the practice of piety, not only in the Christian East, but also in the Occident. The reception history of the Lord’s Prayer in the Orthodox tradition, particularly within its rich liturgy and hymnology, has all too often been neglected by western scholars. The Symposium has, as a whole, also attempted to shed light on the wealth of traditions in which the Lord’s Prayer has been received.

Thus, the articles in this volume focus on these three focal points of research on the Lord’s Prayer: how it reflects and interacts with Jewish tradition, its theological significance for the earliest streams of Christian tradition, and ways it was subsequently received in selected texts of early Christianity. We offer here a brief overview of these contributions.

The first group of contributors explore the Jewish *Sitz-im-Leben* of the Lord’s Prayer.

Rodney Werline considers the ways in which the Lord's Prayer, in its three earliest contexts (Matthew, Luke and the Didache), has been redacted to inform communities on the proper practice of piety. In all three redactions, the Lord's Prayer is addressed within a context concerned with the practices of other (disparate) groups; over against these, this particular prayer serves as one expression of communal self-identity. At the same time, "there is nothing distinctively 'Christian' about the Lord's Prayer" per se; it shares both the themes and language of the Hebrew Bible with other Jewish texts of this era. Comparisons with those few Second Temple texts which address the right practice of prayer, chief among them Ben Sira and Qumran, reveal a lack of either explicit instruction or sectarian demarcation. Werline then turns to narrative passages in Daniel and I Enoch, arguing that the entreaties, blessings, and penitential prayers found in these texts do more than highlight individual piety; instead, these prayers are "products of believing, worshiping communities." The right practice of prayer within the community assists the audience to encounter and to embody the text.

Cana Werman examines the final three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, as redacted by Matthew (6:12–13), in the context of Jewish sources from the Second Temple period. The "debts" which the petitioner has already forgiven (6:12) should be seen in the context of the biblical command to remit loans during the Sabbatical year. The transformation of the Deuteronomic promise of material blessing into a promise of forgiveness may well provide the background for Matthew's redaction here. In all three of Matthew's final petitions, as in biblical wisdom literature and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy, the human being enjoys a high status, living in a reality "with which he can cope, with a little help from God, his ally." In Matthew's Lord's Prayer, the ordered world view of the closing petitions is in tension with its opening petitions, which express an eschatological hope for God's will to be worked in a disordered world – a tension which finds parallels in Second Temple literature, e.g., in the Book of Parables. At the same time, the certainty of restoration by a human end-time Messiah – a vision expressed in the Book of Parables – is not echoed in the Matthean Lord's Prayer.

Two essays deal with the so-called Qumran writings or with their supporters. Hermann Lichtenberger finds among the discoveries from the Dead Sea (but also already in the book Jesus Sirach) equivalents for "my father" and also for "our father," expressions which formed the foundation for Matt 6:9 and for later synagogal prayer (*Shemoneh Esreh* "our father"; *avinu malkenu*). The use of the "father" form of address in the New Testament and particularly in the Lord's Prayer is set within the wider discussion concerning the replacement of the divine name which can be observed in early Jewish and rabbinic literature. By means of a comparison between Qumran and rabbinic texts and New Testament texts one can demonstrate a continuity in the meaning of the "father" form of address: Over against other substitutions such as the address of "heaven," the

“father” form of address in early Jewish as in all New Testament texts emphasizes God’s care and sovereignty.

Judith H. Newman, noting that Jesus belongs to a long line of Jewish teachers who taught their students to pray, sets the Lord’s Prayer against the background of Jewish instruction about and practice of prayer in the post-exilic era. She examines three examples of Jewish teachers: Tobit, who teaches his family within the narrative and who exemplifies faithful prayer; the scribal sage, Ben Sira, whose instruction about prayer is set in a wisdom context and modelled in the prayers of the teacher himself; the Maskil of Qumran, the liturgical teacher who instructs the Sons of Light in esoteric mysteries and the daily practice of prayer while also modelling prayer. Newman then turns to portrayals of Jesus as the teacher of prayer. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus inspires his followers – including women – to pray to an immanent God both by his instruction and by his own practice of prayer. By contrast, Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Moses and as a dispenser of wisdom. The Didache, leaving aside narrative, extends the Gospel teaching of Jesus concerning prayer, stressing its liturgical context and daily practice.

Benjamin G. Wold likewise demonstrates the ways in which Qumran texts shed light on the Lord’s Prayer. 4QInstruction, in particular, offers a “valuable sapiential” background against which we might interpret the Sermon on the Mount, the broader context of the Matthean Lord’s Prayer. Both 4QInstruction and Matthew describe participation in the heavenly realm as a present reality and use economic terms (e.g., the “poor in spirit”) to describe how persons relate to that heavenly realm. The Matthean Lord’s Prayer and 4QInstruction share a number of motifs: God as Father, teaching about daily bread, and – most strikingly – forgiveness related to the remittance of debt. 4QInstruction “provides a previously unrecognized and valuable example of how a pious, religious community idealized a model of human debt remittance in relationship to fatherhood”, namely, “Father, cancel our debt as the wisest among us do.” This understanding of debt forgiveness illumines the sixth petition in Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts.” Matt 6:12 is calling on community members to set an example – an example which God will follow! – by forgiving literal debt.

The versions of the Lord’s Prayer in the New Testament are addressed by a number of contributors. In the process, the diversity of teaching about and practice of prayer, not only in the general religious and historical context of the first century A.D. [C.E.], but also in the New Testament itself, is clearly in view.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord’s Prayer forms part of the so-called Sermon on the Mount; *Ulrich Mell* analyses to what extent the Lord’s Prayer can be seen as the “center” of the Sermon on the Mount. In the process, he enters into debate over proposals concerning the structure of the Sermon on the Mount in recently published research – research which illustrates the perennial question concerning the place of the Lord’s Prayer within this larger section. In Mell’s

own view, the Sermon on the Mount can be regarded as a thematically-ordered wisdom collection of sayings. The Sermon on the Mount frames the Lord's Prayer with its arrangement of units consisting of 12, 6, and 3 sayings so that the Lord's Prayer is set as the theological center of the Sermon on the Mount, in the middle of the collection of sayings. True, it is not possible to establish a theological or syntactical correspondence between those units of sayings which come respectively before or after the Lord's Prayer; the Sermon on the Mount, however, aims at a "Christian" ethic of virtue, which wants to lead the reader to act in true righteousness.

Gerd J. Steyn focuses on one notable feature of the Matthean Lord's Prayer, namely, its repeated references to "heaven" and "earth". The presence or absence of these motifs shed light on the respective cosmology and eschatology of both Matthew and Luke. In contrast to Luke and to common usage in the LXX and Philo, Matthew most often refers to "heaven" in the plural: "our Father who is in the heavens" (οὐρανοῖς) and, elsewhere, "the kingdom of the heavens." The universe, in Matthew's worldview, as in Jewish post-exilic apocalyptic, encompassed multiple layers or spheres: the heavens of the birds, the clouds, the stars, or the angels, and the ultimate heaven where God abides. By addressing "our Father who is in the heavens," the Matthean Lord's Prayer proclaims God's presence within and dominion over all of these layers. The Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel, moreover, even as it distinguishes between "heavens" (the first three petitions) and "earth" (the final three petitions), also builds a bridge between these two realms, with its eschatological statement of faith in divine salvation, the fulfilment of God's will "as in heaven, so also on earth."

Wilfried Eisele addresses the challenging topic of petitionary prayer from both an exegetical and a theological perspective. In his contribution, he goes in search of a Lukan echo of the statement (James 1:13): God "himself tempts no one." He demonstrates that the motif of temptation in the Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer has particular relevance in this regard and that this motif should be considered within the broader theological context of faith, temptation, and protection. The Lord's Prayer is located at the centre of these thematic connections; at the same time, it sets forth a possible way in which temptations might be handled. For temptation in Luke is invariably a temptation of faith, a temptation which can be banished by prayer. With its petition for protection, the Lord's Prayer is also formulating a petition for the preservation of faith, and it is expressing – in the mode of hope – the trust of the person praying in God's provident care, also and especially in the face of temptation and the shaking of their faith.

Kasper Bro Larsen considers the Lord's Prayer from a Johannine perspective, arguing that one should speak not only of the absence of the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of John, but equally of its reception and its reworking. A careful reading of the Fourth Gospel, and particularly of Jesus' prayers in John 17 and 12:28a, shows that the long version of the Lord's Prayer – known to us from Matthew

and the Didache – was known to John, for he alludes to all six of its petitions, even as he reinterprets each one. John has reworked the Lord's Prayer in accordance with his Christology, stressing the Son's special relationship with the Father. In John 17, moreover, John shifts away from the future hopes expressed in the Lord's Prayer to a realized eschatology, emphasizing "Jesus' power to fulfil God's work and to give eternal life to the believer even in the believer's present". The prayers in John 17 and 12:28a are thus examples of "rewritten prayer", a common practice in early Judaism, and one employed by the Qumran scribes and the authors of the Book of Judith and the *Hodayot*. In the Gospel of John, the testamentary prayer of Jesus in chapter 17, together with John 12:28a, is "the Lord's signature prayer."

In the Gospel of Luke, as *Dennis R. Lindsay* observes, the Lord's Prayer in chapter 11 is the centrepiece of the broader Lukan concern with appropriate and effective prayer. In particular, the relationship between faith (*pistis*) and prayer in Luke's Gospel deserves our attention. Jesus' question in Luke 18:8b – "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find *pistis* on the earth?" – is answered in the affirmative by two examples of *pistis* and prayer: "the respective prayers of a powerless, marginalized widow, and of a sinful and equally marginalized tax collector". The *pistis* vocabulary, both in the LXX and the NT, and in line with the Hebrew *'aman*, refers to "faithfulness as an engaging mutual relationship" rather than to adherence to doctrine. Here in Luke's Gospel, *pistis*-qualified prayer is marked by both persistence and repentance, and answered above all in the forgiveness of sins. Although *pistis* is not explicitly mentioned in the Lukan Lord's Prayer, it is assumed in the Lukan context and integral to the "mutuality of forgiveness" in the fourth petition. Those who pray this petition, in humility and grace, show *pistis* on earth as they receive forgiveness and are empowered to "participate in God's own redemptive work."

Karl-Heinrich Ostmeier turns to the person who prays, focusing on this person's self-understanding and hermeneutics. From a pragmatic perspective, he raises questions concerning the didactic function of the Lord's Prayer, a function which consists in the responsibility of the person praying, as they engage in prayer, to come closer to the ideal of the prayer implicit in the Lord's Prayer. He reconstructs this ideal in terms of a father-child relationship, one in which the prayer is permanently placed, on the basis of his faith. In the (daily) ritual of prayer, the prayer – so Ostmeier proposes – practices a fundamental attitude that can be described as an approximation to God's will, and which – in light of the petition for forgiveness – includes a constant willingness to forgive. He concludes with a hermeneutic view of the change that occurs in the self-understanding of the prayer as a child of God and, following on from this, with the principle that all New Testament texts should be read as texts spoken by God the Father.

The final three chapters address the reception history of the Lord's Prayer in early Christianity.

Tobias Nicklas takes us on the search for traces of the Lord's Prayer in the early Christian world prior to Origen's time. He investigates the reception history of the Lord's Prayer in early Christian writings by surveying an exemplary collection: the Didache, the letter of Polycarp, 1 Clement, and apocryphal writings. Drawing comparisons with the Matthaean version, he demonstrates shifts within the Lord's Prayer and its situational interpretation. The Lord's Prayer could be taken up in both ethical and theological contexts, as part of the social memory. By comparing early Christian texts, Nicklas is able to show that the Lord's Prayer was already understood early as a Christian "identity marker" and as a "mental dimension." It belonged already in this early phase to the texts which should not only accompany, but also form the Christian life. Moreover, the essential role of the Lord's Prayer in the formation of Christian self-understanding over against other early Christian groups and movements can be substantiated.

Ronald E. Heine calls our attention to Origen, in particular to his treatise *On Prayer*. In the preface, Origen, reflecting upon Romans 8:26, notes the importance of praying "as we ought" and praying "for what we ought." He then cites a saying of Jesus not found in any canonical or non-canonical gospel: "Seek the great things and the little things will be added for you." The Lord's Prayer serves as an example of these "great things", of "the kinds of things one ought to address to God in prayer." Origen expounds the petitions of the Lord's Prayer spiritually, not eschatologically or materially. If the prayer for "daily bread" is to be properly understood within the rubric of "great things," for example, then it cannot refer to the meeting of material needs; rather, it is the Word, the true and living bread that nourishes those in all stages of spiritual development. In short, "Origen understood every petition in the Lord's Prayer to be concerned with the interior life of the person or persons praying, for this was the locus of the great and heavenly things."

Konstantin Nikolakopoulos turns to the liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer in Orthodox worship. The hermeneutical premise here is the Orthodox exposition of Scripture in the sense of a liturgical exegesis, which determines the place of interpretation in the liturgical use of biblical writings. As a consequence, the "Our Father", as it is also known, not only forms a substantial element of all liturgical formulas in the Orthodox tradition, but it also has an impressive reception history in the field of Orthodox hymnography. The special place of the Lord's Prayer can be seen in its liturgical and recitative use as a spoken prayer and in the way in which it has served to inspire a multitude of Eastern Christian hymns. With regard to the influence of the Lord's Prayer on hymnography, Nikolakopoulos takes the First Antiphon, a collection of hymns for the Good Friday church service, as an example. In the First Antiphon, the Lord's Prayer is connected to the Passion narrative, a connection which facilitates a new substantive function for the liturgical interpretation of the Lord's Prayer.

I. The Jewish Background of the Lord's Prayer

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1. The Hebrew Bible and Greek Translations of Its Books

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