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Do Not Let Us Fall into Temptation: A New Understanding of the Lord's Prayer

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Abstract: Does God lead us to temptation? The basic question that the author in this article poses is: Does God 'leads' humans into temptation or human themselves surrender to the evil existing in the world. The author refers to the new understanding of the popular Christian prayer Our Father and shows that the words learned by millions of English and Italian-speaking believers are due to be changed after a 16-year-long research carried out by experts from a theological, pastoral and linguistic viewpoint. He points out that Pope Francis offers words of encouragement and inspiration for all who are seeking hope and direction in our often-tumultuous world. As children of God, we learn that God is our Father who cares about us, our needs and desires to draw us ever closer to himself.

Keywords: Lord's Prayer, Our Father, Pope Francis, Temptation, Leading to Temptation, Succumbing to Temptation.

One of the fundamental questions Christians ask is: Does God 'lead' humans into temptation? Or, Do human themselves surrender to the evil existing in the world? The words learned by millions of English and Italian-speaking believers are due to be changed after a 16-year-long research carried out by experts from a theological, pastoral and linguistic viewpoint. The Italian bishops have already decided to change "lead us not into temptation" to "abandon us not when in

temptation.” The ‘new’ Our Father in effect from 2019 is being prayed daily at Mass in Italy. Besides, there is a change in a verse within gloria. The new translations, ‘allegedly’ more adherent to the original text, are the main innovations that emerged from the last assembly of the Italian Bishops’ Conference (CEI). Many other languages have this. It is theologically accurate. Today, attempt is being made to ensure that the translation is not left open to misinterpretation. A wrong translation might come as a ‘blasphemy’, or heresy (Friso 2019)..

Do Not Lead Us to Temptation

What ‘new’ Our Father are we talking about? Certainly, it is not a theological revolution, but a revised version of the Roman Missal, the liturgical text for the Eucharistic celebrations of the Catholic community (Lectionary). The experts have been working on it since 2002 to contribute to the renewal of the Church community through a liturgical reform. In contrary, in January 2018, the ‘conservative’ German bishops’ conference, chose to keep the Our Father as it is. They noted “philosophical, exegetical, liturgical and, not least, ecumenical” reasons for not following the modern trend but leave it untouched, because the petition speaks of “the trust to be carried and redeemed by almighty God.”

“Do not lead us into temptation” becomes: “do not ‘abandon us’ to temptation” or “Do not let us fall into temptation”, removing the possible misunderstanding about the agent of temptation itself. Pope Francis says, “It is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation [...] I am the one who falls. It’s not He pushing me into temptation to see how I have fallen [...] A father doesn’t do that; a father helps you to get up immediately. It’s Satan who leads us into temptation, that’s his department.” (Pope Francis told Italy’s TV2000 channel in

2017, for The Guardian). He illuminates the Lord's Prayer, the most important and oft repeated prayer in all of Christianity, as a guide to living a life of meaning, purpose and strength. He offers unprecedented insight into Jesus's most profound words, as he explores the importance of embracing social justice, benevolence, and forgiveness in our hearts and minds.

This clarification, though, is not the latest finding of Pope Francis. The new version is not, in fact, a novelty in absolute terms. It is already heard in some community celebrations (not yet in the Mass), as well as it is known that there are faithful who have adopted it definitively in their own personal prayer and family. This is because the last official translation of the CEI dates back to 2008 and it is already proposed in the translation: "and do not allow us to give in to temptation" (Mk, 6:9-13), emphasizing a clear truth that is easily traced in the Bible (1 James 1:13-15): "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed by the evil around. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." The previous verse 12 states, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."

Don't Let Us Succumb to Temptation

God never puts us into temptation. The petition does not imply "don't bring us to the place of temptation" or "don't allow us to be tempted." It can only mean as "don't let us succumb to temptation" or "don't abandon us to temptation." Sometimes we succumb to temptations but never because we have no alternative, for God will never put us into test beyond our ability (1 Cor 10:13). God does not 'bring' us to the test. Neither He 'leads' us to the test. It is wrong, therefore, to pray, "don't 'get us' (lead/induce) into temptation". Rather, we can pray, "Keep us from (falling into) temptation."

Similarly, when we tell God, “deliver us from evil”, it means we have already fallen into evil, and now we plead with God to ‘lift us up’ (save/deliver) us from evil. The last clause “deliver us from evil” may mean either “rescue from” or “protect against” “the evil one” (as noun, referring to the Devil). Some scholars opine that the word is a neuter, (neither Hebrew nor Aramaic uses “the evil one” to denote Satan). Whatever it be, evil exists in the world.

Prayer is not a psychoactive chant that may trigger a meditative mood or transfigure us into a mystic. It is a simple set of words that are metaphorically arranged which induces a state of being aware and conscious beyond the mundane (literal meaning of the word or its present significance). It makes an amendment between us and God and makes us to be aware of God, of creation and the purpose of our existence. Human beings ‘believe’ in being tempted because of their uncontrolled desire of the mind and the awareness of their limits of satisfaction. As all is good, the desires for more can lead to ‘temptation’ for satisfaction. And that is evil existing in the mind, out of the ability to think and act. By driving the consciousness towards a divine experience through the Lord’s Prayer, we enrich our souls overcoming greedy desire for more.

The Lords’ Prayer indeed conditions us to know the reality beyond the personality of the mind. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Christ teaches us to pray, not that we may not be tempted, but that we may not be led into temptation. For it is when one overcomes temptation that one deserves the reward [...] Our Lord, therefore, teaches us to pray that we be not led into temptation, by giving our consent to it,” because “it is human to be tempted.”

In Paul’s Letter to the Philippines, in particular, in the final exhortation (Phil 4:4-9), concrete role of marching for a good and worthy life. Does it mean, perhaps, “let us not enter into temptation”? The French bishops, a few years ago, chose to

change the precedent “not to submit us to temptation” by “not letting us enter into temptation”. They have modified the prayer as “do not leave us to fall into temptation,” because it is I who fall; it isn’t He who throws me into temptation. A literal translation of Spanish also shows the same pattern. It would read, “Do not let us fall into temptation” (changed from 17th C translation: *no nos metas in tentación*, ‘do not place us in temptation’). The choice for English language could be “do not abandon us in temptation”, or “do not let us fall into temptation”, (as chosen by the Spanish translation).

Helping One Another to Dare

These nods are enough to understand how delicate the subject is. Brother Enzo, the founder of the Bose community, points out: “Understanding the liturgy and its language is an unrelenting challenge: it is a question of conveying a message faithfully to the original intent and, at the same time, understand the actual recipient.” A famous adage argues that “translating is cheating”. At least in part, it certainly is. Translation is a complex process: through it we can emphasize on certain nuances that still remain, untranslated in keeping with the prevalent cultures, progressive linguistic forms of expressions within a particular time in history. For this reason, "perfect" translation does not exist. The best may get close to the original but, with the same lack of errors, it can be flanked by another equally valid one. Therefore, is it *trial* or *temptation*? According to Enzo Bianchi, who has been involved for 50 years, in the study of the Word, the translation used by all Christians for decade has been “very faithful to the Latin text, sounding “*do not induce us into temptation*” and risked giving a perverse image of God, as if that God can be the author of temptation.” He observes that “it is not easy to translate a Greek expression that, perhaps, finds inspiration in a psalm in Aramaic found in Qumran, where the faithful expresses themselves thus: “Let me not enter into situations too difficult for me!” Does the

Greek term (*peirasmòs*) mean ‘test’ (trial), or ‘temptation’? And, what about the verbal phrase “do not let us enter” (in trial or temptation), being in the active form?

St Augustine says outright: “Many people in their prayers, however, say it this way: ‘and do not allow us to be led into temptation.’” Catholic commentator Peter D. Williams (2019) in a blog for *Premier Christianity* makes an excellent point: that, the problematic word *peirasmòs*, was translated by St. Jerome as ‘temptation’, which probably is closer to trial or test (outside New Testament Greek). A more accurate translation, would be “do not lead us into trials/tests”. Unfortunately, the wrong word has been used.

In the book, *Our Father: Reflections on the Lord’s Prayer*, Pope Francis (2018) writes : “We need courage to pray the Our Father to truly believe that God is the Father who accompanies us, forgives us, gives us bread, is attentive to all that we ask, clothes us even better than the flowers of the field. To believe is a big risk.” Challenging this doubt and fear, he issues a call to “dare [. . .] help one another to dare.” He offers words of encouragement and inspiration for all who are seeking hope and direction in our often tumultuous world. As children of God, we learn that God is our Father who cares about us, our needs and desires to draw us ever closer to himself. As J. Ivy (2020), author of *Dear Father: Breaking the Cycle of Pain*, writes, “We all want to make it home to our Father.”

Conclusion

Based on 1 Chr 29:11-13, a doxology is added to Our Father at the end (not found in Mt 13:14). Sinless Jesus cannot ask God to forgive his sin. However, Jesus sets up an example of prayer for his disciples, in order to reconcile with God in unity, while honoring God’s name in our daily life. Thus, we build His



kingdom, praying to God daily for the needs of our body, and asking for forgiveness of our sins. We pray for deliverance from and protection in testing.

(This map is called Europa Polyglotta and was published in 1730 by Gottfried Hensel. Our Father is written in all the European languages of the time and each language is placed in the respective geographical area.)

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