

I have received numerous queries about the Pope's recent comments about the Lord's Prayer. There has been a good deal of news coverage on the topic. Here is an article from my local paper:

<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODN/NewsandObserver/shared/ShowArticle.aspx?doc=NAO%2F2017%2F12%2F09&entity=Ar05202&sk=CF05DD44&mode=text>

The issue is summed up in that article as this:

In a new television interview, Pope Francis said the common rendering of one line in the prayer - "lead us not into temptation" - was "not a good translation" from ancient texts. "Do not let us fall into temptation," he suggested, might be better because God does not lead people into temptation; Satan does.

"A father doesn't do that," the pope said. "He helps you get up right away. What induces into temptation is Satan."

In essence, the pope said, the prayer, from the Book of Matthew, is asking God, "When Satan leads us into temptation, You please, give me a hand."

And so I have been asked by several people what I think about that. There are at least three issues involved:

1. What should Christians today pray? On this, unlike the Pope, I have no opinion. I completely understand that the Pope does not want anyone to think that God himself is responsible for bringing temptation. And I suppose as head of the Catholic Church, he has the right to suggest that Christians pray something appropriate rather than inappropriate. But, as most readers on this blog probably realize, I myself am in no position (and have no inclination) to make suggestions about people's prayer lives.
2. What does the Gospel of Matthew actually indicate that Jesus told his disciples to pray? On this I'm more of an expert. The Greek is completely unambiguous. It decidedly does not say what the Pope wants it to say. It does not talk about Satan leading people into temptation or about people "falling" into temptation. Matthew's wording is clear: KAI MH EISENEGKHIS HMAS EIS PEIRASMON. The key word is EISENEGKHIS ("lead us into") It is an aorist, active, subjunctive, second person, singular, with the subjunctive being used with an imperatival force in a negative command. The word itself is a compound verb with EIS ("into") and ENEGKHIS ("bring"). The proper translation then, is "Do not bring us into temptation." It's not ambiguous. It is directed to "Our Father" and it is asking God not to put a person into a time of temptation or trial. The word "temptation" can mean what we mean by it - the temptation to do something wrong or sinful. But it can also refer to a test or trial. So it could mean something like: don't make us undergo a time of trial at the end of this age.
3. What did Jesus actually teach his disciples to pray? This is a tricky historical question, and I don't have a definitive answer. The prayer as found in Matthew 6:9-13 is partially found, as well, in Luke 11:2-4 - including this line "Do not bring us into temptation/trial." That means that the prayer - or at least the heart of it, including the line in question - comes from Q. So it is older than both Matthew and Luke. Does the prayer go back to the historical Jesus? My inclination is to think that it does, in no small measure because it coincides so well with his apocalyptic message otherwise. The prayer is asking for God to bring his kingdom soon to earth, to help his followers live till then ("daily bread"), to make them qualified for the kingdom ("forgive us our debts"), and to keep them from facing trials and tribulations at the end of the age. Short story: if Jesus did teach this prayer - as I'm

inclined to think he did - he probably did teach his disciples to ask not to be brought by God into a time of trial. Whether that's what Christians ought to pray today or not is up to the individual Christian. And, apparently, to the Pope. **Members of the blog can read posts like this all the time, at least five times a week. If you don't belong yet, you can join for very little money (less than a dime a post). All the money goes to charities fighting hunger and homelessness. So why not JOIN???**



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