



Prayer Before Studying Theology:

ALMIGHTY Father, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--Book of Common Prayer (1928), First Sunday After Easter

Teaching the Church to Pray: Early Christian Expositions of the Lord's Prayer (II):

- **Origen of Alexandria (185/6-254/5): His Teaching on Prayer and Contribution to Later Ascetic Spirituality**

Origen was born c. 185. His father was martyred when he was a child. He then resided with a wealthy female patron whose favorite protégé was a Valentinian Gnostic (in fact, the household or school seems to have been sympathetic to this). Origen refused this heresy and searched for alternatives to it. This led him to devote extensive consideration to the problem of how and why evil exists in the present world (which was created by God)

Origen later became a teacher/tutor in grammar/rhetoric/philosophy and then renounced this to take up a disciplined (ascetic) Christian life, selling his library to help support himself. He then apparently served as a teacher, instructing the baptized (possibly offering advanced biblical-theological studies for educated converts, an option for Christian instruction beyond simple baptismal catechesis).

After a conflict with his bishop in Alexandria, Origen moved to Caesarea in the 230's, where he was ordained a presbyter and taught/preached/expounded the Bible.

Arrested and tortured in the Decian persecution, he died in 254.

- The importance of allegory—allegory a standard literary device for interpreting classic literature (e.g. Homer); allows apparently unfitting or irrelevant material to be interpreted in a way congruent with the nobility and deep meaning of the biblical text.
- The importance of Platonic philosophy and Stoic ethics
- The importance of grammatical interpretation (basic literary criticism)=definition of words/terms, analysis of word choice, syntactical constructions/literary style attended to wherever they might shape meaning (see emphasis upon first occurrence and definitions of terms in a text [p. 117] and textual criticism [p. 144]).

Origen's treatise is the first extant exposition of the Lord's Prayer that does not seem to have originated in baptismal catechesis and therefore transcends the earlier focus on simple petitionary

prayer (without much further elaboration), such as we observed last week in the treatises of Tertullian and Cyprian.

- It establishes some lasting precedents that guide later expositions of the Lord's Prayer in the Greek East, e.g.
 - "Deliver us from the Evil (One)"
 - allegorical interpretation of "bread" as the incorporeal Word of Life.
- Like Tertullian and Cyprian, it gives detailed instruction on postures and times of prayer (see chapters 31-32), which is not always the case with later expositions.

Prayer in General (Chapters 1-17)

Exposition of the Lord's Prayer (Chapters 18-34)

Proemium: Win Audience's Sympathy for the Subject Being Presented Through the Praise of Wisdom (Esp. the Wisdom of the Historical Person Whose Words Are Presented or Discussed)

Chapter 1: The special significance of the Lord's Prayer lies in the fact that it is divinely offered to us when we in our weakness do not know how to pray in accordance with God's will.

Address to the Patrons and Statement of the Purpose of the Treatise

Chapter 2: Address to the patrons, Ambrosius and Tatiana (personalizes the text and overcomes the anonymity of readership). Ambrosius had originally been a follower of Valentinian Gnosticism but had been won over to the orthodox faith by Origen's teaching.

This address to the patrons also contains the *propositio*, in which Origen discusses the aims or goals he hopes to achieve in writing this work:

- The manner in which one should pray (the disposition of the one who prays)
 - with a clear conscience after reconciliation with others has occurred
 - forgiving enemies and praying for enemies
- What one should say to God in prayer
 - The Spirit meets us in our ignorance to help us pray and intercedes on our behalf. ("Our mind cannot pray unless the Spirit prays first.")
- What occasions (and how many occasions) are suited to prayer
- [Lacuna in manuscript; possibly, what we ought to request in petitionary prayer?]

Definition of Terms (ὄρος)

Chapters 3-4: The beginning of the exposition of the concept of "prayer," using the techniques regularly employed in late antique grammatical studies.

- First mention of the word prayer (εὐχή) within the text as central to defining its meaning/function within the text (literally, the word="vow"; Origen: the word refers "to somebody who promises with a vow to do certain things should he obtain certain other things from God," but later comes to mean simply "prayer").
- The relation of the term established philologically in relation to similar words (e.g. compound words like προσευχή), with a distinction of terms established. (Stewart-Sykes translates προσευχή as "intercession," as if it were equivalent to εἵντευξις; the Greeks, however, often thought of the former as asking for good things, the former as complaining about those things that hurt us.)

Why Is It Necessary to Pray?: Responding to Objections Arising from Determinism

Chapter 5: The question examined of why we should pray when prayer neither adds to God's prior knowledge nor changes God's will—why then does not God's knowledge and providence render prayer superfluous? (see p. 124; 5.6: "At this point let me lay out the very words that you set down when you wrote to me. They are as follow:

‘Firstly, if God has foreknowledge of what is to come about, and this will occur of necessity, then prayer is pointless.

Secondly: if all things occur through the will of God, and his decrees are fixed, and if nothing which he wills can be altered, prayer is pointless.’”)

Origen: This criticism could be extended:

- Question: Why are baptism and the Lord's Supper useful?
 - Are they useful to God?
 - Or are they useful to us?

Perhaps the same is true of prayer and this is part of the reason why prayer is commanded.

- God has left a measure of freedom in the world and it is concerning these things that prayer is to be offered. Prayer is not normally offered for things that happen as a matter of necessity, since these happen apart from prayer.
 - Furthermore, a father may act for a child when the latter is unable to act for themselves, but when the child is able to act, the father can reasonably wait for them ask.

Refuting Determinism: Where is Freedom Located? What Kinds of Motions or Changes Can Be Considered "Free"?

Chapter 6: Some reflections on how things change and motion is initiated:

- A thing can be moved by external action upon it, being kept together (as it is moved/goes through change) by its constitution (κατασκευή).
- A thing can be moved "of itself" by its innate nature (φύσις).
- An animal can be moved "from itself" (local motion?=κατάβασις)
- A rational being can move "through itself" (i.e. by its own volition), hence responsibility and punishment are reasonably assigned to those who do wrong, since they have the capacity both to originate and control action.

Foreknowledge and Providence Are Compatible with Freedom

Our free actions are foreknown by God in the same way that all other contingent (i.e. non-necessary) events are foreseen by God and taken into account in his providence.

- In the same way, God knows in advance our particular exercise of free will and this is taken account in God's providence as he leads us on to better things.
- God chooses to make his response to prayers contingent upon what he foresees to be fitting and profitable.

Chapter 7: Even the Sun and the Moon, as living beings (=have a refined, ethereal existence and, engaging in complex [epicyclical] movements, appear to be self-moved), act freely and their movements are taken into account in God's providence.

Chapter 8: God sets up the world in a way that prayer is made a precondition for certain things to happen (just as a mother is the precondition for the birth of a child). God does this with a view to forming us, since in turning to Him in prayer, we avoid certain vices and arrive at certain virtues.

- No good would have been served, for example, if God did not do this but, e.g., answered angry prayers for vengeance made by the unreconciled.
- Prayer not only brings honor to God, but benefits us as well.

Chapter 9-13: More specifically, prayer requires a turning in dependence to God, which helps us to understand the relative insufficiency of all created things.

- Our aims and goals then are not for material things, but is in God that we find our proper goal.
- Love is the greatest of the virtues and the means by which we are united to others (cf. p. 135) and to God and prayer is intrinsically linked with love (cf. p. 137).
 - This is why prayer is to be offered throughout the day (the 3 times/day of the Old Testament) and in the New Testament Paul instructs Christians to pray without ceasing (pp. 137-138).

Types of Prayer

Chapter 14: The Four Major Types of Prayer (1 Tim. 2:1):

- “Supplication” (*deesis*): “the prayer that is offered with pleading, by somebody who is lacking something, so that it might be obtained.
- “Intercession” (*proseuche*): “offered up by somebody more high-minded and is accompanied by ascription of glory.”
- “Plea” (*enteuxis*): “an address requesting something that is made to God with boldness”—it is not we ourselves, but the Spirit who does this pleading (Rom. 8:26-27)
- “Thanksgiving” (*eucharistia*): “a response made by somebody who, after prayer, has received good things from God; the response is an acknowledgement of the greatness of the blessing, as the greatness of the blessing”—this true far more of spiritual blessings than of material blessings

Pleading and thanksgiving can be addressed to other human beings but supplication should be addressed only to those who are saints, since it is an appeal to a person who has what one is lacking (and this can never be true of the wicked).

Can One Pray to the Son?

Chapters 15-16: If we should not pray to beings who have a derivative existence, but only to the uncreated, unoriginate God, what then of prayer to the Son, whose existence is derivative from that of the Father?

- Can we pray to the Son, while ignoring the Father who is the source of the Son’s life and existence?
- Can we pray to the Father and Son together, as if there were two coeternal, co-equal sources of divinity without falling into polytheism?

The answer turns out to be that we should recognize an order (*taxis*) within the divine life, with the unbegotten Father as source and the Son as begotten. We should therefore pray to the Father (as the Lord’s Prayer commends) through the Son. “No prayer should be offered to the Father except through him” (p. 147).

Exposition of the Lord's Prayer

Chapter 18: Exposition of the Lord's Prayer Begins: The two different versions of the Lord's Prayer addressed—spoken on two occasions, one private and one public, but with common elements and common meaning.

Chapters 19-21: Proper Attitudes in Prayer:

- against seeking worldly glory and making an outward show of goodness out of vainglory;
- against praying primarily for material benefits

Chapter 22: "Our Father Who Are in the heavens"

- The individual's intimate address to God as Father and a firm, abiding sonship are not found in the OT.
- Sonship (filiation) also involves moral likeness.
 - Thus, restored by the Son, the saints bear his image and likeness.
 - We must examine ourselves to avoid praying impiously due to a lack of repentance and reconciliation.

Chapter 23: "Are in the Heavens" God is not

- a body (divisible, material, corruptible) or
- circumscribed or enclosed in any space.

Chapter 24: "Let Your Name Be Hallowed":

- The hallowing of the name of the father has not yet occurred.
- A name is indicative of the peculiar quality of that person.
- Names are changed when the peculiar qualities of a person change.
- God, however, does not change but our approach/relation to God changes as we are enabled once again to know him and respond to him ("having in mind his need of God to make perfect, and calling to his assistance the one who is truly able to supply what was mentioned").
- We must have true understanding of God's character and be united and of one mind and judgment in regard to this.
 - This is made possible by an outflowing of power from God, in which we are made to participate.
 - To think that the outworking and fulfillment of the divine plan depends on created beings rather than on God is to fall into the old anthropomorphic mistake of Tatian, who thought that the Creator prayed, "Let there be light" because he depended on something outside himself.

Chapter 25: "Let Your Kingdom Come" within oneself so that the mind and heart may reverently submit to God and gain wisdom and knowledge.

- The redemption of all things (future) must begin now with the renovation of mind/heart (=the reign of God in us) and the mind's long journey back to God by way of knowledge and love, overcoming the fallen passions/desires which disturb us and cause us to deteriorate and fall away from God toward death.
- The repetition of this petition is appropriate that we might ask to receive this more fully and to a greater degree (perfection in wisdom and knowledge only at consummation)

Chapter 26: “Let Your Will Be Done—As in Heaven so also on Earth”—this will come about when we do nothing contrary to the Father’s will but rather receive it as Christ received it (by desire tending toward the latter’s perfection and becoming increasingly conformed to Christ in this). Christ is our Heaven.

Chapter 27: The bread for which we pray is not that which is mundane and material (as if material things could ever be an end or goal in and of themselves.

- Instead we should see this petition as connected with the previous petitions that God’s reign would come in us (“Your kingdom come”) as we are made like Christ and so the Father’s will is received and becomes complete in us (“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven).
 - The bread for which we pray is thus Jesus as the bread of life and the incorporeal Word which nourishes us inwardly.
- This bread is called *epiousios* (supersubstantial) because it is conjoined with the divine substance and is added to us, going beyond what we are (as a surplus) and allowing us to participate in the life and existence of God (God’s power acting upon our reason and conforming us to its goodness so that we can truly discriminate between good and evil).
 - The alternative to making this petition is to die through a famine of the Lord’s Word (which is not much of an alternative!).
- It is not human beings alone who participate in the divine goodness but the angels as well.
- We pray that the divine goodness might come upon (*epieinai*) us even now (this age), though it is something that belongs primarily to the future (the age to come).

Chapter 28: “Forgive...as we forgive...”: This does state a condition for forgiveness, but the achievement of this condition requires the prior action of the Spirit (grace to love beyond our natural capacities, with all our heart and mind).

Chapter 29-30: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”:

- We are not praying that we not be tested or tempted, for that is impossible in this life.
 - Health and strength are not unconditional goods, but can be occasions for sin and can give power to sin, with worldly resources allowing sin (distorted desire) to extend its far-reaching destructive effects. (One thinks here of the bodily strength of the Gerasene demoniac and the worldly power of those who despised Jesus and nailed him to a cross.)
- We are asking that we not be overwhelmed or overcome by temptation when we are tested.
- God never tempts one to evil but afflicts the soul that it may be purified of desires and turn away from baser things and back to him and manifest virtue by resisting evil.
 - “The utility of testing is thus something like this: through testing the things which our souls have admitted, unknown to anyone except God, unknown even to ourselves, are made manifest, so that we should no longer be unaware of what kind of people we are, but may recognize this and, should we so wish, perceive our own evil and give thanks for the good things which have been made manifest to us through testing” (p. 203; see the bottom half of the page for further discussion).

Excursus: Origen's Esoteric Doctrine: A Solution to the Problem of Why Evil Exists and Afflicts Us from Birth

- p. 114: “the groanings in this tent can only weigh down those who have fallen or wandered”
- p. 115: “our soul is humbled to the dust and enclosed in the body of our humiliation”
- p. 123: estranged from birth –Esau hated before he was born;
- pp. 131 (bottom)-132 (top)
- pp. 139 (bottom)-140 (top)
- p. 161
- p. 165 (body of humiliation; outflowing of divinity)
- p. 167 (bottom)-168 (top)
- p. 174
- p. 185 (the arrangement of the ages and final rest, though final restoration of all is uncertain)
- p. 199-204

Chapters 31-32: Postures in Prayer and the Disposition of the Soul :

- Attention and raising the mind up to the heavens (“one...wears on the body the image of the characteristics which are becoming to the soul in prayer”=“standing with hands extended and eyes upraised”).
- Kneeling out of humility
- The place of prayer where believers gather as a place of power
- Different explanations given for praying toward the East (the rising of the sun/Son who is true light).

Chapter 33: Summary and Giving of an Order for Prayer