

THE LORD'S PRAYER
AND
MODERN MAN

ROGER HICKS



BLANDFORD PRESS

By the same author
The Endless Adventure
Letters to Parsi (o/p.)

First published 1967
Second edition 1971
© 1967 Blandford Press Limited,
167 High Holborn, London, W.C.1V 6PH

Dutch edition
published by
W. Ten Have, N.V., Amsterdam

The quotations from the New Testament are taken from J. B. Phillips' translation The New Testament in Modern English by permission of Geoffrey Bles Ltd. Other quoted extracts are acknowledged specifically in the footnotes, and I am grateful to all the publishers concerned for their permission.

R. O. H.

*Printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), Ltd,
Bungay, Suffolk*

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¹ The Book of Common Prayer, from which this text of the Lord's Prayer is taken, says 'in earth'. The more usual 'on earth' is, however, used throughout this book.

I am convinced that with the experimental method we could have a new flowering of faith that could reshape our civilisation.

It would, I believe, be a faith in a spiritual reality to match that of the Middle Ages, but one based not upon a belief in a miraculous interference with the course of nature but upon a greatly widened scientific outlook. By experimenting I mean putting to the test the act of prayer. Experiment to see if it works. However unlikely it may seem to one from one's rationalistic upbringing, try the experiment of really imagining that there is some element that one can make contact with beyond the conscious self. Have that amount of faith—and see.¹

Sir Alister Hardy, F.R.S.

In every encounter with reality, in whatever discipline, we find that the reality comes to meet us; it is given.²

C. A. Coulson, F.R.S.

¹ *The Divine Flame*, Part 2 of the Gifford Lectures on Science, Natural History and Religion, by Sir Alister Hardy, M.A., D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S., Emeritus Professor of Zoology in the University of Oxford (Collins, 1966), p. 242.

² *Science and Christian Belief*, C. A. Coulson, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S., Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics in the University of Oxford (Fontana Books, Collins), p. 123.

Introduction

This book is a working manual for those of all faiths and of none, who want to find out if there is any sense in praying and, if there is, how to go about it.

It is an examination, from a practical point of view, of the answer Jesus gave his friends when they asked him to teach them to pray.

Jesus was a rebel against the *status quo*. He did not accommodate himself to people. He went all out to bring inner revolution to men and through them to build a new world. He invited others to join him. Those who accepted his targets and his standards became conscious of their need for more than human help and direction. They wanted to know how to pray.

These friends of Jesus would not have called themselves Christians. In his lifetime the name had not been invented. There had been no Crucifixion or Resurrection for them to believe in; no Pentecost for them to experience. There was no Creed to which they could subscribe. Jesus showed them a road along which they could go, an experiment they could make.

Professor C. A. Coulson, F.R.S., has said of scientists:

‘The only hope for science, as it is, certainly its glory and excitement, is to follow uncompromisingly wherever we are led.’¹

¹ *Science and Christian Belief*, p. 29.

The same is true for followers of Jesus. When we do that, as Francis Bacon said, 'we need fear no lion in the path nor set any limit to our journey'.

By going along the road he pointed out and setting no limits to their journey, Jesus' followers found that God became real to them and a force in their lives. Simple folk that they were, they made history.

The discovery of how men can change, become modernised, and together apply the discoveries of science and the fruits of industry for the benefit of all mankind, opens the way to an endless adventure.

The peoples of the earth, hungry for food, effective statesmanship and peace, scan the horizon for hope of an answer. Perhaps the most hopeful sign today is the emergence of a generation which recognises the need for change and is ready to be involved. Their hatred of cant and humbug, and their desire for what is fresh, sincere, and real, could mean that the Lord's Prayer is accepted as a practical dynamic programme to be lived and made known to renew the face of the whole world.



Every age needs to reinterpret the Lord's Prayer and none more so than our own. God himself is no longer taken for granted, even in those European countries where once Christianity was dominant.

Our view of the past changes as the passing of time helps us to see the same facts of history from a wider perspective. The technological achievements of this scientific age also bring a new perspective—one that often seems further to undermine the authority of religion. 'It is a puzzled world; so many people still find religion in their hearts but find their minds deciding that such

yearnings must be the product of a childish wishful thinking.'¹

Modern man will in fact, seldom accept God on any authority. He wants to find him by experience. It is possible to say the Lord's Prayer meaningfully and be intellectually honest and relevantly effective. A man who prays is more up-to-date than a man who relies only on himself.

* * *

This introduction to the Lord's Prayer is designed both to be read and discussed by groups and to be an aid to the individual's private prayer. It could be read at a single sitting, but it is intended, rather, to provide food for thought over several days and weeks. It is important to take time to follow where the Spirit leads. 'While I was musing,' said the Psalmist, 'the fire kindled.'

The experience that is opened up in the Lord's Prayer transforms our views and our handling of every situation.

Jesus did not lecture on 'International Relations'. But in bringing men the experience that enabled them to say 'Our Father', he broke down all walls of partition and opened up a new dimension of living for all mankind.

Jesus did not discuss politics. But the new relationship people found with God started a revolution in politics.

Jesus did not propound economic theories. But the new scale of values and responsibilities men found made them put people before profits and end the exploitation of men by men more speedily and effectively than any government could manage.

As we face up to the situation in the world today, the need for the change of heart and motive that turning to

¹ *The Living Stream—Evolution and Man*, Sir Alister Hardy, F.R.S. (Collins), p. 17.

God brings becomes more and more imperative. So does the immediate, practical, and wise direction, in matters great and small, that the Holy Spirit gives.

To make the Lord's Prayer more fully his own, the reader is invited to give his or her own answers to the questions asked before reading further.

The Lord's Prayer, said and pondered each day, becomes a touchstone for every responsibility and every decision. The test of all our praying is: do we find and carry out God's will better?

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is given twice in the New Testament:

In Matthew's Gospel—Chapter 6 verses 9-13

In Luke's Gospel—Chapter 11 verses 2-4

To whom did Jesus teach this prayer?

To those who had been listening to him and learning what they could from him—to his disciples.

Were these disciples 'Christians'?

The name was not even coined until some thirteen years later.

They could not have believed in the Creed—most of it had not happened.

Dr Leslie Weatherhead writes:

'Since Christ never demanded belief in theological statements from those who would follow him, we must declare again that Christianity is primarily a way of life, not a system of beliefs, and in regard to the latter, we must allow the follower of Christ to have a large mental box labelled, "Awaiting further light" in which he can leave, for the time being, matters about which he is not yet convinced. It will be found that,

in the main, they are matters about which Christ said nothing.'¹

What were the qualifications of those Jesus taught?

They were simply men who wanted to find out about God and how to pray to him.

They started with questions, not with dogma.

They asked Jesus: 'Teach us to pray.'

They had responded to Jesus' invitation—'Follow me.'

Why do you think they asked Jesus to teach them to pray?

They had seen and heard Jesus pray and there was a difference.

They were seeing that prayer meant a lot to Jesus, that for him it was much more than words and sound.

They connected Jesus' prayers with what he was able to do.

They were getting a new conception of God and what he wanted them to do.

They felt they were missing something Jesus had.

They needed help for what they were beginning to see they were called to be and to do.

They had enough faith in what they did see to embark on what they did not see.

What is the background to the giving of the prayer in Luke's account?

¹ Dr Leslie Weatherhead, Minister Emeritus, The City Temple, London, formerly President of the Methodist Conference, writing in *The Times*, March 18, 1967.

'One day it happened that Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us how to pray . . ."' (Luke 11:1).

What is the background in Matthew's Gospel?

Jesus has just said:

Don't be hypocrites and pray in order to show off.

Don't babble or be longwinded.

Your Father knows what you need, before you ask him.

So prayer is not a bombardment of a reluctant God to make him do his duty; nor is it an effort to win him over to our way of thinking: nor is it an insurance policy to protect us from hardship or a heavenly super-market to provide us with a life of luxury.

What is prayer, then? What does it do?

It establishes our relationship with God. It puts us on his side. The important thing is not whether our prayer is 'answered' as we think it ought to be: but that we have laid ourselves open for God to answer our prayer in his own way. God does not disregard our prayers: though he may say 'No' to what we want because there is a bigger 'Yes' that he has ready for us. 'No' is as much an answer as 'Yes'—God knows best. It has been said of the Lord's Prayer: 'It is getting into line with God, it is agreeing with God, it is understanding God, it is enlisting with God to carry out his world purpose.'¹

The prayer of magic seeks to win God to do man's will. The prayer of true religion seeks to win man to do God's will.

¹ Frank Laubach in his introduction to *How to Be the Lord's Prayer*, by Norman Elliott (Arthur James).

Prayer does not consist of man seeking God's intervention in the ever decreasing areas of life which he feels incompetent to cope with himself. It consists of a life in which man totally commits all the talents he has to mastering and using the forces of nature and human nature in the service of mankind.

Prayer is founded on what God can do, on what God and man can do together. Man grows up and becomes of age not by discarding God but by finding the full exercise of his integrated nature by working with God. It works on the principle 'where fresh causes are at work fresh effects are to be expected'.¹

Prayer is more than talking to God. It is listening to God and finding out what he wants us to do and receiving the power to rise to it. Such prayer brings faith. Not just the faith that we believe in God but the discovery that God believes in us and entrusts us with the working out of his plan and purpose for the world.

Let us now see, phrase by phrase, the answer Jesus gave when he was asked, 'Lord, teach us how to pray.'

¹ *The Secularisation of Christianity*, E. L. Mascall (Darton, Longman & Todd), p. 211.

Our Father

OUR FATHER

What picture does the word 'father' conjure up? A square? Someone not 'with it'? Someone unapproachable, like a Victorian father in his study? Does thinking of God as a father give you the Omar Khayyàm philosophy—that God is too good-natured to take sin seriously?

*'Why,' said another, 'some there are who tell
Of one who threatens he will toss to hell
The luckless pots he marred in making. Pish!
He's a good fellow and 'twill all be well.'*

Some think as the boy did who, when told that God was like a father, replied with much venom: 'If he's like my father I sure would hate him.'

Another put it like this:

*'God is the kind of father
That you wished you had.'*¹

What would the word 'father' mean to the disciples of Jesus? What was the place of the father in a Jewish household at that time?

It was a patriarchal society. The entire life of the family revolved round the father—not like the West

¹ *God is for Real, Man*, Carl Burke (Fontana, Collins), p. 37.

today, where women compete in work, inherit, and move on equal terms with men. The father provided for the family, protected them, had authority over them, and expected obedience from them.

By what stories and illustrations did Jesus show his disciples his own idea of a father?

In the story of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11), when the son wanted to go off, did the father let him?—Why?

When Judas went off to betray him could Jesus have stopped him?—Why didn't he?

Did the father in the story lower his standards at home to accommodate his son?

Why not?

Wouldn't it have been more pleasant for both of them if he had?

Will God lower them for you?

What would the father have eventually had for his son if he had acted that way?

Have you ever known husband and wife, or parents and children, blackmail each other, saying 'Do this'—or 'let me do that—or else . . .'?

What is the best answer to that?

When the son went his own way, did the father cease to love him?

Did he punish his son when he came back?

Why did the father act as he did?

Can you give further examples of Jesus showing his idea of a father?

E.g. Matthew 7:9-11

Jesus said: 'If any of you were asked by his son for bread would you be likely to give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish would you give him a snake? If you then, for all your evil, quite naturally give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him?'

'To those who ask'! That is worth thinking about, too.

Can the reality of God be conveyed by language?

God is other than we are, and greater than we can grasp. We can only use picture words illustrating part of his nature. There are over 200 such 'names' used in the Bible. Jesus chose 'Father' as the best picture of God that human beings could understand.

'The word Jesus used for "father" is "Abba", which is not a designation of a role but an address to a person.'¹

'"Abba"—that was the expression heard from the lips of children in the secular language of every day. Jesus had the audacity to speak of God and to God in such a way that to pious ears it sounded offensive, disrespectful, worldly.'²

What does that choice show us?

That God is love, that he cares for his children, that we *matter* to him, each one of us. It means that God must be personal. 'This does not mean simply that God is "a person": but that he cannot be less than man

¹ *The Lord's Prayer in Today's World*, Gerhard Ebeling (S.C.M.), p. 35.

² *Ibid*, p. 54.

who is personal. There must be within God at least the attributes of personality—reason, will and love. It is because God is personal that man can know him, love him and speak to him. We can neither know, love, nor communicate with a “Life Force”, a “Great First Cause” or “Fate”!’¹

Sir Alister Hardy, F.R.S., writes:

‘The nature of God remains for us a great mystery; we realise that the conception of a parent-like Person is but a childish notion, to help us to have some idea of a much greater truth we cannot yet understand . . .

‘The act of *submission* to this Power is nothing to be ashamed of. . . . It is an act of devotion to some fundamental element beyond the self which we may rightly call God . . .

‘If in our private lives, or in a place of worship, we feel we can approach this hidden Power with a greater sense of divine reverence in a physical act of obeisance, as on our knees, we should not, I believe, feel it to be a childish act . . . With the right approach lives can be transformed, seemingly impossible tasks achieved, and the drabness of the world turned into joy.’²

To whom did Jesus address his own prayers?

‘Father.’

Can you give instances?

From the Cross:

‘*Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing*’ (Luke 23:34).

¹ See *The Lord's Creed*, by George Ingle (Collins), p. 52.

² *The Divine Flame*, pp. 174-5.

“*Father, I commend my spirit into your hands.*” *And with these words, he died*’ (Luke 23:46).

In Gethsemane:

‘*Dear Father, all things are possible to you. Please—let me not have to drink this cup! Yet it is not what I want but what you want*’ (Mark 14:36).

At the raising of Lazarus:

‘*Father, I thank you that you have heard me*’ (John 11:42). (See also Luke 10:21, 22; John 12:28.)

Do these prayers give a picture of a soft, indulgent father?

What picture do they give?

Paul talked of the ‘kindness and the severity of God’—love and discipline. We see, in the way God let Jesus suffer, how much sin meant to him: and the immensity of his love for us, ‘while we were yet sinners’.

To come back to the story of the Prodigal Son—did the elder brother think he was being treated fairly by his father?

Was he?

Who got the tougher time from his father: the prodigal son who went his own way or Jesus who went God’s way?

Is that fair?

By what standards are you judging that ‘fairness’?

Was Jesus forced to choose God’s will?

Why did he choose it?

Why have you chosen it? Have you chosen it?

Is the world more likely to be remade by men who try to do it their own way, or by those who try to find and follow God's way?

By those on the give or those on the get?

Did Jesus say: 'It is to be hoped that as many as find it conveniently possible will consider taking up their Cross and, in due course, following me, at least for a period'?

What did he say?

'If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, carry his cross every day and keep close behind me' (Luke 9:23). (See also Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34.)

What 'rights' have you left when you choose Christ?

For what do you volunteer, what do you take on, when you say 'Yes' to Christ's call?

Do you remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the Cross?

'The preaching of the cross is, I know, nonsense to those who are involved in this dying world, but to us who are being saved from that death it is nothing less than the power of God' (I Corinthians 1:18).

Taking up the Cross, saying 'Yes' to Jesus and following him regardless, is the condition of two words much used by Paul—'joy' and 'rejoice'.

'Conversion,' it has been said, 'means that instead of spending our lives looking in all directions, we should follow one direction only.'¹

¹ *Living Prayer*, Archbishop Anthony Bloom (Libra—Darton, Longman & Todd), p. 65.

Because God created all men, loves all men, freely offers sonship to all men, does that mean that all men are automatically his sons?

The relationship is potentially there for all; but we need to accept it to complete it. At the start of his Gospel John says of Christ:

'Wherever men did accept him he gave them the power to become sons of God' (John 1:12).

One sign of our acceptance is our willingness to accept correction.

The Letter to the Jewish Christians (Hebrews) says:

'No true son ever grows up uncorrected by his father. For if you had no experience of the correction which all sons have to bear you might well doubt the legitimacy of your sonship' (Hebrews 12:7 ff.).

What about those who don't accept?

What about those who wilfully reject the light that is within them, the truth they do know, however little or however distorted it may be?

Who did Jesus tell the Pharisees was their father when they resisted the truth he was giving them?

He said:

'Your father is the devil, and what you are wanting to do is what your father longs to do' (John 8:44).

And Jesus went on to say:

'The man who is born of God can hear the words of God and the reason why you cannot hear the words of God is simply this, that you are not the sons of God' (John 8:47).

Do you remember what Jesus told Nicodemus, a leading Jew and a Pharisee?

He said:

'Believe me, a man cannot even see the kingdom of God without being born again' (John 3:3).

The condition of completing our relationship to God is that we say 'Yes' to him, that we give all we know of ourselves to all we know of him, that we claim our sonship.

Paul puts it like this:

'All who follow the leading of God's Spirit are God's own sons. Nor are you meant to relapse into the old slavish attitude of fear—you have been adopted into the very family circle of God and you can say with a full heart, "Father, my Father"' (Romans 8:14-15).

When we say 'Our Father' at the beginning of this prayer we accept and acknowledge God's Fatherhood and all that it means for us and for the world. We accept Jesus' picture of God as our Father, a picture so mirrored in his own life that he could say to one of his disciples:

'The man who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

We have looked at the second word of the Lord's prayer, 'Father'; now let us look at the first word, 'Our'.

What do you learn from that word 'Our'?

What was Jesus trying to do with the Twelve and with his other disciples?

Bind them into a force, a Church, that stuck together and carried forward his message. Give them such a big target that they needed each other.

Are we individuals doing something together or are we something more?

If we all have God as our Father what is our relationship to each other?

Brothers.

So, besides having our paramount relationship with God, we have our relationship with each other. That relationship is more than a passive attitude; it means responsibility and action. 'Jesus never speaks of the love of the neighbour without mentioning some positive action by which love is exhibited.'¹

'Our' means we share our lives with others.

Is that always easy? Would you have always chosen those with whom it is your lot to work?

Are members of our own family always easy to work with?

It was after Peter had been sent out paired with his brother Andrew that he asked Jesus: 'How often must I forgive my brother?'

Is it a good thing or a bad thing to be thrown alongside those whom you do not humanly find particularly congenial?

Were the Twelve whom Jesus especially picked, trained and kept together, kindred spirits at the start?

¹ *The Power and the Wisdom*, John L. McKenzie, S.J. (Chapman), p. 265.

Can you think of any two who started with diametrically opposite ideological viewpoints?

Simon the Zealot was a member of the Resistance Movement, afire to turn out the occupying Roman power.

Matthew the tax-gatherer was a Quisling, set to get what he could by serving the occupying Roman power.

Did the Twelve always get along well together? Can you give any instances when this was not so?

There was a revealing incident towards the end of their training on the road. Jesus asked the Twelve an awkward question. He said: 'What were you discussing as we came along?' They were silent in reply: 'for on the way they had been arguing about who should be the greatest' (Mark 9:33).

A little later we read that James and John were jealous of the leadership Peter was being given. They went to Jesus privately to ask for preferential treatment for themselves. Mark recounts: 'When the other ten heard about this, they began to be highly indignant with James and John' (Mark 10:35).

It makes a good Bible study to note the ways that Jesus dealt with such questions and quarrels among those he was training, and how he went to the root causes.

When you say 'Our Father', do you include in your heart people you don't naturally get on with or who you think have done you wrong? What do you think would happen if you did?

'Our Father' jumps over class, race, wealth, age, hurt and grievance. That is why change, i.e. when people

come to say and mean *Our Father*, is the speediest and most permanent road to progress.

Why do trade unionists in Britain often call each other 'Brother'?

Because of the Christian foundations of the movement. There was a time when they had the music as well as the words. Keir Hardie said: 'It is the Christianity of Christ which took me into the movement and drove me on in it.'

Continental labour leaders were dumbfounded when in 1910 in Lille 260 English trade union leaders, representing 500,000 English workmen, carried in the procession banners which read: 'We proclaim the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man' and 'Jesus Christ Leads and Inspires Us.'¹

At the end of a joint Trades Union and Management Conference, in London, in 1966, the following statement was issued: 'We have declared war on shoddy workmanship, the second rate, apathy, cynicism, and selfishness at home, and on hunger, misery and under-employment abroad. We will not rest till the new society is matched by the new type of men and women needed to make it work.'

Just as the word *Father* contains all the reasons for loving God, so the words *Our Father* contain all the reasons for loving our neighbour.

¹ See *The Endless Adventure*, Roger Hicks (Blandford), p. 52.

Which Art in Heaven

What do you understand by the word 'Heaven'?

The medieval picture of the universe was a three-tiered affair: Heaven above; earth in the middle; hell below.

That picture no longer makes sense to us; but this does not mean that the reality it was trying to express is not there.

Khrushchev mockingly said that the astronauts had not discovered God when they broke through into outer space (or perhaps it should be called 'inner space', as man has only penetrated a few hundred miles towards even the visible objectives, that are something like two thousand million light years away).

Modern writers who object to talking of God as 'out there' do not seem to have produced any more helpful picture—for any language we use must be picture language. A Frenchman, Father J. N. Grou, born in 1730, tried to answer the people of his day, who objected to the picture of God as being 'out there'.

He wrote:¹ 'But what is this heaven which is God's dwelling place? Is it the blue vault sown with stars which we see over our heads and which the Scriptures call the *firmament*? No, it was incorrectly, and only to accommodate themselves to our ideas, that the Holy

¹ *How to Pray*, Jean-Nicholas Grou (James Clarke), pp. 112, 113.

Books represented the firmament and the sky as God's palace and habitation.

'Since it is removed from the earth at a vast distance and its mighty curve is of a magnitude inconceivable, whilst, except for the stars that glow within it, our eyes see it as an empty place; since a changeless order pervades the movement of the heavenly bodies, and amongst them all is harmony, silence and apparent peace; since when we look at it, our imagination raises us above all earthly things, detaching our soul from the body, as it were, and transporting it to the realms of peace; for all these reasons it is a natural image of the intellectual heaven where God dwells, and it is useful in giving us a picture which conforms to our human way of seeing things, into which natural things always enter.

'Heaven, to speak correctly, is God. It stands for His immensity. There is not, there could not be, any other place for Him than Himself, and when we say *Our Father which art in Heaven* it is as though we were to say: Our Father who dost exist and dwell within Thyself, whose pure but infinite substance fills all things, and within whom as in a space without measure and bounds all created things subsist.'

C. S. Lewis, in one of his books, gave a picture that is helpful. He said that when we see a circle drawn with a pair of compasses, we know that that was what a child was aiming at in trying to draw a circle free-hand. So, said Lewis, in the next world we shall find things not unrecognisably different, but the fulfilment of our best aspirations here.

You ask me what I myself believe about Heaven. I would say: First, the highest thing I know is my

relationship with God, who is there within me—but not only within me. So Heaven to me is where lives are lived in wholly right relationship to God, and so also to each other; where all do God's will by whole-hearted choice. One cannot imagine that being dull!

A modern scholar writes his speculations:¹

'There could not be unhappiness within such a relationship; but there might (for all that we can now know) be difficult tasks, not to be performed without the endurance of even great hardship and pain; and immense and challenging problems, to be solved only by intense effort. . . . The notion that a heavenly existence must be flat and boring is itself gratuitous and unimaginative. God's creation is virtually infinite in its range and complexity, its depths and wonders, and there may be endless scope for further discovery and exploration, further adventures in new dimensions of reality, further experiments in new sciences and experiences in new arts, further spiritual growth in relation to the infinite divine plenitude and activity. But our imaginative resources are so utterly inadequate to whatever the power and wisdom of God may have in store for "just men made perfect" that these are probably all but childish guesses.'

We may speculate, but scripture tells us little. Had it been necessary for us to know more, we should have been told more.

Second, I do not believe in the impoverished and dreary world of the materialist or atheist. Those who try to voice the ultimate meaning of the world within the world are doomed to failure. They think there is no Good News, no purpose. Hence the doctrine of the

¹ *Evil and The God of Love*, John Hick (Macmillan), p. 386.

pointlessness or absurdity of existence, which we see so much in both drama and life today.

I believe that the end to which God is leading us is all good, and so great that it justifies all the failings and sufferings and sorrows that are endured on the way.

Third, I believe that in this world I am being given the opportunity to learn to make the right decisions for the right values by my own free choice. I am learning to choose heaven.

I believe that the riches of God are inexhaustible. 'We grow into the knowledge of God gradually from year to year until the end of our life and we will continue to do so through all eternity, without coming to a point when we shall be able to say that now we know all that is knowable of God.'¹

Last, I am content to leave the whole matter where Jesus left it with his disciples. Shortly before he was killed, when his disciples were anxious, Jesus gave them this picture: 'You must not let yourselves be distressed—you must hold on to your faith in God and to your faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am' (John 14: 1-3).

If we are to be where Jesus is, that is enough to know, for Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus said: 'The man who has seen me has seen the Father.' Our home is with Jesus and with our Father who is in Heaven.

¹ *Living Prayer*, p. 107.

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Let us look first at the meaning of these words. What does 'hallowed' mean?

J. B. Phillips translates it 'honoured', the Jerusalem Bible,¹ 'holy'.

It means honoured, holy, blessed, all-praised, revered, whole.

What does the word 'thy' imply?

That we are addressing a remote First Cause or a Father?

What did the word 'name' mean?

All that a person stands for—his nature, his entire person, his individuality and his power. In ancient times children were given a name after the hopes their parents had for them—for instance, Joseph was told to call Mary's son Jesus, which means Saviour. New names were also given when people's nature changed, for instance, Jacob became Israel.

J. B. Phillips translates Jesus' words: 'I have made thy name known' as 'I have shown thy self.' It is not by just tacking on the words 'through Jesus Christ, our Lord' that we pray in his name. It is only by praying a

¹ *The Jerusalem Bible* (Darton, Longman & Todd). The editor has explained its aims: to keep abreast of the times and to deepen theological thought by translating the Bible into a language we use today and by providing notes which are neither sectarian nor superficial.

prayer in accordance with his character, a prayer to which he can say 'Amen'—'so let it be'.

Jesus took people away from the old idea that magic lay in the use of a name. It was not calling him 'Lord, Lord' that pleased him.

What did please him?

People doing God's will.

Do all people who call themselves 'Christians' have that as their goal?

Do some people who do not call themselves 'Christians' have that as their goal?

Is the basis for discovering truth the label worn or the obedience given?

Jesus' object was that all men should discover and possess more of God's nature and that they would freely do his will. The key to finding God was not to speculate about him but to want to *do* his will.

Jesus said:

'My teaching is not really mine but comes from the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I merely speak on my own authority' (John 7:16, 17).

Jesus said:

'It is not everyone who keeps saying to me "Lord, Lord" who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the man who actually does my Heavenly Father's will' (Matthew 7:21).

When Jesus said 'Hallowed be thy name' it must have conjured up for him the whole story of God's dealing with his people, of which he was part. To these

historical conditions personal conceptions and experiences were added.

When we say 'Hallowed be thy name' we are saying 'Your nature, all that you are and all that you stand for, is our goal; we would reflect you fully, we trust your character, we count on you, we will love, honour and obey you.'

In the Church of England Prayer Book, in the Communion Service, we say: 'We give thanks to thee for thy great glory', i.e. for being what you are. We are not trying to get anything out of God, but opening our hearts to his perfect goodness and saying 'thank-you'. It is called worship. It is awe and wonder.

What is the alternative to worshipping God and to honouring him by obedience?

Giving honour to something less than God—being dominated by some person or some desire—making false gods.

What false gods?

Idols of one kind or another—a Hitler, a Lenin, a movie-star, the top-of-the-pops, our country, our party, our cause, our class, our colour, our school, or, more likely, ourselves. Nationalism—my country right or wrong—is a common idol today. It is to be distinguished from patriotism, which means loving and serving my country as it is but fighting for it to be what it ought to be.

Is it dangerous to worship an idol, something less than God?

Why?

Because a man's life is shaped by what he worships.

An idol brings disillusionment because it leads us to live on unreality.

An idol screens us from the Reality that satisfies.

An idol excludes others, draws the wrong battle-line and brings division.

Worship is not a word we use much nowadays. It means getting outside oneself and giving oneself to God in whatever way one can. Archbishop William Temple said¹:

‘This world can be saved from political chaos and collapse by one thing only and that is worship.’

He defined worship in these words:

‘To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.’

Temple went on to say:

‘Prayer is one part of worship, and is in place only in that setting. That is why the first clause in the model prayer is “Hallowed be Thy Name”.’

Hallowed be *thy* name means that no relationship, no moods, no feelings can be allowed to stand in the way of God coming first. Because God is holy, right is right and wrong is wrong, and moral standards are absolute. When we say ‘Hallowed be thy name’ we discover the meaning and satisfaction of purity, and worship God instead of worshipping or exploiting men.

What are the most common and likely rivals to God?

¹ *The Hope of a New World*, William Temple (Macmillan), pp. 26, 27, 30.

Sex—security—success—about sums them up.

Does that mean that God is against sex, security, and success?

It simply means that they must be under his direction, under his control.

When people change, really change, where do they often first run into opposition?

In the family: with those who have, often ever so nicely, sought to control them before. How strong is the desire between husband and wife, parents and children, to control, please, or at least live peacefully enough not to be uncomfortably disturbed!

Do you remember who Jesus said were his family, his true kinsmen?

We read:

'Then his mother and his brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent a message asking him to come out to them. There was a crowd sitting around him when the message was brought telling him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you." Jesus replied, "And who are really my mother and my brothers?" And he looked round at the faces of those sitting in a circle about him. "Look!" he said, "my mother and my brothers are here. Anyone who does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me"' (Mark 3:31-35).

Was this the first attempt of his relatives to get him home?

We read of an earlier attempt:

'Then he went indoors, but again such a crowd collected that it was impossible for them even to eat a meal. When

his relatives heard of this, they set out to take charge of him, for people were saying: "He must be mad!" (Mark 3:20, 21).

Do you remember any other times when Jesus talked about division in the family?

We read, for example, when Jesus says:

'Never think I have come to bring peace upon the earth. No, I have not come to bring peace but a sword! For I have come to set a man against his own father, a daughter against her own mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those who live in his own house.'

'Anyone who puts his love for father or mother above his love for me does not deserve to be mine, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and neither is the man who refuses to take up his cross and follow my way. The man who has found his own life will lose it, but the man who has lost it for my sake will find it' (Matthew 10:34-36).

J. M. Morrison comments on this passage:¹

'Far from diminishing the love that ought to exist between parents and children, Jesus is calling us to put that central relationship to himself and to the Father in first place so that all the other relationships of life will also have their proper place and significance.'

The Jerusalem Bible in a footnote to the same passage says:

'Christ's aim is not to provoke dissension, but this becomes inevitable as a result of the strict alternative He offers.'

¹ *Honesty and God*, J. M. Morrison (The Saint Andrew Press), p. 84.

This does not mean that we should not give the utmost care to our families. We should. Christ, suffering on the Cross, cared for his mother and put her in charge of John, the beloved disciple; but he did not allow the pain his crucifixion caused her to deflect him from God's course.

When we say 'Hallowed be thy name' we are affirming our decision on all occasions and at all times to put God first and to accept his absolute standards, to accept holiness and wholeness.

Thy Kingdom Come

Do you think Jesus' disciples all had the same idea as to what he meant by 'Thy Kingdom come'?

For what kind of Kingdom was Simon the Zealot hoping?—or Judas?

The Jews in Palestine were expecting a sudden and exclusive victory for Israel—they were not thinking of a Kingdom in which all men everywhere could become citizens. The Messiah would drive out the Roman occupiers and Israel would be triumphant.

Was Jesus' idea of the Kingdom good news or bad news?

It was good news. Good news of the full life men would *want* to live; and not, as we have sometimes made it, bad news of a dull life that men *ought* to live.

Where and when had he thought it out?

When he was about thirty years old he was 'driven by the Spirit' into the desert to face up to himself and his task. He rejected temptations to bring in a mini-Kingdom by cheaper ways—we shall look at the alternatives when we examine the phrase 'Lead us not into temptation'. Here we may just note that Jesus came back from the desert saying: 'You must change your hearts—for the kingdom of Heaven has arrived' (Matthew 4:17).

What are the two elements of this call?

1. A moral decision: a personal change of heart; deciding to 'repent' i.e. be sorry enough to quit everything wrong, to put it right, to adopt absolute standards for future conduct: and
2. An ideological decision: a world change; deciding to live to bring all humanity under God's control, to put right what is wrong everywhere, to adopt this single-minded aim to streamline all future conduct.

These two elements were always present in Jesus' teaching. He calls us not only to change *from* all narrow ways, but also to change *to* a single worldwide commitment.

The 'Kingdom of God' was Jesus' ideology.¹

It means: 'The full dimension of change. Economic change. Social change. National change. International change. All based on personal change'.²

Other ideologies seek to reform the world without personal change, which they do not know how to achieve. Too many self-styled religious people stop at personal change. They may end up good: but good for nothing! They are like the fanatic who 'redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim'.

Jesus said:

'Believe me, unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 18:3).

¹ See *The Kingdom of God as a Christian Ideology* by the Ven. O. H. Gibbs-Smith, M.A., Archdeacon of London, with a foreword by the Right Rev. and Right Hon. J. W. C. Wand, K.C.V.O., D.D. (Mowbray, 1957).

² *Remaking the World*, F. N. D. Buchman (Blandford, 1956), p. 170.

God's Kingdom starts with the change in individuals, goes on to the change in society and is the goal of history.

Jesus' disciples, like the rest of their countrymen, had wrong ideas about God's coming Kingdom. They had much to unlearn before they could grasp what it was Jesus was trying to teach them.

Is it easy or hard to unlearn the best ideas on which we have been brought up?

Why is it hard?

Why do we cling on to them?

We don't want to see our security go.

We don't want to be disturbed.

We cling to false pride, false loyalty.

We like being 'a big frog in a small puddle'.

*'God, what a rain of ashes falls on him
Who sees the new and cannot leave the old!'¹*

Did those closest to Jesus understand his new teaching at once?

Even after his death, when he appeared to them again, they showed how woefully they had failed to get the point.

We read that when they were all together they asked him:

'Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6).

Where can we read the story of the break-through when

¹ Edwin Arlington Robinson.

the disciples discovered and accepted that Christ was for all men everywhere?

Especially in Acts 10—the story of Cornelius the Roman officer and Peter the devout Jew.

What makes some 'Christians' today as bigoted in their approach to non-Christians, or to their fellow Christians of whom they do not approve, as the Jews were to the non-Jews?

A mini-conception of the Kingdom.

A limited experience of Christ.

A limited experience of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Their own failure to bring change to people.

Jealousy of seeing others, often those thought of as having less spiritual experience and knowledge of the truth, doing what they should be doing themselves.

The pride that refuses to learn from other people or other traditions.

The unthinking maintenance of one's own traditional approach.

It is important to see why good and religious people sometimes oppose the change in other people, even in those for whom they have been praying.

* * *

How did Jesus make his own conception of the Kingdom of God known?

He taught by parables. Very many of his parables were about the Kingdom of God. (Matthew preferred the

term 'Kingdom of Heaven' to avoid offending the Jews who did not like to mention God's name.)

There are in the Gospels about seventy-five references to different things Jesus said about the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Can you recall some of them?¹

All these references occur in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John preferred to write about the signs Jesus gave—signs which pointed to who Jesus was, the quality of his life, and the nature of his Kingdom.

In the parables, did Jesus say what the Kingdom of God was?

No. He said what it was like.

Why do you think he did this?

The people were not ready for the straight truth, they would not have understood, let alone accepted it. When they even suspected what Jesus meant they tried to do away with him.

To them it was blasphemous.

The parables are like time-bombs; their meaning often explodes in the minds of people later, who judge the characters in the story before they realise the application to themselves. Even today there is no universal agreement as to the meaning of the parables. They force nothing on people. Each must reach up and take for himself what he sees.

Where do we see modern parables today?

On the stage, on the screen, on television. Ideas of all kinds are put over by means of stories.

¹ An excellent summary of where Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom can be found is given in a footnote in the Jerusalem Bible, p. 21.

Is it part of our fight for 'Thy will be done on earth' to create and support first-class dramatic productions for that end?

To get them shown on television and so into the homes of the nation?

How should we go about doing that?

It is impossible to know what we think about modern theatre unless we have thought out what we think about the modern world. The test of any theatre as of any culture is: does it or does it not equip and enable us to deal with the age in which we are living?

Jesus used parables to fight for the people in front of him, for their understanding and change. They are the urgent teaching of a man who knew he was soon to be killed, to open the minds and hearts of those who were going to be left behind.

C. H. Dodd writes:¹ 'A parable leaves the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.' The teaching of Jesus is 'not the leisurely and patient exposition of a system by the founder of a school. It is related to a brief and tremendous crisis in which He was the principal figure and which indeed His appearance brought about.'

* * *

How else did Jesus make the Kingdom known besides teaching in parables?

Following his call 'You must change your hearts, for the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived', Jesus sketched the spirit of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5).

¹ *The Parables of the Kingdom*, C. H. Dodd (Nisbet).

And how else?

He demonstrated it by his life.

Of whom did Jesus say no one greater had ever been born?

John the Baptist.

And what did Jesus go on to say after that?

'And yet a humble member of the kingdom of God is greater than he' (Luke 7:28).

John the Baptist, who was at home in the wide spaces of the desert, had been chained up in prison. He had recognised Jesus as the Chosen One of God and proclaimed: 'Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand.' Now he began to have doubts. Jesus was not inaugurating the Kingdom in the way John expected. Do you remember the question John sent messengers to ask Jesus?

'Are you the one who was to come, or are we to look for someone else?'

Do you know Jesus' answer?

'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind are recovering their sight, cripples are walking again, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, dead men are being brought to life again, and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me' (Luke 7:19-23).

Why do you think Jesus answered like that and didn't just give a straight: 'Yes, I am the One'?

What was he saying to John by this answer?

He was saying *this is* the coming of the Kingdom. Here is the compassion and power of its King.

C. H. Dodd again helps by putting it clearly. He writes:

'Jesus says: "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." Something has happened which has not happened before, and which means that the sovereign power of God has come into effective operation.

'It is not a matter of having God for your King in the sense that you obey His commandments: It is a matter of being confronted with the power of God at work in the world.'¹

The sovereign power of God has come into effective operation . . . the power of God at work in the world. That is the Kingdom of God.

Something new has happened, a further step forward has been taken. Jesus said to his disciples:

'How fortunate you are to have eyes that see and ears that hear! Believe me, a great many prophets and good men have longed to see what you are seeing and never saw it. Yes, and they longed to hear what you are hearing and they never heard it' (Matthew 13:16-17).

* * *

In Jesus, once again God broke into human life with a new creation. The new type of man is born. The road is open to the next inevitable step in the development of a united mankind.

Leslie Paul writes:²

'The more one ponders the mystery of man, the less probable it seems that one misshapen Hominoid

¹ *The Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 36.

² *Nature into History*, Leslie Paul (Humanities, U.S.A.), p. 193.

blundered into the realm of the specifically human; and the more probable it is that man was *called* into it, or even *commanded* into it.'

Jesus said man must be born again. The new creation was inaugurated and seen in him. 'The Son of God became what we are in order that he might make us what he is.'¹ Change in the individual does not come by self-effort in amassing virtues. It comes by God's intervention in the welcoming heart. It is God who brings the Kingdom.

J. B. Phillips writes that, although in a true and real sense the Kingdom of God is established on earth, 'you simply cannot read the New Testament fairly and come to the conclusion that the world is going to get better and better, happier and happier, until at last God congratulates mankind on the splendid job they have made of it!'²

Paul wrote to the Romans (8:3):

'The failure was always the weakness of human nature. But God has met this by sending his own Son Jesus Christ to live in that human nature which causes the trouble.'

Man is called to respond and is free to do so or not to do so.

'I stand knocking at the door. If anyone listens to my voice and opens the door, I will go into his house and dine with him, and he with me' (Revelation 3:20).

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¹ Athanasius.

² *Ring of Truth*, J. B. Phillips (Hodder & Stoughton), p. 78.

How else, besides teaching it and living it, did Jesus get people to know about the Kingdom?

Jesus sent out his disciples—seventy of them at one time in pairs—to proclaim the Kingdom.

Do you think these seventy would have been able to pass an examination in Theology?

What was their strength?

They had been with Jesus; they trusted him and did what he told them. They had begun to live together as part of the new society.

Do you think some of them were scared at first?

Even later Jesus had to reassure his most intimate friends:

'Don't be afraid, you tiny flock! Your Father plans to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32).

God gives and we accept.

Does the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, belong to the present or to the future?

Jesus said: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.' Wherever God reigns in men's hearts the Kingdom has begun. We possess the attitude, the relationship, now, as we say 'Yes' to Jesus.

The future lies with those who do respond. John, who responded wrote:

'Here and now we are God's children. We don't know what we shall become in the future. We only know that, if reality were to break through, we should reflect his likeness, for we should see him as he really is!' (1 John 3:2).

We do not yet see what the completion of the Kingdom means or how it will come. Jesus told us to pray: 'Thy Kingdom come.'

* * *

Is the Kingdom of God interested in material things?

What does John mean when he says at the start of his Gospel 'The Word became flesh' or, as Phillips translates, 'The word of God became a human being'?

Do you think Jesus was a good carpenter?

Why?

Can you produce shoddy work and be at home in the Kingdom of God?

Put it the other way round. If you are at home in the Kingdom of God will you produce shoddy work?

No: because that would not be an expression of what you are; it would neither satisfy you nor the God whom you serve.

If the Kingdom of God is your home, will you accept the standards of those about you, or will you live and fight to introduce God's standards?

What would that involve?

How will God's standards affect being on time for work? tea breaks? pilfering? demarcation disputes? laying off men? management by privilege rather than by competence?

Would God's standards bring increased production?

Is the Kingdom of God interested in increased production?

Why?

Because it is concerned, not only with the character of men, but that every last person in the whole world receive the material benefits needed to live a full life of body, mind, and spirit.

Is the Kingdom of God concerned with a person's income?

It is concerned with everything that touches a person's life.

Is it concerned that that income should be as high as possible?

No. It is concerned with man's need and not with man's greed; with his character not with his capital. In the Kingdom of God people are more important than profits.

If a person puts the Kingdom of God first, would he accept a directorship for work he did not know or did not do?

Which better expresses the Kingdom of God: 'All I can get for as little as I can do' or 'A fair day's work for a fair day's wage: and a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'?

What did Jesus say about the Kingdom of God and money?

You cannot serve God and Money.

If you have a lot of money it makes it difficult to put your trust in God.

He said:

'Set your heart on his kingdom, and your food and drink will come as a matter of course' (Luke 12:31).

Jesus said:

'Wherever your treasure is, you may be certain that your heart will be there too!' (Luke 12:34).

* * *

When did Jesus give his disciples a strategy for advancing the Kingdom?

When he appeared to them after his crucifixion he gave them an outline of what to do (Acts 1:8).

The Acts of the Apostles describes how this plan was carried out:

First in their own lives (Acts 2:1-14).

Then in the capital of their nation (Acts 2-7).

Then throughout their country and the neighbouring states (Acts 8-12).

Then to the rest of the known world (Acts 13-28).

The Holy Spirit gave them both the power and the further direction needed to carry out this task.

Is God's strategy limited to what we see can be done?

No! Think of the human absurdity of telling a handful of ordinary, little-educated men that they would take the message to the ends of the earth. And this just after the leaders of their nation had rejected Jesus and put him to death.

God's strategy for remaking the world is liable to be just as breath-taking today, and the power and direction given by the Holy Spirit just as effective.

Thy Will Be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

First of all in the Lord's Prayer we were told to whom to pray—Our Father. Then we were given the motive—that God's name should be honoured. After that came the aim, the end product—Thy Kingdom come. Now we are given the how—Thy will be *done* on earth as it is in Heaven. Heaven is simply where God's will is done.

What do you make of this petition: Thy will be done on earth?

Is it a cry of passive resignation?

It is more revolutionary than anything Karl Marx ever said.

It is a revolutionary programme that has often been turned into a pious drone.

What would this world be like if God's will was done?

What will this world be like if God's will is not done?

William Penn said on this point:

'Men must choose to be governed by God, or they condemn themselves to be ruled by tyrants.'

How do the wonders of modern science affect this choice?

Science now is discovering how human nature can be

changed or controlled by means of drugs and electronics, by genetic and environmental manipulations. The question is who or what will control science? The challenge is to utilise the advances of science while maintaining, extending, and safeguarding freedom. What is needed is a new type of man.

If God is best described as a father and best seen in the person of Jesus, then it is as a person we encounter him. We discover him not through a scientific proof but through the meeting of person and person and get to know him through a growing relationship.

It is not because we see electricity that we know it is true, but because of what it does when certain conditions are fulfilled. We know that Jesus is there when we respond as a whole person. Then we listen and obey and find the power that changes our motives and our natures. No scientific formula is proved, nothing that is bound to convince anyone else. But we are convinced because we possess a personal relationship.

Can science show us the will of God?

Science can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God. It can explore the creation but not find the Creator. Through science God is fulfilling his plan of entrusting man more and more with the management of the universe. But science can only give the 'how', not the why. A further field of values is needed.

It has been observed¹ that of those famous philosophical twins, Russell and Whitehead, the co-inventors of mathematical logic and the joint authors of an epoch-making book, one turned out to be an atheist, the other a theist, and neither could show the other the error of his ways.

¹ *Saving Belief*, Austin Farrer (Hodder & Stoughton), p. 13.

Is the basis of seeking God's will by experiment 'scientific'?

Our knowledge of science advances through honest experiment. So does our knowledge of God. In his Gifford Lectures, Sir Alister Hardy, F.R.S., said:

'The conception of an experimental faith is, I believe, of overwhelming importance for the future of mankind; it has been forcibly expressed by Miss Barbara Ward in her book *Faith and Freedom* (pp. 254-6), from which I now quote—she has just been discussing the success of the experimental method in science:

“What is perhaps not very generally realized is that if this is the full extent of science's claim to lay bare reality, religion can proceed with much the same degree of certitude. The saint can say: This universe I tell you of, in which God's being and energy and love fill all reality and in which the base of your own soul is anchored in the Source of Being, may seem to you very far removed from the colourful material reality which you meet every day. But is it stranger than the colourless, soundless energies of science? Stranger than the notion that you are sitting this moment upon an intersection of physical impulses? Than that reality is a dance of electrons? The energy of God and the energy of nuclear power are equally remote from daily experience.”¹

Professor C. A. Coulson, F.R.S., writes:

'The greater part of our schoolboy's acceptance of science and rejection of religion springs from his unexamined belief that science accepts no presuppositions, and must therefore be superior to a Christianity which

¹ *The Divine Flame*, pp. 232, 233.

is overloaded with them. Yet this view is wholly wrong.¹

Do you *want* to see God's will done in you, everywhere, all the time?

If, on arrival in the next world, there were two doors, over one of which was written, 'In here you do as you please'; and over the other, 'In here you do as God pleases'; through which door would you go?

Who would be doing the judging?

Which would be hell and which would be heaven?

Austin Farrer writes:

'Christ teaches one thing with particular insistence. Men whose moral misery is disguised from them by comfort, pride or success, will find themselves after death a prey to that flame which can surely be nothing but the searching truth.

'Christ speaks of the flame as everlasting, as a torment which does not lose its force, or die down. The sinners will vainly wait for it to exhaust itself, or hope to escape from it on the further side. . . .

'If Dives needed to be stripped, and to suffer the truth of his condition, do not we also? Perhaps, before we suffer it, we may be assured of mercy; perhaps the sight of mercy will make the torment, when we see what a God we have, and how we have served him; what wounds we have inflicted on the souls of our fellows by our egotism and neglect.'²

¹ *Science and Christian Belief*, p. 29.

² *Saving Belief*, pp. 153-4.

George Macdonald said:

‘The one principle of hell is: “I am my own.” A hymn expresses the one principle of heaven: “Thine for ever! God of love.”’

Does your will always coincide with God's will?

What happens when it doesn't?

You have to choose.

Why has man, do you think, been given such a large measure of freedom to choose or reject God's will?

Would it be a good thing or a bad thing if man had no choice but to know and obey God's will?

What kind of relationship would that bring between God and man?

What kind of relationship is built when man voluntarily responds to God's initiative by acts of trust?

Man's free choice matters so much to God that he is willing to pay the price of all the injustice, suffering and evil that man's wrong choice brings. God created the universe and brought about man's evolution so that we would neither be blinded by God's holiness nor deaf to his voice.

Is it wrong to have doubts about God and his will?

No. Though it is not necessary. There is a centre about which one can be certain while still holding doubts about much that is on the circumference. Some people spend so long doubting their doubts that they don't give themselves time to believe their beliefs. It is better to hang your doubts on a hook and get busy with what you do know. Mark Twain said that it was not the

things he did not understand in the Bible that troubled him but the things he did understand.

Doubt is the starting-point of many. What is wrong is to refuse to explore, to experiment, to involve oneself.

Man's attitude in his search for God should be similar to that, described by the physicist Professor J. R. Oppenheimer, of the scientific researcher. Oppenheimer says:

'It is a world in which inquiry is sacred, and freedom of inquiry is sacred. It is a world in which doubt is the indispensable method of aiming at truth. It is a world in which the notion of novelty, of hitherto unexpected experience, is always with us and in which it is met by open-mindedness that comes from having known, of having seen over and over again that one had a great deal to learn. . . . The nature of the discipline of science is its devotion, its dedication to finding out when you are wrong, to the detection of error.'¹

After his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9) Paul was certain of Christ—that Christ was alive, that he had given him a job to do and the power to do it. But Paul could still write:

'At present we are men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror' (I Cor. 13:12).

Doubts are best cured by obedience to what we do understand. Jesus said:

'If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God' (John 7:17).

What happens when God's will meets our will?

¹ Quoted in *Science and Christian Belief*, p. 59.

The Cross is the place where God's will crosses our will and we have to choose. The Cross is the place where we see that God is for us, just as we are. The Cross did not change God's character. It revealed it. The Cross gives us a chance to respond and say 'Thy will be done' and have our character changed.

Do you always find it easy to choose God's will?

A will based on instinct clashes with a will based on faith. Our animal heritage and nature clashes with our divine nature and heritage. Paul wrote to the committed people in Rome about the inner struggle he had (Romans 7:23).

Did Jesus find it easy?

We read that after Judas went off to arrange Jesus' arrest, Jesus took the other disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane and 'began to be distraught with horror'.

Do you remember his prayer at that time?

'Dear Father, all things are possible to you. Please—let me not have to drink this cup. Yet it is not what I want but what you want' (Mark 14:36).

Earlier Jesus had prayed:

'Now comes my hour of heart-break, and what can I say, "Father save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very purpose that I came to this hour. "Father, honour your own name!"' (John 12:27).

When we are faced with the Cross, we can claim Christ's victory and find his risen power to enable us to choose aright.

* * *

How can we know God's will?

One way is to listen and obey.

How do we know that we are not asking God to bless our self-will?

We test all thoughts by the teaching of Jesus; by the teaching of the Church and by the highest moral criteria we know, for many summed up in a practical way through testing by the four standards of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. We further test by listening with those who are experienced in following God's will.

We may have been given a portion of the truth which helps to make the whole pattern but is incomplete in itself.

The Quakers ask a good question: 'Which way lies the Cross?'

They say: 'Set your face towards the light and see whether you can still do it.'

What did Jesus say about himself?

We read that 'Jesus was led by the Spirit' (Matthew 4:1).

He said:

'By myself I can do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is true because I do not live to please myself but to do the will of the Father who sent me' (John 5:30).

'The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and what to speak' (John 12:49).

'The very words I say to you are not my own. It is the Father who lives in me who carries out his work through me' (John 14:10).

Jesus also promised:

'The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into everything that is true' (John 16:13).

Dr Frank Buchman, who once summarised his life in the words: 'I have been wonderfully led', took his teaching of Jesus seriously.

He said:

'By a miracle of science, men can speak by radio to millions. By a miracle of the Spirit, God can speak to every man. His voice can be heard in every home, every business, every government.

'When man listens, God speaks.

'When man obeys, God acts.

'It does not matter who you are or where you are. Accurate, adequate information can come from the Mind of God to the minds of men who are willing to take their orders from Him.'¹

'Anyone can hear the words of the Lord. It is only necessary to obey the rules. The first rule is that we listen honestly for everything that may come—and if we are wise we write it down. The second rule is that we test the thoughts that come, to see which are from God.

'One test is the Bible. It is steeped in the experience through the centuries of men who have dared, under Divine revelation, to live experimentally with God. There, culminating in the life of Jesus Christ, we find the highest moral and spiritual challenge—complete honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.' Another excellent test is: 'What do others say who also listen to God?' This is an unwritten law of fellowship. It is also an acid test of one's commitment to God's plan. No one can be wholly God-controlled who works alone.

'It is to a group of willing men and women that God

¹ *Remaking the World*, p. 42.

speaks most clearly. And it is through God-controlled people that God must one day govern the world.’¹

What should we do if we don’t seem to get any thoughts when we are quiet?

Test our receiving set. Maybe some compromise which is (we have let the devil persuade us) ‘small enough not to matter’, is keeping us from God’s great plan. Big doors swing on small hinges.

What tests?

Ask: Have I done everything I already know I ought to do?

Is there anything at the back (or front) of my mind that I’m unwilling to do?

Am I just thinking of myself and what I can do?

Am I frightened of making a mistake?

Am I demanding to see more than one step ahead?

Are my horizons too limited and too self-centred?

Am I really praying ‘Thy will be done on earth’ and trusting God?

Dr Buchman talked of ‘remaking the world’. He told people to think in terms of continents. He was not interested in good work being done in a country, but in strategic work that answered the problems in a country. He said he gave his mind to ‘disciplined direction’.

When we really pray ‘Thy will be done on earth’; when we seek with others a strategy towards that end, know our long-term and immediate targets, think in

¹ *Remaking the World*, p. 36.

terms of people and what is needed for their change and for them to play their full part; then guidance for the creative use of all our talents will flow.

Abraham Lincoln said:

'I have so many evidences of God's direction that I cannot doubt this power comes from above. I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do any particular thing, he finds a way of letting me know it.'

Jesus' conversations left people with action expected of them. After praying the Lord's Prayer, early in the morning, it is good to take more time in quiet to seek in more detail what part we are to play this day, what action is required of us to fulfil the petition 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. If we mean business we may find it helpful to write down the thoughts. There is one supreme test of all prayer. It is not feelings; it is simply: 'Am I doing God's will better than I did before?'

There is first the *fact* of what God has done for us, then the *faith* with which we accept it and obey. *Feelings* may or may not follow.

'Thy will be done on earth' is a life-long commitment for ourselves: and one to which we should constantly bring others.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Every word of this petition is important.

Quite a lot has gone before it.

What has?

We've acknowledged and addressed God as Father—*our* Father.

We've desired that his glory, his nature, his good name, and not ours, be given credit.

We've committed ourselves to seeing that his will, not ours, is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Now, and only now, we ask to be looked after.

GIVE

What kind of a giver is God? Stingy? A mini-giver? Is he hard up?

Paul refers to God as 'Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20).

That verse can be broken down like this:

Able to do what we ask or think.

Able to do all we ask or think.

Able to do above all we ask or think.

Able to do abundantly above all we ask or think.

Able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

Do wise and loving parents always give their children everything they ask for at once?

Why not?

In *The Lord's Creed*, George Ingle quotes this circular issued to the Police Department of Houston, Texas:

FOR PARENTS

How to make a Child into a Delinquent:

12 Easy Rules

1. Begin at infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way, he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad language, laugh at him. This will make him think he's cute.
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he is 21 and then let him 'decide for himself'.
4. Avoid the use of the word 'wrong'. It may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later, when he is arrested for stealing a car, that society is against him and he is being persecuted.
5. Pick up everything he leaves lying around, books, shoes, clothes. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility on others.
6. Let him read any printed matter he can get his hands on. Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilised, but let his mind feast on garbage.

7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children. In this way they will not be too shocked when the home is broken up later.
8. Give a child all the spending money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you had them?
9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink, and comfort. See that every sensual desire is gratified. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
10. Take his part against neighbours, teachers, policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
11. When he gets into real trouble, apologise for yourself by saying: 'I never could do anything with him.'
12. Prepare for a life of grief. You will be likely to have it.

It would be a good exercise to put down twelve Easy Rules of a positive nature!

When we ask God to give, does that mean we are to be lazy and hold out a begging bowl instead of going to work?

Paul dealt with that kind of nonsense in his letter to the Thessalonians: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat' (2 Thess. 3:10).

Because God is rich, can we be wasteful?

Far from it—we are told that it is he who is a good steward over small things who will be entrusted with big things.

In asking God to give, we are acknowledging our ultimate dependence on him. If we obey him we are

free from anxiety, for God is our Father and our provider.

God does not give us our food ready cooked on the table. We plough, sow, fertilise, reap, transport, cook, serve. But it is still God's gift, though our work has brought it to our tables. Families used to acknowledge this by saying Grace at mealtimes.

Man is meant to bring all the world under his control, just as he himself is meant to be under God's control.

When we say 'give us' we acknowledge our reliance on God. We do not have the conceit to believe that man, having mastered so many secrets, is henceforth destined to steer the universe, unaided, to a future of even more glorious splendour.

Who do you think Jesus meant by 'us'? The Twelve? The in-group? The whole human race?

Us means mankind, every last person.

When we take the needs of the whole world on our hearts we see more clearly why we ask God to give.

Only when everybody cares enough and everybody shares enough, will everybody have enough. When we care enough we act as God's stewards for all we possess. We think more of what we can give and contribute to shift the selfish way the world lives and to meet men's basic needs than of what we can get and keep for ourselves.

Give us—what?

This day our daily bread.

Why do we need to pray for it every day?

Because we need to realise our dependence on God

every day. It doesn't mean we should not have forethought for the future. We should, and Jesus makes that point, too. It means we should not be anxious about the future.

Then what is the last word of this request?

Bread.

What do you understand by (that?) *bread?*

All that is needed, spiritually and physically, to carry out God's Will.

And what if we have more than we need to do God's Will?

We are a trustee of it and God will tell us what to do. God has given enough for all. If some lack, it is because some are being selfish.

God's Will is not the levelling down that is demanded by jealousy and envy; it is the levelling up that is brought by change, sharing, and the right use of all our talents for the public good. An undue emphasis on 'equality' may simply be a cloak for jealousy, and undermine that desire for achievement without which neither men nor nations can fulfil their destiny.

The Pope in his encyclical on the Development of Peoples (March 28, 1967) said:

'No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities. . . .

'The superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations. . . .

'The world is sick. Its illness consists less in the unproductive monopolisation of resources by a small

number of men than in the lack of brotherhood among individuals and peoples. . . .

'Delegates to international organisations, Government officials, gentlemen of the press, educators, all of you each in your own way are builders of a new world.'

That new world will only be built by a change in men's hearts and a revolution in their thinking, planning, and living—in their truly praying 'give *us* our daily bread'.

An article in the *Guardian* (March 8, 1967) shows that between 10 and 15 per cent of the world's population is habitually hungry and up to half the world suffer from malnutrition. The article ends by saying:

'If the technology already available were applied in developing countries the food problem would be solved. The obstacles are human, not scientific.'

'Give us our daily bread' includes our taking responsibility for seeing that these human obstacles are removed in ourselves as well as in others.

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Them that Trespass Against Us

What does forgiveness mean?

It means the end of our rebellion against God.

It means the re-establishment of right relationships with God and with each other.

It means the end of our self-inflicted punishment of estrangement, of our refusal to accept ourselves as we are, or to accept God's acceptance of us as we are.

It means the end of self-concern and hold-back.

What were the terms on which Christ offered relationship with himself?

None, except all-outness—'Follow me'.

'Anyone who puts his love for father or mother above his love for me does not deserve to be mine, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and neither is the man who refuses to take up his Cross and follow my way. The man who has found his own life will lose it, but the man who has lost it for my sake will find it' (Matthew 10:37-39).

Forgiveness restores relationship with God, with Christ. It is the acceptance of a strong, determined, tough way of living. Commitment is the other side of the coin of forgiveness. To repent is not a matter of

feelings, it is a matter of putting right what can be put right, of changing course.

What is that little word after 'forgive'?

'Us'—or 'me'?

Us. Forgive *us our* trespasses.

Why do you think Jesus said that?

God sees us not only as individuals but as a family. It is what we together have done and are doing to God, what he has planned through us for the whole Universe. We are not to be concerned just with ourselves; we are all in the same boat together.

Do we really pray 'forgive *us*'; or do we just pray 'forgive me'?—or don't we pray at all?

What difference does it make if we really pray 'forgive *us*'?

It is the answer to nagging criticism, jealousy, competition. It is the 'open sesame' to taking responsibility and initiative, to working together.

Forgive us, what?

Forgive us our trespasses.

What do you mean by 'trespass'?

You trespass when you go where you shouldn't.

You trespass when you do what you shouldn't.

None are too far gone, or have done too much wrong, to find forgiveness. Paul wrote to his fellow workers in Corinth reminding them of the kind of people some of them had been—impure, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, perverts, thieves, swindlers, drunkards, foul-mouthed, rapacious (I Cor. 6:9-11).

The answer for one and all was the same: Sin is the disease. Jesus Christ is the cure. The result is a miracle. God's forgiveness, free for the asking, 'breaks the power of cancelled sin, and sets the prisoner free'.

Others, who may not so easily recognise it, also need forgiveness and to set out on a new course. They try to harness God to their petty aims and concerns. They never attempt much because they never expect much from God. 'O, ye of little faith' was Jesus' frequent and sad comment on those who some would have thought were doing fairly well.

Forgiveness makes us want to go all the way with the new life and never turn back to the old.

The actual meaning of one word commonly used in the New Testament for trespass is 'falling short of the target'.

Forgive us our trespasses.

Forgive us for falling short of the target.

Forgive us for inferior thinking and our lack of trust.

Forgive us for our small aims, our self-concern, our dirt.

Forgive us for our hold back and not going all-out all the time.

Forgive us our debts. Debts—that is Matthew's translation of the original Aramaic word. It means the same as trespass or sin. Matthew chooses a characteristic Jewish word, Luke a characteristic Greek word.

Whose fault is it when we trespass, when we sin?

When Jesus tells us to ask for forgiveness for our trespasses, where does he imply the responsibility lies?

It is true that some of our limitations are 'sins of the fathers visited upon the children', but do we not all know that we have often deliberately chosen wrong, deliberately held back, deliberately stopped short of giving ourselves when we had a free choice?

Which gives you more hope—people who say you are O.K. and not responsible for being like you are, that you are wrong to feel guilty—or people who can show you how to change because they've changed themselves?

Are you more helped by people who preach and practise a minimum, permissive morality—or by people whose lives challenge you by their giving all to fulfil God's plan and by their expecting the same of you?

Which attitude do people find in you, in their relationships with you?

What kind of a friend are you to them?

Can't we just forget the past and do better in future?

This is the cry of man's pride which is the biggest obstacle to God's grace.

If we are sincere, we will want to be dead honest with God about ourselves, and also put right with men what can be put right.

The passing of time does not get rid of sin or what made us sin. Unfaced sin is unforgiven sin. It means we lower standards for ourselves and for others so that our conscience is not too difficult to live with.

Unforgiven sin does not bring the freedom and fire of a man who has nothing to hide, or give him an all-out passion to get on with remaking the world.

How much time should we spend on our sins?

God is a father who does not want us to spend a lot of time bemoaning the past. In the book of Exodus we read:

'Yahweh said to Moses: "Why do you cry to me so? Tell the sons of Israel to march on"' (Exodus 14:15).

If we are wise we will check our life by the standards of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love. To be honest with a wise friend about what we find in ourselves, will help us see the kind of person we really are, and what it is we are asking God to forgive. We will even find that we become free from the very things we most wanted to hide, and can use them to help others find the same freedom. Our honesty will be a step in the change of others. Our debits can be turned into assets.

Straightness on these absolute standards opens up the way for the limitless expectancy of God's unfolding plan and of the creative, imaginative use of all our talents. Anything short of that stops at self-improvement and self-concern. Our aim is to remake the world.

After we have left our past behind with God, it takes almost no time in the future to keep up-to-date and get on with the job.

How long does it take for you to say 'sorry'?

How long does it take you to make up your mind to say 'sorry'?

There's the rub! It takes no time if we change quickly. God's forgiveness is already there, waiting for us. He even provides us, if we ask, with the power needed to say 'sorry'.

* * *

This request in the Lord's Prayer says:

'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.'

Do you notice any difference between this request and the other requests in this prayer?

This is the only one that is conditioned. And it is the only part of the prayer on which Jesus adds his own comment at the end.

'For if you forgive other people their failures, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failures' (Matthew 6:14-15).

Strong words!

There is a triangle—God at the apex, the other fellow, me—and anything that comes between God and me, or me and the other fellow, is sin.

If we tread on the hosepipe of the relationship between ourselves and the other fellow, we make it impossible for God's spirit to go on flowing in and through us.

When Jesus says we must forgive to be forgiven, he is not so much making a condition as declaring a law of life. Like gravity it works, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, whether we admit or deny it.

Is it easy to forgive other people?

Why not?

Our pride—our picture of ourselves—has been hurt; our reputation damaged; our self-will and our desire to control has been thwarted; our plan of how we think something should be done has been interfered with; our self-righteousness has misled us; we so easily set

ourselves up as judge, or feel a self-imposed duty to give a moral lecture.

How long should we harbour a grievance against another person?

Jesus said: 'If your brother wrongs you, go and have it out with him at once—just between the two of you' (Matthew 18:15), and Jesus goes on to say what to do if there is no response.

And what if it is the other way round and someone is harbouring a grievance against us?

We should take the initiative. If we are only 5 per cent to blame it is easier for us to apologise than it is for the person 95 per cent to blame!

Jesus said:

'If, while you are offering your gift at the altar, you should remember that your brother has something against you, you must leave your gift there before the altar and go away. Make your peace with your brother first, then come and offer your gift' (Matthew 5:23).

The cost of our pride, which prevents us taking such action, is that God's work goes on at a less effective level and with less united striking power than he wishes.

What is the answer? How do we come to be able to forgive other people?

The hymn gives it:

*When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

From the Cross Jesus said:

'Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

When we see how much God has forgiven us, we know we are in no position not to forgive others.

When we are really engaged in a big enough battle with a big enough target, we need and want the united heart and action that comes from honest apology and mutual trust.

And Lead Us not into Temptation

What do you make of this request?

Very strange if we should think of a good and loving Father leading us into temptation and having to be asked not to! Most of us get into enough temptation without having to be helped!

Of course it doesn't mean that at all.

James in his letter in the New Testament clears up that point. He says:

'A man must not say when he is tempted, "God is tempting me." For God has no dealings with evil, and does not himself tempt anyone' (James 1:13).

(James is generally identified with the 'brother of the Lord' who played an important part in the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem.)

The translation from Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, reads: 'leading us out of temptation'. J. B. Phillips' translation puts it: 'Keep us clear of temptation.'

Jean-Nicholas Grou writing on the Lord's Prayer says: 'What we ask in this petition is that God will not permit us to yield to temptation; that He will temper it to our strength, that He will come to our help, protecting us by His Grace from the snares and assaults

of the devil, and will fortify our will against the lures of concupiscence. We say this prayer every day, because there is not a single day, or indeed a single moment, in which we may not be in danger of sinning . . . the most subtle and dangerous attacks of all threaten those who have advanced furthest in the way of perfection, unless they are extremely watchful.'¹

Is temptation the same thing as sin?

What is the difference?

Martin Luther said: 'You can't prevent birds flying over your head, but you can prevent them building nests in your hair!'

Most modern translations don't use the word 'temptation' at all. What word do they use?

Test.

Is a test always a bad thing? What does it do for your character?

It makes us see our real motives and aims, what we are really committed to. It makes us decide.

Taking responsibility is the choice of a free man. It inevitably brings the counter-suggestion to settle for an easier way.

We emerge from a test stronger, wiser, ready for more responsibility.

Do we read about Jesus being tempted, tested?

When did that happen?

Directly after his baptism by John, when he had been conscious of a voice from Heaven saying:

¹ *How to Pray*, p. 146.

'You are my dearly-loved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Luke 3:22).

Where did these temptations happen?

In the desert, alone.

Why had Jesus gone there?

To think over all that this implied, and what he should do and how he should do it.

We read in Matthew and Luke that Jesus was 'led by the Spirit' into the desert. Mark says: 'The Spirit sent him out at once into the desert.' 'Drove him' the Jerusalem Bible translates it. So Jesus' time of testing was at the instigation of the Spirit, part of God's plan.

What did these tests consist of, and how would you sum them up?

Suggestions on how to find an easier way than the way of doing God's will; perhaps to face doubts about himself—*'If you are the Son of God . . .'*

The Jerusalem Bible says in a note:

'Jesus was faced with the idea of being a material and political Messiah with its accompanying human privileges of wealth, glory, power. He chose instead utter dependence on God, humility, obedience to God's will.'

Having thought the whole matter out and faced the attractiveness of other alternatives, Jesus rejected them as smaller and less effective, and decided to do only God's Will. What did Jesus do next?

We read he returned to Galilee 'in the power of the Spirit' (Luke 4:14).

Is that how we emerge from a test undergone and passed, from a decision to put God's will first—in the power of the Spirit? His message had the clarity, too, of one who has been tested and been victorious. Mark says Jesus returned proclaiming: 'The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news' (Mark 1:15).

Some tests, then, some crises in our lives when we have to choose and decide, are God-sent. God puts us in situations where we can do his will, but where we are still free to choose our own will. When we are led by the Spirit, we accept his guidance, and emerge stronger, clearer, with more passion and conviction and taking more responsibility.

Do you remember what Paul said to the Corinthians about such tests?

'No temptation has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it' (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Such are the tests God sends and permits.

Are all temptations that come tests to take us further forward?

No! If we deliberately pick up a magazine because it is likely to have pictures in it that do the wrong thing for us, is that a Spirit-led test?

Grou says: 'It would be a gross mistake to hope for Grace to preserve us from trials into which we had

light-heartedly flung ourselves.' He writes of the Gospel's 'holy severity'.

James in his letter says:

'A man's temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which can be enormously attractive' (James 1:14).

What is the best way to avoid such temptations or to deal with them when they come?

Face them squarely and decide once and for all what you choose. Milton has put this in one of the greatest pieces of English prose. He wrote:

'He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd and un-breath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.'

Decide once and for all. When, for example, I decided to stop smoking, I decided to stop smoking. I do not debate the matter each time I am offered a cigarette. I do not compromise my freedom from smoking to please people. On the contrary I find I can use it to help change people. Similarly, there are certain thoughts and private movies of the mind which I have decided never to put on again.

And what if the temptation comes back?

Shoot the little man as he comes over the horizon, otherwise the progression is 'the look, the thought, the fascination and the fall'. Know yourself and keep away from temptation: keep wide margins.

Quickly tell of the temptation to a friend who will not let you down or someone whom it will help. Jesus told of his temptations. Mark's Gospel shows how Peter used his failures. If our pride keeps us from being honest about them when they continue to assail us, they are likely to fester.

Be part of a big, fast-moving programme. Keep moving too fast for the dirt to stick.

Realise the cost of not being in action.

Martin Luther said: 'The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to tests of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.'

A little girl gave a good answer. She said: 'Whenever the devil knocks at the door, I ask Jesus to answer it. Then the devil says: "Oh! I've come to the wrong house," and goes away again.'

Paul gave an answer to the Philippians. He said: 'All that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable—fill all your thoughts with these things.' Notice that 'all'. We can't expect to be free of trouble at night if we let our eyes and minds roam wilfully during the day.

And if we do fall, what then?

Quickly be honest: put right what can be put right: and get back into action.

But Deliver Us from Evil

What is the evil from which we ask to be delivered? Is it hardship? Unfair treatment? Not being appreciated? A tough life? Shortage of money?

Will obeying God and fighting that his will is done on earth involve us in hardship?

Is that hardship evil or bad for us?

What was the attitude of Jesus towards it?

He invited people to take up their cross and follow him. He prayed to God about his friends:

'I am not praying that you will take them out of the world but that you will keep them from the evil one'
(John 17:15).

Jesus did not say that the storms would not come to those who built their house on rock—there was to be no preferential treatment—but he did say their house would not fall.

Did Paul try to protect the vulnerable young Christian communities from hardship?

He wrote to the Romans saying that it was not by escape but *in the midst of* trouble, pain, persecution, lack of clothes and food, danger to life and limb, the threat of force of arms, that overwhelming victory was found (Romans 8:35-37).

James in his letter says this:

'When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends!' (James 1:2).

Don't, in short, run away from the Cross; but go through the Cross to Christ.

What is the attitude of the human spirit, at its best, to hardship?

Do we admire Scott and his men venturing to the South Pole? Do we respond to Churchill's 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'?

Did Rupert Brooke express the response of the best of his generation to the challenge of the first world war?

*Now God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping.*

Do you know the more recent lines of the playwright-poet, Christopher Fry?¹

*Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.*

Paul well knew the weakness of man, but he did not disparage man. He knew that man needed Christ's help to be his true self. When he wrote to brace up the Corinthians he told them: 'Live like men, be strong!' (1 Cor. 16:13).

¹ *The Sleep of Prisoners* (Oxford University Press).

What are the alternatives to accepting cheerfully the hardships that come?

Running away from them.

Living in unreality.

Thinking God has let us down. Many people have become atheists because the picture in the back of their mind was of a God who would look after them in friendly fashion if they were good. Then the storms came and with them the end of trust or belief in God.

Francis Bacon said: 'Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity that of the New.'

If it is not hardship and suffering what, then, is the evil from which we asked to be delivered?

What is the ultimate evil?

It is a separation from God, the breaking of fellowship with God.

Evil is everything that separates us from God.

It is the stepping out of line of God's evolutionary and revolutionary purpose for us. It is our going our own dead-end way and becoming a throw-back.

It is turning our back on God.

How do we turn our back on God?

By saying he is not there.

By refusing to experiment to find out if he is there.

By being too proud to ask for help.

By denying that there is any such thing as evil.

By maintaining that other people or circumstances are responsible for what we are.

By lowering our standards until we can keep them, or most of them, without his help.

By being very busy and so full of self-effort that we have no time to think of God or the possibilities of God.

Is all evil forgivable by God?

What did Jesus mean when he said:

'Men may be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit cannot be forgiven' (Matthew 12:31)?

What is blasphemy against the Spirit?

It is deliberately going on calling good evil and evil good.

We can disobey the truth that God whispers into our hearts and minds, repent and be forgiven; but as long as we deliberately call truth falsehood, how can there be forgiveness?

Jesus did not say such blasphemy would not be forgiven. He said it could not be forgiven.

When we say 'deliver us' what do we mean?

We acknowledge our need of God and ask his help. If we do not turn to God we become accustomed to sin and even cease to recognise what it is doing to us. Billy Graham gives a good illustration of how inaction enables evil to win the day. He says: 'Psychologists have learned that they can put a frog in hot water and he will jump out. However, if they put a frog in lukewarm water and gradually heat it, they can boil him without his jumping.'¹

Paul's experience is universal experience. He said:

¹ *World Aflame*, Billy Graham (World's Work), p. 77.

'My own behaviour baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I really loathe. . . . I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power. That is, I don't accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I don't really want to do I find I am always doing' (Romans 7:15 ff.).

Paul goes on to answer the question: 'What do we mean when we say "deliver us from evil"?' He says:

'It is an agonising situation, and who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my own sinful nature? I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 7:24-25).

Grou writes:

*'Since the Christian ought to love God rather than himself, it is right that he should have a greater horror of sin because it is an evil to God, than because it is injurious to himself. God desires that the principal motive in our minds, when we thus pray for heavenly success, should be to serve Him with a freer spirit, with more love, gratitude and faithfulness.'*¹

¹ *How to Pray*, p. 151.

For Thine is the Kingdom, The Power, and the Glory, For Ever and Ever. Amen.

These words were not part of the prayer given by Jesus. They came to be included as the familiar response of the congregation when the prayer was used in public.

Saying this response means commitment to what has been outlined in the prayer:

God's kingdom: where his plan is followed and his way of life lived out.

God's power: where it is not human effort but divine control that supplies all that is needed. The word used for 'power' here comes from the same source as the words 'dynamo' and 'dynamic'. Lives which are not demonstrating dynamic power are lives not switched on to God. It has nothing to do with our feelings. We don't get the power and then step out into action. We step out into action and then get the power. What starts off as a great gamble grows into an attitude of trust.

God's glory: can we say 'Thine is the glory' and still have ambition?

A change of course brings a change of ambition. There is an end to credit-snatching and personal aggrandisement, to jealousy and division.

Inturned, self-centred ambition is transformed into out-going, God-centred ambition that brings gain to all. Jesus' closest disciples first quarrelled about which of them would be the greatest. Then the Holy Spirit took charge of them. They streamlined their lives and set about remaking the world together.

When we are caught up in the way of Christ we forget ourselves and go all out. Get the target right and the more ambition to reach it the better.

How can we be sure that our motives are right?

They are most unlikely to be 100 per cent right. This way of life is a journey. Motives and ambitions can be adjusted *en route*. They should get more selfless and more interesting all the time.

The spiritually proud can fuss so much about the purity of their motives that they don't get off the ground at all. They care too much for themselves and not enough for others. Worse still, they become jealous of those who are airborne and try to shoot them down.

The best way to deal with motives is to keep engaged in a big enough battle, keep close to those in the same fight and keep in step with Jesus. There will be no time for fussing at that pace. Quick change and more action will be the order of the day. 'Thy will be done on earth' is an all-absorbing programme.

The Coming World Civilisation

A new society, designed by God and worked by everyone

The Lord's Prayer was a beginning. There is another side of prayer for which the time came only after Jesus' death.

How were his friends to grasp all that had happened since Jesus first taught them to pray, so much of which they still did not understand? How was God to go on communicating with them, to teach them to grow up and to let them and others know what he wanted done? Jesus had given the clue; but it seemed so far-fetched that his friends failed to realise what he meant. They only grasped it later, when it hit them like a hurricane.

Jesus had promised that he would send the Holy Spirit who would teach them and tell them what to do. The Holy Spirit was to be a corporate experience, belonging to all who would walk the path Jesus had shown, and not only an individual possession. The Holy Spirit came at the point in their lives where they met the fire and passion of the living God, the point where they found creative power and the power to change.

Jesus had told his friends that it was for their good that he was going. While on earth he could only give his attention to a few people at a time and that for only part of the time. Through the Holy Spirit he could and would be with all who invited him all the time.

The friends of Jesus had difficulty in keeping up with him. In three years they had seen him so rouse a nation that its leaders engineered his death. Those leaders chose to get rid of him rather than change their ways of life or be pushed out by the populace. Jesus' own description of his mission was: 'It is fire I have come to bring upon the earth—how I could wish it were already ablaze!' (Luke 12:49).

There is nothing 'goody-goody' about the action of the Holy Spirit. Pursuing the goal of our own goodness for its own sake is a flat, unconvincing, and sterile occupation. It can lead to the attitude of the praying Pharisee who said: 'O God, I do thank you that I am not like the rest of mankind' (Luke 18:9 ff.). Pursuing the goal of 'Thy will be done on earth' is, however, dynamic action. It makes us develop those qualities which help that commitment and drop those which do not. It makes us realise, like the tax-collector praying opposite the Pharisee, how far short we fall of God's target and how dependent we are on him.

Why have good men not been more effective in reshaping industry or the world? When speaking to the National Union of Teachers in 1964, Sir Paul Chambers, President of Imperial Chemical Industries, described those who have respectability and ability but are not geared into significant action. He said:

'How often have I met men of unblemished character, of high academic achievement, but whose life, sheltered from the harsh need to make important decisions, has left them timid or irresolute, or stubborn because of the fear of making a mistake.'

Jesus called the Holy Spirit, through whom he would come to men, the Comforter. Words change their meaning. There is nothing in the word 'Comforter' that

implies soothing a person or smoothing the way. That was not what Jesus' friends had seen happen to him or experienced themselves by being with him, nor was it what they wanted or expected to happen now. It means 'getting alongside to give strength'. Archbishop William Temple referred to the Holy Spirit as 'that explosive and disruptive energy'.¹

The Bayeux tapestry illustrates the meaning of 'Comforter'. It depicts a scene in which King William, on horseback, is pricking a straggler in the flank with a lance. The description reads: 'King William comforteth his soldiers.'

God speaks through the Holy Spirit to all who are ready to be set ablaze and to listen to him. The 'light that lightens every man' is the same light. The Jews found, to their surprise, that the Holy Spirit also came to non-Jews, who had a different understanding of God. To many religious Jews, God seemed to be contradicting what he had taught them in past history. In reality he was fulfilling what had gone before in a manner beyond their expectation, which demanded further change in them.

Those who accepted the Holy Spirit's challenge to change course talked of it as the 'Way'. They were persecuted. They were driven out of the Jewish city of Jerusalem by the orthodox who would not move from the old way. They came to Antioch, where the Roman Government had its seat.

Some Romans, however, like some people everywhere, found the challenge of change too much. To save their consciences they sought a respectable excuse. So they called the followers of the 'Way', Christians. This, they thought, would make them a sect, a sect just for the Jews.

The word 'Christian' is used only three times in the

¹ In *Theology*, November 1939.

New Testament. First: upon the occasion when we read 'it was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians'. Second: by King Agrippa (a non-Jew) when he taunted Paul with trying to persuade him to be a Christian. Third: by Peter when he warned those to whom he was writing that they must suffer for being Christians.

All down history men have tried the same trick of giving a nickname to avoid a challenge. 'Jesuit', 'Quaker', 'Methodist' were all used as terms of scoffing by men who wanted to keep God, and the dynamic life he wanted of them, confined to a safe box of their own choosing and comfort.

Today the label 'Christianity' has come to stand for something other than the way of life on which Jesus asked men to set out. The Christian life has often been so little lived out that honest men are now rebelling against Christianity, or what they think is Christianity. The danger is that they will throw out what is true and relevant with what is false and irrelevant. The spirit of the men who founded the first hospitals, universities and schools, the spirit that appraised professions and business by standards that served the community, the spirit that produced the care for the needy and underprivileged in the gay heart of St Francis has never been more needed.

It may be that the situation both calls for and provides for a new approach. The wide rejection of present-day Christianity by the western world has opened up the way for the acceptance of Christ by the whole world. Christ and his message need no longer be identified with the western world. Christians themselves are distinguishing more clearly between their faith and their culture, between the essence of the Gospel and the form of its presentation. They are acknowledging their mistakes and changing their ways.

Thomas Merton writes:

'The Second Vatican Council has clearly admitted that there is no place left for empty triumphalism in the Catholic estimate of missionary history.

'Serious errors have been made, and they have brought great discredit on the Christian message. These errors were due not to the faith and to the Gospel, but to nationalistic and cultural prejudices, attachment to rigid organizational patterns, or obsession with institutional façades and political prestige. The Council has implicitly or explicitly admitted such errors, and has declared that they must never be repeated.'¹

His Holiness Pope Paul VI expressed the new outlook when he invoked 'God's abundant blessings' on the young Indian men and women of different religions who had expressed their cultural and reconstructive aims in a musical weapon, 'India Arise', which they had brought to Europe. His Holiness told them (March 5, 1967) of the 'respect, admiration and affection with which he gave his conviction that "we are all children of God and we must all work together in harmony for the mutual benefit of all"'.²

The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote (1966):

'I believe that the old way of presenting the Christian faith by proclamation and preaching needs to be supplemented by the way of dialogue, to use a word in current fashion. Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers, need to talk together about the realities which mean most to them. What in the depth of my being do I find supreme for my relations

¹ In his foreword to *Vietnam: the Lotus in the Sea of Fire*, Thich Nhat Hanh (S.C.M. Press), Fellowship of Reconciliation, U.S.A.

² *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 5, 1967.

to other people and to the world? The Christian will help the non-Christian to ask that by asking it himself without using as he does so the language or conventions of religion.’¹

A new approach for a new age is needed. For modern man there is an unlimited new frontier to explore. What matters is not the label worn but the obedience given. Jesus said: ‘It is not everyone who keeps saying to me, “Lord, Lord” who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the man who actually does my Heavenly Father’s will’ (Matthew 7:21).

Men of all faiths are discovering ‘the good road of an ideology inspired by God upon which all can unite. Catholic, Jew and Protestant, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Confucianist—all find they can change, where needed, and travel along this good road together’.² The Christian who knows and obeys the guidance of the Holy Spirit will readily recognise Christ wherever men listen to God’s voice and battle for absolute standards to prevail.

I have sat with Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Parsee, and Christian, with believers, half-believers, and unbelievers. Again and again I have witnessed God’s Holy Spirit speaking to each in his own language. Those who had not yet found God discovered that God had already found them. Their knowledge of God increased with their obedience to God. Again and again those who began to listen, gratefully witnessed to the truth of what Christ said of the Holy Spirit: ‘He will bring glory to me for he will be drawing on my truth and showing it to you’ (John 16:14).

¹ *Problems of Christian Belief*, The Most Reverend Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury (B.B.C.).

² *Remaking the World*, p. 166.

When Bishop Foss Westcott was Metropolitan of India, Burma, and Ceylon he was asked how it was that the lives of some people were so clearly changed and showed forth the fruits of the Spirit when they had no apparent knowledge of Christ. The Bishop consulted the works of his saintly and scholarly father, Brooke Foss Westcott, sometime Bishop of Durham. He turned to what his father had commented on Christ's words: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me' (John 14:6):

'The last words which at first sight seem to narrow the magnificent prospect on which we are allowed to look, do in fact only define it. They do not set limits for the access to the Father, but give us a wider view of the action of Christ.

'They carry light into the dark ages and dark places of the earth. They tell us that wherever there is heroic self-surrender, wherever there is devoted study of the ways and works even of the unknown God, wherever there is a heart yearning towards the undiscovered glories of a spiritual world, there is Christ: there is Christ, though we see Him not, and His name is not named, and where Christ is, there is the approach to a loving Father.'

Such a conception has nothing to do with indifferentism, or an Irish stew of religious beliefs. It means each person obediently following the light within—'the light that lighteth every man'. All that is of God will be preserved. All that is missing will be added as the Holy Spirit fulfils Christ's promise and leads men into all truth.

The first thing a Christian can do for one of another faith is to live out a full commitment of his own faith. What the Christian has to offer is simple. It is Christ.

Dewi Morgan says:

‘I write as a Christian priest. And I deliberately make the statement that but for one thing, and one alone, Christianity is no more than one among the religions and indeed hardly deserves to be even that if it forgets its relationship with Christ. Indeed, one must put it more brutally. Christianity deserves to be forgotten and is best forgotten if it fails to forget itself and remembers only the Christ who is its cornerstone. Other religions have tenets of immense value, have a capacity for vast moral endeavour, have deep insights into the inner mysteries of life. But only Christianity has Christ. And Christ is all that Christianity has. It needs no more.’¹

Just as Jesus leads us to a new understanding of God as Father, a Father with a purposeful plan for each of us and for the world, so the Spirit leads us, as we obey, to a new understanding of Jesus. This is the way of the New Testament and the way of experience today. It is a road along which all can walk together and be fully faithful to all they have already found and fully open to all they may yet receive.

Professor Hocking writes:

‘The Christian will not be concerned that the total outlook slowly emerging bear his name. He will be mindful that his Master in one parable likened the kingdom of God to leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened—that hidden anonymity a favourable condition for its work.

‘The time is ripe for that radical reconception whereby the concept of the Christ is extended to include that

¹ *God and Sons* (Peter Davies Ltd.), p. 77.

unbound Spirit who stands and has stood at the door of every man, and who, in various guises, still appears to him who opens, both as an impersonal word and as a personal presence.¹

The key to building this new world civilisation, where man no longer exploits man but seeks the will of God for himself and for all others, is that men should listen to and obey the Inner Voice. How to listen and be part of this universal cure?

The Lord's Prayer gives the attitude of response of our hearts and the commitment of our minds and wills. *The Acts of the Apostles* tells how the first disciples of Jesus, with all their faults, were led by the Spirit and took this way of life out to the world. They had no endowments, no Press, Television, or Radio to aid them. Yet when they arrived at one place it was said: 'These are the men who have turned the world upside down and have now come here.'

Father Alphonse Gratry, born at the beginning of the last century, a member of the French Academy and a professor at the Sorbonne, underlined the link between listening to God and affecting the modern world. He wrote:

'The world you want to transform to a just world, is not transformed because you yourself are not transformed. And as long as you refuse to change yourself, the world will not change. And the world can change, if you change. And if you become a new man, a new world will be possible; and you have in the Gospel all the light and all the power needed to create both—the new man and the new world.

'In practice you need to listen to God in the morning before the distractions and business of the day begin. "What, in practice, is listening to God?" you ask me.

¹ *The Coming World Civilization*, William Ernest Hocking (Allen and Unwin), p. 168.

“What really do I do?” Here is the answer—You write. Do you believe in God? Is God dumb? Is it not certain that God has not ceased to speak, just as the sun always shines? Only, take care not to lose what you hear and see then. Don’t pride yourself on your memory. The memory is trustworthy and complete as objects present themselves. Memory is a faculty which forgets. . . . So it is necessary to write. Write for God and yourself. Write in order better to hear the Word in you, and to keep his words. Always assume that no man will see what is thus dictated to you.

‘If you truly are his disciples, then the inspiration which comes will be most concrete, most precise, most relevant.

‘I know that you and I, each one of us, can throw our weight into the movement towards decadence which is taking us to chaos, or else, in the name of God, and in unity with Christ, we can work to save the world at this very hour, turning the course of the century and of history.’¹

This act of dedicated listening, of disciplined direction, coupled with obedience, does not so much provide an explanation as create an experience. Professor C. A. Coulson, writing of the experience of finding the reality of God, says:

‘We shall certainly feel the strength of Jung’s advice: “Nobody can really understand these things unless he has experienced them himself. I am therefore much more interested in pointing out ways to such experience than in devising intellectual formulae which, for lack of experience, must necessarily remain an empty web of words.” This is why our Lord gathered His disciples with the simple word: “Come”; and

¹ See *Honesty and God*, J. M. Morrison (Saint Andrew Press), p. 93.

why, in their turn, His followers have said, "O taste and see."'¹

Human wisdom is not enough. But God has a Plan—a plan for the developed and for the developing nations, for the East and for the West. It is a plan that needs the full use of all that man has been given plus that extra direction that God may still want to give. The more we discover of the universe and its workings, the more we discover of God and his workings. The astronomer Jeans said:

'The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. . . . We discover that the universe shows evidence of a designing or controlling power that has something in common with our own individual minds.'²

Jesus said that that mind could best be pictured as a Father.

There is a line that runs through every heart and every home. It is not a line of race or religion, of class or of colour, but of obedience or disobedience to that loving Father, to the voice of the living God.

Today the world awaits a generation that will be ablaze to live God's way, and to use all the discoveries of modern science and all the arts of modern communication to make effective the prayer: 'Thy will be done on earth.' Modern, up-to-date men and women, living the Lord's Prayer together, will create a revolutionary force to remake the world. The design is God's and he has prepared and called us to have a part in his unfinished work.

Could any task be more challenging or more satisfying?

¹ *Science and Belief*, p. 143.

² *The Mysterious Universe*, Sir James Jeans (Cambridge University Press), p. 137.