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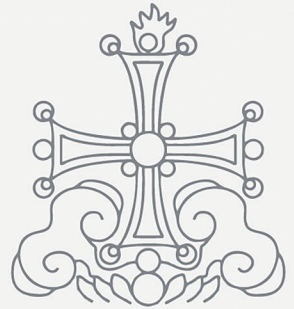
The Lord's prayer : a Chinese catechism of praying

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THE LORD'S PRAYER

A Chinese Catechism of Praying



YOU BIN (游斌)



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Chinese Catechism 2

THE LORD'S PRAYER

A Chinese Catechism of Praying

YOU BIN (游斌)

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Preface

Scott W. Sunquist

A number of interwoven themes make this an important volume. First, although carefully thought out theologically and philosophically, the volume is focused on the life of prayer. Loving God with all your heart and mind is fulfilled here. Secondly, the volume holds on to the best of the Chinese cultural tradition while staying centered on the Jesus of Scripture. Christians will appreciate this, but not only Chinese cultural Christians. All Christians will see with greater depth the meaning of Christian prayer in the pattern of the Lord's prayer.

However, I would submit that it is the incarnation which makes this book so significant. In theological and spiritual reflection, You Bin shows the importance of particular contexts for such reflection. The incarnation is the theological understanding that God came to human existence as a particular man in a particular culture at a particular time. Regarding theological discourse, this changes or shapes everything. The universal God over all of creation has, as it were, sanctified the particularity of human life and culture. As theologians in the past have observed, Jesus was not a generic person with generic language and culture, but he became part of a particular Middle Eastern Jewish culture speaking a particular language and eating particular food cooked in a particular way. He lived according to particular customs as part of the Covenant People of God which included Sabbath keeping, truth telling and honoring father and mother.

Some of his customs align well with ancient Confucian practices and customs. Other cultural habits, even of Jesus time, he revised (healing on the Sabbath, not ritually cleaning vessels) and some of these revisions also stretch the limits of Confucian life and culture. What is key is understanding this spiritual practice as "advancing

a Christian theology of dialogue in the context of Chinese cultures [which] has always been an activity of 'going forward and returning'." (page 9) You Bin is both systematic and artistic in this important theological and spiritual task.

This is the second of a four-volume series which takes this incarnation principle, develops it within Chinese culture and then, for the global church, develops a catechism based on the Creed (volume 1) the Lord's Prayers (volume 2), the Ten Commandments (volume 3) and the Liturgy (volume 4). I find this a profound way of understanding spiritual formation, a method which is rooted in core documents and practices that Christians throughout the world and through Christian history would recognize.

In an age of division and either-or thinking, You Bin has taken a very particular culture (Chinese) and provided a catechism that connects with, even unites, global Christians from different cultures in a better understanding of our unity in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Of particular note in this volume is the careful biblical work that is done by an accomplished Bible scholar, the sensitivity and respect for traditional Chinese (especially Confucian) philosophy and terminology, and finally the catechetical structure of the volume. In the end the book guides the reader to understand how people prayed in the Bible, what prayer is (biblically), the different forms of prayer, and how prayer nurtures the fullness of life as a Christian, as a human made in the image of God.

I believe You Bin has provided a succinct, profound, creative, and accessible volume to deepen the Christian life for all. I am appreciative that he has dedicated his scholarship to such an end for the global church.

* Scott W. Sunquist is the President & Professor of Missiology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA/USA, author of *Explorations in Asian Christianity: History, Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017; *Shape of Christian History: Continuity and Diversity in the Global Church*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2022 and many other books on World Christianity.

Preface

Catherine Cornille

One of the great unfinished projects of Christian theology is the development of genuine intercultural theologies, drawing from the insights and expressions of a variety of cultures. Though the Bible has been translated in most living languages, and catechists and theologians have used local categories to render Christian ideas intelligible in particular contexts, a thorough engagement with various local cultures for the purposes not only of teaching, but also of learning from them is still in the making.

In this book, professor You Bin offers a compelling example of such effort as it applies to Chinese Christianity. He points out that, just as the sources of the Biblical tradition may be traced back through ancient civilizations, the Chinese tradition itself is based on an ancient and rich civilization that has transmitted elements of important wisdom through the ages. The process of re-discovering Christianity through Chinese culture may thus lead to new discoveries. This requires a process of dialogue that grants its own autonomy and integrity to Chinese culture as well as to Christianity.

Rather than on abstract theological topics, his focus is on one of the core elements of Christian faith and practice: the Lord's prayer. This opens up various new avenues of reflection both for intercultural and comparative theology: it moves away from an exclusive focus on texts and ideas toward more attention to prayer and practice. You Bin clearly names the problems of contemporary theology: intellectualization, fragmentation and alienation from life-practice. The Lord's prayer allows for reflection on central theological themes, while also addressing proper attitudes and orientations in Christian prayer more generally. Drawing from Chinese traditions, prayer itself, as You Bin points out, may be thought of as "heart-

mind learning” lifting up a wholistic or integrated approach to prayer. While each of the articles of prayer may be enriched through engagement with Chinese culture, I am particularly inspired by his Chinese interpretation of forgiveness as “taking a heart that is the same as the other.” This deep understanding of empathy as a resource for forgiveness is one that may be a lesson for the whole Christian tradition.

As You Bin points out, engagement with a new culture may become an occasion to overcome denominational differences and to move to what he calls a “greater theology,” going beyond the distinctions of theological systems as defined by confessional, doctrinal and intellectual differences. Often, these differences arise from social, historical and political contingencies, and moving into new cultural and historical frontiers may offer the chance to return the tradition to its basic sources while moving the tradition forward. You Bin suggests the possibility of generating a “better self” by “drawing on a wide variety of resources to arrive at a more holistic system of thought, spirituality, morality, liturgy and ecclesiology.”

Whereas the process of inculturation has often been regarded as a service to a particular local Church and community, this book demonstrates that it should also be regarded as a gift to the global Church and Christian community. Though each culture is indeed distinctive and unique, it offers ways of being and seeing the world that may be a source of genuine enrichment for other cultures and for Christianity as a whole. The Spirit, which is the ultimate source of all prayer and the means by which “our hearts become the place where God communicates with God” ultimately transcends all time and place, and allow God’s gifts to flow from one culture to the next, to the benefit of the universal Church.

* Catherine Cornille, Professor of Comparative Theology at Boston College, Boston/USA, author of *The Im/Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (2008) and *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (2020), one of the world’s leading researchers in the field of comparative theology and interreligious dialogue.

Introduction

Catechism and Intercultural Theology in China

For Christianity in China,¹ the most vital and foundational issue is to develop a contextual, indigenized, and locally rooted Christian theology for Chinese Christians and churches that can be articulated and grounded in Chinese cultural terms.² Christianity can only make solid progress if it is willing to enter into extensive, in-depth dialogue with Chinese culture, a process through which, on the one hand, the various aspects of Christianity such as doctrinal expression, spiritual practice, ethical exhortation, and liturgical celebration will be renewed; and on the other hand, the treasures of Chinese indigenous cultures will be integrated into Christianity as it preserves its own truth claims, thereby building an intercultural theological system rooted in Chinese cultural soil that enables Christianity to become an intrinsic part of Chinese culture.

Initiated by Bishop K. H. Ting (1915–2012) in the 1990s, this intercultural theological construction is today in need of a new impetus and fresh resources. New questions must be raised and new methodologies must be created to further the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture. We should therefore ask: If Chinese Christian theology is necessarily a theology of intercultural dialogue, how can we advance it in the context of the venerable, varied, and rich cultures of China? With Chinese culture as a comprehensive

1 As used in this paper, “Christianity in China” refers mainly to the Chinese Protestant Church. For this terminology, see Miikka Ruokanen, Liu Ruomin, and Chen Yongtao, “Is ‘Postdenominational’ Christianity Possible? Ecclesiology in the Protestant Church of China,” *The Ecumenical Review* 67.1 (March 2015): 77–95.

2 For more about this as goal, see Hans Küng and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 232.

dialogue partner, how can we reshape our understanding of theology, perhaps even constructing a “greater theology” of universal and comprehensive extension? With respect to current global and domestic theological tendencies, what kind of a framework might accommodate this “greater theology”? How can a post-denominational catechism for a comprehensive expression and teaching of the Christian faith constitute the first step in constructing a framework for this “greater theology” within the social and cultural contexts of China?

1. Theology in Deep Dialogue with Chinese Cultures

It has long been acknowledged by Chinese Christian leaders and theologians that the core component of the extension of the gospel in China is in-depth dialogue with Chinese culture. But what precisely does it mean to “dialogue with Chinese culture”? Clearly the two key words here are “dialogue” and “Chinese culture.” Only after thoroughly examining both, can we form a clear understanding of the framework and approach for the construction of an intercultural theology in Chinese context.

What is dialogue? Obviously, an ideal and fruitful dialogue is neither a simple, conventional conversation nor the straightforward exchange of views. Rather, when “dialogue” becomes a basic approach in the construction of an intercultural theology, it entails a fundamental attitude towards the self and other in dialogical relationship. Dialogue involves not only self-representation but also deeper discovery and understanding of the self vis-à-vis the other. In facing the dialogue partner, one “discovers a better self.” Moreover, dialogue not only facilitates an understanding of the other but also receives insights from the other. When we combine these two meanings of “dialogue,” we yield improved self-discovery and self-cultivation through the process of deep learning across boundaries.

The theology called for by Chinese Christianity is therefore necessarily a “theology of dialogue.” This theology of dialogue neither

centers on comparisons between Christianity and Chinese cultures nor is reduced to inserting elements of Chinese culture into Christian thought. Rather, a theology of dialogue should be thoroughly “dialogical” and “theological.” Dialogue should be intimately united with all aspects of “doing theology,” constituting a new way of Christian “faith seeking understanding” in a “new” Chinese cultural context.

In short, a Chinese theology of dialogue should encompass three inseparable and mutually enlightening modes of thinking: first, it must be rooted in the faith traditions of Christianity itself, relying on the Church’s universal theology as its intellectual resource; second, it must boldly venture beyond its own boundaries to draw on the beneficial resources of Chinese cultures; third, it must seek to renew the theological insights of the Christian faith while drawing inspiration and resources from its encounter with Chinese cultural traditions. Figuratively speaking, although its point of departure is the Christian faith, it courageously enters Chinese cultural traditions with the purpose of returning to the Christian faith, having renewed and developed its indigenous theological understanding.

Advancing a Christian theology of dialogue in the context of Chinese cultures has always been an activity of “going forward and returning” (*wu wang bu fu*, 无往不复)³— intellectual reflection that aims not only to observe and discover Chinese culture through the lens of Christianity but also to observe and discover Christianity through the lens of Chinese culture. It demands that Chinese theologians return continuously to the deeply rooted traditions of Christianity, examining the origins of their own thinking. This is why the notion of “rediscovery” is emphasized: although some aspects of Christian theological traditions—for example, spiritual cultivation though daily

³ This line comes from the *Yi Jing*, which in explaining the symbolic meaning of the diagram of “Harmony” (*Tai*, 泰), proclaims that harmony lies in communication between different, even opposite, things. The original diagram for “Harmony” indicates that heaven and earth in communication bring all things of creation into harmony. It therefore suggests that no one should go forward without return. See, *The Zhou Book of Chang (Yi Jing)*, trans. Fu Huisheng 傅慧生 (Changsha: Human People’s Press, 2008), 77.

moral practices—were forgotten or concealed during the long course of Christianity's global history, their value might be rediscovered and reappraised in dialogue with Chinese culture. A Christian theology of dialogue is also constructive in the sense that Chinese culture constitutes not only a conversation partner but also an object of deep learning. Moreover, the goal of this deep learning is a creative renewal of Christian theology. In this sense of dialogue, Chinese theology must be an intercultural theology of boundary crossing and deep learning, while remaining rooted in the traditions of Christianity.

Because Chinese culture possesses a treasure trove of resources so different from those of Christianity's other socio-cultural dialogical partners, the intercultural dialogue between Chinese culture and Christianity will require the latter to perceive and construct itself in broader and deeper ways. We therefore need to ask: What is Chinese culture? There is no single answer in response to this complicated question. At the very least, however, there is generally a consensus on the following points: chronologically, the origins of Chinese culture can be traced to the earliest civilization of the Yellow River, the *Huaxia* (华夏) cultures, as well as to the surrounding cultures of the time; it dates back, popularly speaking, to about 5000 years ago;⁴ and in terms of ethnic heritage it refers to the Han ethnicity as well as ethnic minority cultures that interacted with the Han, slowly integrating into a more widespread Chinese culture through various means. This civilization of Chinese cultures encompasses a set of thought systems

4 The historical "creed" of a 5000-year history of Chinese civilization is in step with the construction of the Chinese people as an ethnic group. Liang Qichao (梁启超, 1873-1929) first proposed a 4000-year history, using the term "Chinese people" (*zhong hua min zu*, 中华民族) at the turn of the twentieth century. This was one core in the construction of the Chinese as a united people. Later, Sun Yat-san's (孙中山, 1866-1925) *Strategies of Building China (jian guo fang lue*, 建国方略) claimed a 5000-year cultural heritage to be the foundation on which Chinese identity is built. This then became a consensus among the archaeologist and cultural historians. In 1986, archaeologist Su Bingqi (苏秉琦) clearly proposed for the first time in contemporary China the term "Chinese civilizational dawn light shining five-thousand years." Chinese culture and China's 5000-year history are of the same importance in constructing the Chinese as a people. See Su Bingqi (苏秉琦), "The Origins of Chinese Cultures" (*cong zhong guo wen hua qi yuan dao zhong guo wen ming qi yuan*, 从中国文化起源到中国文明起源), in *Hua People, Descendants of Auspicious Dragon, and Chinese People (Hua ren long de chuan ren Zhong guo ren*, 华人·龙的传人·中国人) (Shenyang: Liaoning Publishing House, 1994), 101.

that comprehensively order life—from the definition and delineation of the life of an individual person, to that of the family, country, and world—as well as all kinds of political, economic, educational, and intellectual systems.

The construction of an intercultural Christian theology in dialogue with Chinese cultures stands not only to make a significant contribution to Christianity's self-awareness but also to exert a deep influence on the nature and identity of Chinese Christian theology. Thus it calls for a "greater theology."

2. Towards a "Greater Theology"

In the context of contemporary Chinese society and culture, Chinese Christian theology must take on a comprehensive and synthesized form and approach as it faces the long-established, multi-layered, and multifaceted systems and particular characteristics of Chinese culture as its dialogue partner. To use a more general term, it must take on the shape of "greater theology" rather than adhere to the limits of theological systems as defined by confessional, doctrinal, or intellectual distinctions.

First, "greater theology" requires the recognition of Christianity as an established cultural system with a long-standing history. When Chinese Protestants talk about theology, they ordinarily understand it to refer to theology after the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Even those people who are conscious of a longer history tend to extend their reflections no further than the Middle Ages, early Church Fathers, or Apostles. But when Christianity begins to dialogue with a roughly 5000-year-old Chinese culture, the question naturally arises: if we take Christianity just as a historical cultural system, should not its history be traced back much further than the 2000 years of the Christian Church?

Here, the mirror of Chinese culture can shed light on the cultural roots of Christianity. In fact, when Jesus and his disciples preached the Good News in the ancient world, the scriptures they consulted

and the verses they recited were the Hebrew Scriptures, which are referred to by Christians as the “Old Testament.” Whether it is belief in one God, the relationship between God and human beings, or the systems of morality, law, and sacrifice—all these Christian concepts are rooted in the older Israelite civilization. The “Hebrew Bible” (or “Old Testament”) constitutes about two-thirds of the Christian Bible. The terminology, ritual system, and religious metaphors invoked by Jesus and the apostles can be traced back to Abraham and the ancient Jewish faith. Broadly speaking, ancient Jewish civilization has its roots in a tradition that dates back to 2000 _{BCE}, while its intellectual system was inherited and developed from Mesopotamian-Mediterranean civilizations that date back another 1000–2000 years. Thus, Christianity has a history of more or less five (or even six) thousand years, a cultural identity that has been largely neglected by the Christian world but might be recovered through a dialogical process with ancient Chinese culture. Doing so would deepen our understanding of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments as well as the link between Christianity as a cultural system and its Jewish and Mediterranean roots. The Bible is not only a text of God revealing Himself to humanity but also a witness to a Judeo-Christian civilization that is over 5000–6000 years old. Given this cultural understanding of the scriptures, a Chinese theological construction can acquire a new appreciation of the theological inspiration of the Old Testament, celebrating the continuity between it and the New Testament.⁵

Second, “greater theology” requires expanding Christian theology into a kind of universal theology that genuinely synthesizes different kinds of traditions. The Chinese word for Protestantism, “*jidu xinjiao*” (new Christianity, 基督新教), like the English term “Protestant,”

5 Similar cultural awareness can be seen in Christianity's encounter of other long-established cultures. Consider, for example, Justin Martyr, who claimed that “[Plato] took this from our teachers—we mean the words from the prophets—listen to what was said in so many words by Moses, whom we have already shown was the first of the prophets and earlier than the Greek writers” (*Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, ed. and trans. by Denis Minns and Paul Parvis [Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], ch. 59, para. 1).

denotes a “protesting sect,” bearing the connotations of opposition to, secession from, and protest against the Roman Catholic Church. These characteristics inspired courageous innovation, believer-oriented worship, and adaptability in the face of change among various Protestant denominations. Regrettably, however, due to the special historical environment of the Reformation and its spirit of controversy, reform, and protest, some of the beneficial theological, liturgical, and spiritual traditions within the Catholic tradition were abandoned. Protestant theology today has acknowledged some of these losses, embracing an “open” attitude to the ancient church traditions and a return to the theology of the early Church Fathers.

This “open” theological orientation accords with recent ecumenical reconciliation and recognition within the world of Christianity. Within the expanded outlook of the universal Church and ongoing dialogue between different denominations, acceptance of and learning from one another have become *de rigueur*. For example, in 1999, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed a “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” reaching a consensus of core doctrine and working toward general reconciliation. In 2006, the Methodist Church also signed the declaration. In 2017 and 2018, respectively, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and Anglican Communion also joined the declaration. Another example concerns liturgy. Following Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church renewed the structure of the liturgical year with a three-year lectionary cycle, which more and more Protestant denominations emulate today. Chinese Christianity’s dialogue with Chinese culture is in line with these recent reconciliations and recognitions, seeking a deeper understanding of the inner direction of Protestant theology and a more comprehensive dialogue with the universal Church. In the process of constructing theology in dialogue with multi-faceted Chinese traditional culture, Chinese Christianity should not cling to its own sectarian bias, otherwise it will encounter difficulties as it tries to establish the structure for rich, comprehensive, and effective dialogue. Rather, Chinese Christianity must keep to the spirit of the Protestant

Reformation, while returning to the foundation of the Bible, absorbing the spiritual resources of the early Church Fathers, and drawing on the historical achievements and contemporary innovations within Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. This will enable the renewal of a broader, universal theology in dialogue with Chinese culture.⁶

Finally, “greater theology” requires an understanding of Christian theology as a complete and systematic body of thought. The Protestant Reformation was an inborn movement of European culture and society that, since the sixteenth century, has so deeply shaped the social and cultural institutions of modern western society that Protestantism and modern western society have become inextricably linked. This is seen for example in the connection between “justification by faith” and contemporary western individualism, or the priesthood of all believers and contemporary systems of representative democracy. However, upon entering the context of Chinese society, which reactively reformed itself in response to Western impact, and in confronting the rich diversity of Chinese culture, we can clearly see some of the significant shortcomings of a theological construction based solely on post-Reformation Protestant thought, especially in the areas of ecclesiology, spirituality, and liturgical and sacramental theology. Chinese Christianity must therefore try to rediscover and construct “a better self” in the process of its dialogue with Chinese culture by means of a deeper and more extensive examination of universal theology. It does this by drawing on a wide variety of resources to arrive at more holistic systems of thought, spirituality, morality, liturgy, and ecclesiology, among others.

An awareness of “greater theology” is in fact consistent with the spirit of the Reformation, as both point to a kind of “unfinished Protestantism.” In dialoguing with Chinese culture, the “unfinished”

6 We see a similar understanding of and approach to a Chinese Christian theological construction in the five-year plan of the National Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China and the China Christian Council; see, “The Five-year Plan for Promoting the Sinicization of Chinese Christianity, 2018–2022” (*tui jin wo guo ji du jiao zhong guo hua wu nian gong zuo gui hua gang yao*, 推进我国基督教中国化五年工作规划纲要, 2018–2022), <https://www.ccctspm.org/cppccinfo/10283>, accessed 26 September 2022.

or “unresolved” nature of Protestantism yields deeper and wider access to the spiritual and intellectual resources of the universal Church through which the “greater theology” of Chinese Christianity is enriched and refined.

3. A “Crystal-Cube” Intercultural Theology

As discussed above, Chinese Christianity calls for a “greater theology,” which requires a more meaningful integration of a dialogical Chinese theology with the trends of universal theology. With respect to the former, the central theme is dialogue between Christianity and Chinese culture, while the latter focuses on dialogue between Protestant traditions and universal theology. More precisely, Chinese theological construction should be in step with and an integral part of universal theology. With this in mind, we might propose a feasible approach for the construction of a “greater theology” in contemporary China through the integration of present-day domestic and universal theology.

Let us start by reflecting on the concept of “theology” itself. What is theology? When people answer this question, they often base their explanations on an analysis on the etymology of “theology”: a rational discourse about God, or a system of knowledge about God. Another explanation—“theology is the church in the act of thinking”⁷—emphasizes the role of theology as the Church’s self-reflection about its existential problems through the Bible or its theological traditions. A rational reflection and understanding of faith are doubtlessly among the most fundamental characteristics of Christian theology. The Christian faith is not a blind faith but a kind of faith seeking and empowered by understanding. Faith facilitates more precise and accurate knowledge; conversely, knowledge facilitates more extensive and comprehensive faith. However, as a result of

7 K. H. Ting, *Love Never Ends*, trans. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 5. For a comprehensive introduction to the theological construction initiated by K. H. Ting, see Philip L. Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

modern rationalization and disciplinary fragmentation, theology has increasingly become an intellectual construction or a theoretical system, making it seem as if accepting a certain kind of system of knowledge or theory were equal to believing the Christian faith.

The common pattern of modern theological classification reflects this tendency to interpret theology as a system of knowledge. For example, theology is commonly divided into four branches: biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, and practical theology. With the exception of spirituality, pastoral care, and related areas covered by practical theology, these theological disciplines, taken together, generally present a theoretical or intellectual system.⁸ In many introductory textbooks of theology, Christian theology is explained as comprising various theories: about the Trinity, Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc. Contemporary disciplinary distinctions and academic divisions of labor further consign theology to a kind of knowledge production. This, on one hand, leads to the narrowing of theology, as it becomes a specialized discipline that can only be accessed through extensive academic training. On the other hand, insofar as it employs various methods of the humanities and social sciences to analyze and respond to theological issues, theology is increasingly cast out on the high seas of modern academic learning, floating aimlessly as a lonely vessel of intellectual production.

Some of these common features of contemporary theology—intellectualization, fragmentation, and alienation from life-practice—which have been criticized by many seasoned theologians, should and can be avoided when constructing theology with a universal orientation in the context of an ongoing dialogue with Chinese culture.

8 There is usually little to no place for spirituality and liturgy in introductions to Christian theology. Take, for example, the two most popular textbooks of theology that have been translated into Chinese. Millard Erickson's *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001; Chinese version by Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2012) does not discuss spirituality at all and provides only a short section on baptism and the Eucharist in its chapter on "Church." Alister McGrath's *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001; Chinese version by Beijing: Beijing Lianhe Publishing House, 2017) also does not discuss spirituality, though does contain an independent chapter on the sacraments.

What is needed is a fundamental reconsideration of what “theology” actually is. Therefore, we need to return to the foundational question: what is theology?

As generally understood today, theology is human thinking about God, as if to make God the object of our intellectual endeavors. In the biblical tradition, however, God reveals Himself first, disclosing Himself to humankind throughout history by speaking and acting, through the interrelated manifestations of His words and actions. The life of faith is our response in words and actions to the grace of God. Faith, properly speaking, is an echo of God’s revelation in human words and action. Theology therefore involves the systematic preservation and reflection of this “echo” within the faith community. Theology begins not only as an intellectual endeavor initiated by human reason but also as human action that echoes the grace of God. In short, what theology should chiefly address is reciprocal: the revelation of the triune God to human beings through His words and actions, and the response of human beings to the triune God through their words and actions. It is a mutual in-dwelling or interaction between human and divine words and actions. Thus it could properly be called a “theology of mutual-indwelling” (*hu yu shen xue*, 互寓神学).⁹ Just as Chinese wisdom holds that “true knowing is doing,” so theological learning should involve the practice of “a way of life.” Theology is therefore not only a theoretical construction but also both an intellectual and practical system consisting of believing, praying, living, and celebrating.

Taking this understanding as our starting point, according to the long-established Christian theological tradition, we can “polish” Chinese contextual theology as a “crystal” with four aspects, each represented by a key verb.

The first aspect is *what we believe*. This is the comprehensive

9 For a systematic elaboration of mutual-indwelling theology, see You Bin, “Mutual Indwelling Theology: A Trinitarian Introduction to the Interpretation of the Apostles’ Creed,” in *A Chinese Theological Interpretation of the Apostles’ Creed* (*shi tu xin jing xiang jie*, 使徒信经详解), Nanjing: Jinlin Union Theological Seminary Press, 2021.

and systematic elaboration on the contents of the Christian faith, often by way of detailed annotations of the twelve statements of the “Apostle’s Creed” as well as the more ecumenically recognized Nicene-Constantinople Creed, both of which are based on the central framework of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—into which the basic tenets of theological beliefs can be incorporated and elaborated.

The second aspect is *what we pray*. Justified by faith, we gain proper knowledge of Him to whom we pray. To pray is to enter into communion with the Trinitarian God in our heart. Our inner being or spirituality—or in Chinese terminology, our “heart-mind”¹⁰—is formed through our prayerful relationship with God. Praying is a spiritual exercise that cultivates the Christian heart-mind in dialogical encounter of God. The correct content and order of such prayer was given to the disciples by Christ Himself in the seven petitions of the Lord’s Prayer.

The third aspect is *what we live*. The inner heart-mind of Christians must be demonstrated in their outward lifestyle. Having received grace in our faith in the trinitarian God and having cultivated the inner heart-mind in a prayerful relationship with God, we can live a sanctified life by following the Ten Commandments that were given by God to His people on Mt. Sinai and imitate the life of Christ according to His Sermon on the Mount.

The fourth aspect is *what we celebrate*. Celebration is what the Church does in its liturgy. The God of the Christian faith is not only the God who speaks but also the God who acts. God’s gift of salvation, as enacted through the passion, sacrifice, and resurrection of Christ, is not only expressed in history but also continuously transmitted through the liturgy and sacraments of the Church. By means of the holy sacraments, God continuously sanctifies humankind, while humans continually offer Him praise. It is in the liturgy, the collective,

10 For the term “heart-mind,” see Ying-shih Yu, “Between the Heavenly and the Human,” in Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker eds. *Confucian Spirituality* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2003), 62–79.

public, open, and regular celebration of God's people, that the blessing of God upon humans and all of creation meets the human praise of God. The two sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, as well as other liturgical acts, are the main objects of Christian liturgical studies.

The “polishing” of Christian theology in these four aspects is clearly and systematically represented in the doctrinal expositions of the Roman Catholic Church, especially its post-Vatican II *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹¹ In fact, however, the same general division appears in Luther's “Small Catechism” and “Large Catechism,” though the sequence of these four aspects is different, as are Luther's theological interpretations of them.¹² Taking this four-aspect division of theology as a point of departure, Chinese Christianity can undertake an in-depth dialogue with the universal theological traditions as it moves toward the construction of “a greater theology.”

The above reconstruction of theology in the context of Chinese culture can also be developed to correspond to the traditional Chinese system of learning as follows. First is the rational discourse on faith, which might be called “Christian *jiaolixue*” (教理学, learning of the Christian “Principles”) or Christian theology more narrowly. Second, the focus on prayer, which has traditionally been classified within Christian spirituality, examines how to cultivate the Christian heart-mind through the exercise of prayer and thereby develop a personal and close relationship with the triune God; this can be termed “Christian *xinxingxue*” (心性学, spirituality).¹³ Third, the study of the

11 See *Catechism of The Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

12 See Martin Luther and Melancthon Philipp, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles P. Arand (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000). I thank Christoph Stuckelberger, for reminding me that this division is also in *The German Protestant Catechism for Adults*; see *Evangelischer Erwachsenenkatechismus*, 9th ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013).

13 The learning of *xinxingxue* (心性学)—or in English, spirituality—is one of the dominant disciplines in Confucian theory and practice. To develop a *xinxingxue* (spiritual) tradition for each religion—for example, Daoism, Buddhism, and even Islam—in their dialogue with Confucianism has become a prominent facet of Chinese cultural history. See Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Confucian Spirituality* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2003), esp. 1–35.

Christian life and its norms, can be called “Christian *lunlixue*”(伦理学, ethics). Fourth, the study of the liturgies and sacraments of the Christian tradition, which extends to ritual activities pertaining to the ceremonial arrangement of the individual's life from birth to death and the Christian concepts of family, state, and world, can be termed “Christian *liyixue*” (礼仪学, liturgical studies).

Although this proposed framework for a “greater theology” covers doctrine, spirituality, ethics, and liturgy, these parts are intricately interwoven and can never stand in isolation. For example, when certain days and times are set aside in the liturgical year to celebrate the life of Jesus, this is not only a matter of liturgy—the rites and ceremonies that mark the celebration of faith in certain seasons—but also of theology, the theological interpretation of the life of Jesus; spirituality, the cultivation of the heart-mind according to the liturgical seasons; and ethics, the imitation in action of the example of Jesus of Nazareth.

At a deeper level, these four theological aspects are all rooted in the Christian text of God's revelation: the Bible. In other words, Christian scriptures can be called yet another branch of theology, namely *shengjingxue* (圣经学, the study of Christian scriptures). In fact, the study of the Bible constitutes the foundation of theology and therefore should be considered the spirit of theology. This is yet another aspect of Chinese theology, one that interacts with the long history of scriptural studies in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Thus, with divine mystery as our foundation, we might move steadily toward the construction of a “crystal cube” Chinese Christian theology by synthesizing these five aspects of theology—*shengjingxue* (Christian scriptures), *jiaolixue* (Christian principles), *xinxingxue* (Christian spirituality), *lunlixue* (Christian ethics), and *liyixue* (Christian liturgy).¹⁴

14 Many thanks to Dr. Naomi Thurston at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for translating the above sections of this Chinese manuscript into English.

4. Catechism as Intercultural Theological Learning

Over the last decade, I have been deeply involved in many different efforts in constructing a Chinese Christian theology. I founded a theological center at Jiangxi Bible College in 2015, a research center at Fujian Theological Seminary in 2017, and other training sessions at Northeastern Theological Seminary and Shandong Theological Seminary in 2018 and the years to follow. These centers have provided theological education at all levels, from church leadership training sessions to grassroots congregational teaching classes. In 2019 I was appointed as a doctoral supervisor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, the top school for Chinese Christianity. Given my broader exposure to, and deep engagement with, post-denominational theological education in the Chinese Protestant church, I have come to agree with the insightful observation made by Prof. Miikka Ruokanen after his twenty-plus years of involvement in Chinese theological education: “to meet today’s growing challenge of Christian education, a new, enlarged version of Chinese Protestant catechism is urgently needed.”¹⁵ I have come to believe that writing a catechism is the best way to effect this, creating an experimental “crystal cube” intercultural theology for present-day China.

According to Miikka Ruokanen, this catechism would be “a Chinese post-denominational catechism for a minimal expression and teaching of the common faith.”¹⁶ In my view, negatively speaking, this catechism would be post-denominational or even non-denominational, even though, positively speaking, it would be of a “greater theology,” which is probably what Ruokanen meant by the phrase “the common faith.” Nevertheless, I disagree with Ruokanen that this catechism

15 Miikka Ruokanen, Liu Ruomin, and Chen Yongtao, “Is ‘Postdenominational’ Christianity Possible? Ecclesiology in the Protestant Church of China,” *The Ecumenical Review* 67.1 (March 2015): 94.

16 Miikka Ruokanen, Liu Ruomin, and Chen Yongtao, “Abstract” of “Is ‘Postdenominational’ Christianity Possible? Ecclesiology in the Protestant Church of China,” https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/156310/EREV_Is_postdenominational_Christianity_possible.pdf?sequence=5, accessed 20 October 2022.

would be only “a minimal expression and teaching,” since the Holy Scriptures and Ecumenical Creeds would have already played such a role of the “minimal expression” of faith. Furthermore, if the catechism limits itself to “a minimal expression and teaching of the common faith,” it would weaken the power of Chinese Christian theological reasoning vis-à-vis the long and venerable traditions of other indigenous religions and cultures that have articulated and inculcated themselves in comprehensive, elegant, and subtle ways.

In a rich and diversified Chinese cultural context, the meaning of “catechism” must gain new meanings. *“Catechism” should signify a seeking for divine wisdom as revealed in Jesus Christ by God through the Holy Spirit rather than being limited to denominational boundary-making; otherwise, a “post-denominational” catechism will turn into one more denominational catechism among the many existing ones.* Chinese catechisms should also focus on the “unfinished and embracing” spirit, on the way of divine-wisdom seeking, upon the foundation of the Holy Scriptures and Ecumenical Creeds. Thus the Chinese understanding of *catechism* should reestablish its original meaning—*kata* (thoroughly) and *ekhein* (to sound, ring)—signifying the resounding or echoing of the divine words within a Chinese cultural context. Also, the term *catechumen* should return to its original meaning of “learner” through questioning. In this way, *a renewed understanding of catechism might fit the Chinese belief that knowledge or wisdom is itself a way of learning to ask (xue wen, 学问).*

My aim in writing this set of catechisms is to make catechisms more like general Christian pedagogies of divine-wisdom seeking than fixed dogmatic entitles. These catechisms are designed according to the structure of a “greater theology” that is open to intercultural learning from Chinese indigenous cultures. The four aspects of the “greater theology”—believing, praying, living, and celebrating—will be interculturally and theologically elaborated in the form of questions and answers, each focusing on core Christian texts: *Apostles’ Creed*, *Lord’s Prayer*, *Ten Commandments*, and *Christian liturgy* selected from

or rooted in the Holy Scripture.¹⁷ This set of catechisms embraces the following three core principles.

First, as the Bible is the echo of God's word, these catechisms will try their best to be an echo of the Bible. Two of these catechisms, the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments, are directly from the Bible; a third, the Apostle's Creed, is inherent within the Bible; and the fourth, Christian sacramental liturgy, is derived from the Bible and recognized by the Church. In answering questions, these catechisms extensively quote from the Bible, providing the basic biblical principles about them. In forming these questions, I have tried to remain aware that good, accurate, and crucial questions reflect a profound and accurate understanding of faith. I hope that these questions are together like a string of pearls that reveal the entire Christian faith. In this way, people can obtain an overall view of the Christian faith through these catechisms. Then, by reading the Bible with this newly gained theological learning, people can reach a better and deeper understanding of the divine economy in the Bible, especially in the interaction between the Old and New Testaments.

Second, the catechisms are open to the universal theological tradition, rooted in the various traditions of the universal Church, including Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and even ancient Asian Oriental churches like *Jingjiao* (Chinese Nestorianism, 景教). For Chinese Christianity, the task of “a greater theology” is not to innovate faith but to continue the tradition of the universal Church so that people can give birth to “new life” on “old roots” (*gu gen xin ming*, 古根新命) that were planted by the prophets and apostles. This set of Chinese catechisms therefore quotes statements from catechisms of different denominations, demonstrating how Chinese Christianity can absorb the strength of others in moving towards union with the

17 The Chinese version of these four catechisms were published between 2018 and 2021: You Bin, *The Apostles' Creed: A Chinese Catechism* (*shi tu xin jing yao li wen da*, 使徒信经要理问答) in 2018; *The Lord's Prayer: A Chinese Catechism* (*zhu dao wen yao li wen da*, 主祷文要理问答) in 2019; *The Ten Commandments: A Chinese Catechism* (*shi jie yao li wen da*, 十诫要理问答) in 2020; and *Christian Liturgy: A Chinese Catechism* (*ji du jiao li yi yao li wen da*, 基督教礼仪要理问答) in 2021. All were published by Religious Cultural Press of Beijing.

universal Church.

Third, the catechisms should constitute theological constructions of deep learning by boundary crossing with Chinese wisdom. Non-Christian cultures, Chinese culture included, bearing the sign of God's love and wisdom as beams of light left by the Word of God in human activity, are absorbed into these catechisms. As a matter of fact, when Christian catechisms are written in the Chinese language, Chinese wisdom is integrated into these Christian teachings since the Chinese language itself is rooted in profound Chinese wisdom. However, this series of catechisms tries to undertake the deep learning of boundary crossing more explicitly and deliberately. Not only is the entire structure of this Christian "greater theology" designed to correspond to the four aspects of Chinese learning; there is also systematic appropriation of Chinese wisdom in the intercultural formation of these Christian catechisms. For example, when interpreting the function of Bible-reading in forming readers' spirituality, I use the Neo-Confucian term "transforming temperament" (*bian hua qi zhi*, 变化气质), and when interpreting the universal dimension of the Church, I employ the traditional Chinese concept of "under the heaven, there is but one world; on the earth, there is but one family" (*tian xia yi ti, si hai yi jia*, 天下一体, 四海一家). I draw from the concept of "life cultivation" (*sheng ming yang cheng*, 生命养成) to interpret Christians' spiritual formation, and I summarize the entire structure of the Lord's Prayer as "three wills and four petitions" (*san yuan si qiu*, 三愿四求). I use Confucius' motto "do not unto others as you would not have them to unto you" (*ji suo bu yu, wu shi yu ren*, 己所不欲, 勿施于人) to interpret the universal principle of the Ten Commandments, and I employ the liturgical principles of Chinese cultures—for example, "liturgy is to celebrate the heavenly principle" (*li zhe li ye*, 礼者理也), and "to celebrate liturgy is to walk by it" (*li zhe lu ye*, 礼者履也)—to develop a Chinese theology of Christian liturgy.

My four catechisms correspond to the four aspects of the "greater theology" proposed above. I sincerely hope they will be helpful for Chinese Christians not only in studying these Biblical texts but also

in building a concise theological framework to obtain an overall understanding of the Christian faith. Doing so would enable Chinese believers to understand the internal structure of Christian theology like engineers, to familiarize themselves with the score of entire Christian faith as musicians. When faced by other religions or secular values, these readers who have learned these catechisms will easily be able to articulate and elaborate Christian values in a clear, accurate, and wise manner, expressing Christian life-attitudes in contemporary Chinese sociocultural contexts. In short, I sincerely hope these catechisms can help more Chinese people stand on the rock of Jesus Christ, continue the apostolic tradition, and echo the word of God in their lives.

I also hope that the Chinese catechetical interpretation of these Biblical texts and practices in accordance with the structure of a “greater theology” will be a gift to the global Christian world. Opening ourselves to cultural heritages does not contradict our return to the apostolic and universal traditions of the Christian faith. In fact, a deeper interaction with cultural resources calls for a stronger embrace of Biblical and apostolic origins. The project of intercultural theology, as a way of life that seeks the divine wisdom of Jesus Christ, is by definition an act of spiritual formation. As a pilgrimage journey to Bethlehem under the guidance of a bright star, we encounter the incarnated Word Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human, in our deep learning from local cultures and societies and our honest seeking for the roots of the apostolic and ecumenical faith of the universal Christian Church.

Part I



Christian Prayer and An Intercultural Theology of the Heart¹



Prayer is one of the most common spiritual phenomena of humankind, a means by which people express a desire for their Creator. The Bible is a book of prayer between God and humanity, replete with God's call to His people and their response to Him. For Christians, prayer is the encounter and dialogue between God and humans. In such an encounter, humans speak to God as a response to God's call. In this calling between God and humanity, people enter into a covenantal relationship with God, developing their entire lives with Him.

¹ In Chinese philosophy, "heart" has cognitive, affective, and even existential dimensions as the location for communion between the divine and humans. The purpose of the spiritual practice of "heart" is to uncover the original nature (*xing*, 性) of human beings in order to reach an ontological union between humans and the divine, from which virtue cultivation, social ethics, and spiritual exercises are derived. When adapted into Chinese culture, this entire Christian system of intellectual discourse and existential practice involving the heart (*xin*) and human nature (*xing*) in prayer can be called an "intercultural theology of heart" (*xin xing shen xue*, 心性神学).

Christian prayer takes on a unique character because of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Word of God, born as a human speaking human words, so that in Him God's words and human words are integrated. Jesus is both the human master of prayer and the divine cornerstone of prayer. It is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that Christians learn Jesus' prayers, pray with Him, and, more importantly, pray in Him.

Jesus not only prayed to the Holy Father frequently but also taught His disciples the model of prayer: the Lord's Prayer. For Christians, the Lord's Prayer, taught by Jesus Himself, has a special significance that embodies the fundamental character of Christian prayer. It is the prayer of Jesus as the Son to the Father. When Christians begin their prayers with the phrase "Our Father in heaven," they enter into "a heavenly realm" (*tian di jing jie*, 天地境界),² in which they serve heavenly ends and enjoy heavenly rewards. Christians pray together with Christ to God, acquiring their identity as the children of God in Christ. The Lord's Prayer adjusts, purifies, and lifts the human heart. It not only reveals to humans the values and life that God intends but also takes human needs into account, covering all their petitions to God.

The Lord's Prayer is the summary of the entire Gospel. It indicates the heavenly identity of Christians as the "knock" on the door of heaven, guiding Christians to practice their life-cultivation in Jesus Christ.

2 This term "heavenly realm" (*tian di jing jie*, 天地境界), literally meaning "live in a spiritual union with all things in heaven and on earth," is borrowed from the modern Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan (冯友兰, 1895–1990), who identified four realms of human life from low to high: the natural realm, the utilitarian realm, the ethical realm, and the heavenly realm. In the highest realm, the heavenly, people enjoy spiritual harmony in union with the essential principle of the universe. See, Feng Youlan, *On Human Being* (*xin yuan ren*, 新原人) (Chongqing: Commercial Press, 1943), 292; reprinted in *Complete Works of San Song Tang* (Feng Youlan) (*san song tang quan ji*, 三松堂全集), vol. 4 (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 2000), 561.

1. HEART: THE PLACE OF PRAYER

What is prayer? Prayer is the lifting upwards of our heart and talking to God face to face. Where is prayer sent from? We always pray as a whole person, no matter our circumstances, language, or posture. We speak to God with heart. Heart is the place of prayer.

What is heart? Heart is the whole of life. It is who I am and where I live. Heart combines human rationality with emotions (*xin tong xing qing*, 心统性情).³ It not only integrates human nature but also motivates human emotions. As the power behind the will, heart brings us to the truth, so that we can be enlightened and make choices between right and wrong. Heart reflects the image of God in us. In the heart, we meet God and answer His call with prayer. We build a covenantal relationship with Him so that we can gain a dignity beyond all other created beings.

In prayer, our heart enters into communion with the Triune God. How can we, as created beings and sinners, meet and communicate with God in our hearts unless God longs to speak to us out of love? It is the Triune God who condescends Himself and brings our hearts into prayer in communing with Him. In prayer, the Spirit indwells

3 According to the terminology of Chinese culture, the triangular structure of the inner being of humans is composed of heart, rationality, and emotion. With the principle “*xin tong xing qing*” (心统性情), first proposed by the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhang Zai (1020–1077), different interpretations of Neo-Confucian anthropology were developed. Although the most common reading of *tong* (统) is to govern, I believe it can be creatively, interculturally interpreted in the Christian spiritual tradition as “collaboration” (*tong*, 同) or “communication” (*tong*, 通). Those who combine and communicate the heart-mind with rationality and emotion realize the image of God, the subject of prayer. In the inner communication between the heart-mind, rationality, and emotion, we talk to God. According to the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200), “Heart is the governor of the whole person. Rationality (*xing*), the principles inherent in human nature, is within the heart that humans obtain from heaven. When rationality is applied to the intellectual-affectional faculties, emotions rise up. This is called ‘heart combines the rationality and emotion’” (*xin tong xing qing*) (心是神明之舍，为一身之主宰。性便是许多道理，得之于天而具于心者，发于智识念虑处皆是情，故曰心统性情); Zhu Xi, *Conversations of Master Zhu* (*zhu zi yu lei*, 朱子语类), ed. Li Jingde (黎靖德) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books [*zhong hua shu ju*, 中华书局], 1986), bk. VII, vol. 98, p. 2514.

in the heart. “We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8: 26–27). As the Spirit prays in us, our hearts become the place where God communicates with God. Our hearts enter into communion with Christ in prayer. The incarnation of Jesus helps us pray in Him with the hearts of children before the Almighty God. The uniqueness of Christian prayer lies in our dialogue with God in Christ, the only Son incarnated. Without Jesus Christ, we cannot find an intermediary and hinge for communication between God and humans. Jesus Christ is the Word of God that became flesh, perfectly God and perfectly human. Divinity and humanity have been perfectly integrated in the person of Jesus Christ, with God’s “heavenly heart” (*tian xin*, 天心) and our “human heart” (*ren xin*, 人心) joining together in Him. Only in Jesus Christ can we obtain the identity of the sonship of God, which qualifies us to encounter and talk with God. When we begin to pray to “Our Father in heaven” with a pure and simple childlike heart, all of our earthly identities are submerged in the call “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). Led by the Son and the Spirit, we can come to the Father and pray to Him, and our hearts can be illuminated and purified. The communion between the human heart and the Triune God is the first aspect of a Christian’s heart of prayer.

In prayer, our heart embraces three times: past, present and future (*xin bao san shi*, 心包三时).⁴ When we pray at each present moment, we not only remember God’s providence in history but also expect God’s grace and salvation in the future. God is the One who was, is, and will be. There is no past, present or future in Him,

4 For the concept of “three times,” see Augustine’s statement in *Confessions* XI.20.26: “it might be fitly said, ‘There are three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.’” Later, in XI.26.33 Augustine claims “Whence it appeared to me that time is nothing else than protraction; but of what I know not. It is wonderful to me, if it be not of the mind itself.” See *The Confessions, Nicene and Post-Nicene Father*, first series, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), 398, 405.

so He is the eternal present. He makes our prayer the present prayer. Meanwhile, prayer in the present awakens our memory of the past and reminds us of God's words and actions in history. In the Old Testament, God's salvation comes down upon the Israelites again and again; in the New Testament, salvation reaches a climax with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our remembrance of Jesus' incarnation, passion, and resurrection moves us to pray and to speak to Him now. We pray because we miss and long for Christ. Remembrance of Christ brings us hope for the future; our praises and petitions are fully realized in Christ, the coming King. To combine the past, present, and future of God's salvation in the heart is the second aspect of a Christian's heart of prayer.

In prayer, our heart contains all things (*xin bao wan wu*, 心包万物) in the Spirit and the Church.⁵ "We" are always the subject of Christian prayer. We, in the Holy Spirit and with the Holy Son, pray to the Holy Father. Our prayer is the prayer of the heart in the Church. Therefore, for the life and blessing of the world, we, together with our brothers and sisters, devote ourselves to prayer with one accord (Acts 1:14). Moreover, since humans are a combination of soul and body, the created world can enter into communion with God through our prayer. All of creation is groaning in travail, longing to be free from the bondage to decay.

5 There is a common connection between the unity of the human heart-mind and the universe in Confucianism, which reached its climax in Neo-Confucianism. According to the early Confucian philosopher Mencius (孟子, 372–289 BCE), "All the ten thousand things are complete in me. To turn within to examine oneself and find that one is sincere—there is no greater joy than this" (万物皆备于我, 反身而诚, 乐莫大焉); see *Mencius* 7A4, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 144. And according to the Neo Confucian philosopher Cheng Hao (程颢, 1032–1085), "our heart-mind is the heavenly principle, and the heavenly principle is our heart-mind" (*xin shi li, li shi xin*, 心是理, 理是心); see *Works of Cheng Brothers* (*er cheng ji*, 二程集) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2004), 139. The later Neo-Confucian Lu Xiangshan (陆象山, 1139–1193) exclaimed that "the universe is in my own heart, and my heart is nothing else than the universe" (*yu zhou bian shi wu xin, wu xin bian shi yu zhou*, 宇宙便是吾心, 吾心便是宇宙); see Lu Xiangshan, *Complete Works of Lu Xiangshan* (*xiang shan xian sheng quan ji*, 象山先生全集), vol. 22 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1935), 267. The even later Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming (王阳明, 1472–1529) also claimed that "there is no thing under heaven that exists outside our heart" (*tian xia wu xin wai zhi wu*, 天下无心外之物); see *Wang Yangming, Instructions for Practical Living* (*chuan xi lu*, 传习录), commentary by Deng Aimin (邓艾民), vol. II (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books [shang hai gu ji chu ban she, 上海古籍出版社], 2012), 231.

When the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, He invites us to intercede for all beings (Rom. 8:20–26). We, as the priest of the universe, invite and lead all beings to pray to God. All creatures of creation are our brothers and sisters regardless of their greatness or smallness. Our heart of prayer is the heart that is with the Son, the Spirit, brothers and sisters, and all beings in the universe. The praying place is the temple of God, the gate of heaven, and the center of the universe. This is the third aspect of a Christian's heart of prayer.

2. PRAYER IS THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

Prayer plays a vital role in the Christian faith. In terms of the ancient saying “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*” (the law of prayer is the law of faith),⁶ we believe as we pray and we live as we believe. Prayer shapes the hearts of Christians, for it is in prayer that God establishes a lively and intimate relationship with humans. What we believe, what we live, and what we celebrate are all internalized in our praying relationship with God. Prayer claims its uniqueness by establishing and nourishing a Christian's faith internally and vividly. Prayer is the fountain from which our faith, life practice, and celebration flow.

First of all, the Bible is the written “words of God.” Scripture reading is a dialogue of prayer between God and humans through written words. Building a relationship with God in prayer cannot be done without reading and meditating on the Bible. When we read the Bible, we are listening to God; when we pray, we are speaking to God. Human prayer and scripture reading constitute a dialogue of speaking and listening between God and humans. The Holy Scriptures are witness to a series of events in which God and humans

6 *Catechism of Catholic Church*, no. 1124.

call to one another, establishing an everlasting covenant. Today, by praying in scripture reading and by reading the scriptures in prayer, we extend the biblical drama between God and humanity into every present “now.”

Secondly, since Jesus proclaimed that He is the Truth (Jn. 14:6) and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 14:17), when we seek wisdom with our minds and enter into a loving relationship with the Triune God in our heart, our prayer unites us with each other through hearing the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation (Eph. 1:13). Our intellectual reasoning about the Triune God, therefore, will set our passion on fire to see the face of God in prayer. The experience of praying to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit with our life will enrich our intellectual understanding the Triune God and His providence. This praying experience makes our beliefs more profound, while our deeper understanding of the Triune God urges us to pray more fervently.

Thirdly, it is by prayer that we gain a new life in the Holy Spirit. Prayer is both our desire and our life. Our lives of virtue, with faith, hope, and love at their core, always grow and mature through our prayers. Prayer is an action of the whole person. The purity of one's life of virtue determines the purity of one's life of prayer. Faith, the virtue of all virtues, drives people to long for and seek the presence of God, motivating them to listen to and obey God's words. Talking with God face-to-face is the core of prayer. We always pray in hope for and listening for His appearance. We “pray constantly” (1 Thes. 5:17) through the years, with the anticipation of His glorious second coming. It is in our prayer that God's love meets our love. He loves us in Christ, enabling us to love in response to Him. Love is the source and everlasting theme of prayer.

In offering our whole life to God, prayer urges us to live a life in accordance with the words of God, as epitomized in the Ten Commandments, motivating us to observe these words more fervently. In requiring Christians to worship God, the only Lord God, the First Commandment shows us the object of our prayer, and

through our increasingly fervent prayer to the Lord, our obedience to the First Commandment is manifested and maintained. The Ten Commandments therefore not only serve as an external ethical code but also urge the formation of an obedient inner heart-mind.

The law of our new life is the “Sermon on the Mount” delivered by Jesus, the “new Moses,” on a mountain. The Sermon on the Mount shows people how to live a new and vibrant life, as “light” and “salt,” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in imitation of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Prayer is at the core of the entire Sermon on the Mount, indicating that the goodness of our life in Christ depends on our prayer to the Father. Jesus opposed both formalism and hypocrisy (Mt. 7:21), requiring His disciples to live a life united in heart, word, and action. Prayer encourages people to obey the will of the Father with their hearts and to “accomplish His work” in their lives (Jn. 4:34). Prayer therefore becomes our actual life itself.

Fourthly, liturgy is our public and communal prayer through the time and space created by God. The spiritual cultivation of Christians in prayer is not an individual, mystical, and meditative experience, but rather a communal act performed in the Church. The Christian tradition holds that time and space, as created beings, are instruments for transmitting the invisible grace of God's sanctification to the created world. As the “high priest” in the celebration of the Church, Christ is in, among, and with the faith community that prays to the heavenly Father. The Church realizes the common prayer of its faith community by celebrating salvation in liturgical space and time. By participating in liturgical activities, we participate in the prayer of Christ through the Holy Spirit to the Father, so that everyone's prayer may, in the Spirit, be accepted by the Father through Christ. Liturgy is the prototype of prayer, containing similar basic elements such as entering the inner chamber to gather up our hearts, recollecting our being in crying to the Holy Spirit, being awakened to meeting the Lord who awaits us, and presenting our whole beings into His embrace to be purified and empowered. When Christians join together their prayer in the communal liturgy, the altar becomes

their heart and their heart becomes the altar. In uniting in prayer together in a public liturgical space, the members of the congregation transcend their limitations as individuals, become immersed in the love of God, and devote themselves to prayer, thus realizing human love for God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

3. WHAT IS THE LORD'S PRAYER?

The Protestant tradition refers to the prayer that Jesus teaches His disciples as “the Lord’s Prayer” (*zhu dao wen*, 主祷文). The Lord’s Prayer is known as the *Oratio Dominica* in the Latin tradition and is translated by the Roman Catholic Church in Chinese as the “The Canonical Saying of Heavenly Lord” (*tian zhu jing*, 天主经).⁷ It is found in Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4. The Church traditionally adopts the version recorded in Matthew.

The biblical authors highlighted the importance of the Lord’s Prayer through its design and structure. In Matthew, the Lord’s Prayer is placed at the core of “the Sermon on the Mount” (in chapters 5–7) in accordance with the chiasmic structure of Jewish literary tradition, emphasizing prayer as the source and center of new life. In Luke, after teaching the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus illustrates the truth that “every one who asks receives” (Lk. 11:10) with several stories, showing that the Lord’s Prayer serves as the foundation on which prayers are answered by God.

7 Merely translating the term “God” in a Chinese cultural context is itself an intercultural theological enterprise, especially since the available terms “Lord on High” (*shang di*, 上帝) and “Deity” (*shen*, 神), which are used interchangeably by Chinese Protestant churches, and “Heavenly Lord” (*tian zhu*, 天主) which is used by the Catholic Church, possess many complex layers of religious and cultural meaning in antecedent Chinese scriptures. The cultural and religious boundary between the Protestant and Catholic churches can be seen clearly in the different names of God they use. See Archie Chi Chang Lee, “The Names of God and Bible Translation: Engaging the Chinese Term Question in the Context of Scriptural Interpretation,” *JTCA: The Journal of Theologies and Cultures in Asia* 5 (2006), 1–17.

There are three meanings of the Lord's Prayer. Firstly, it is a prayer spoken by the Lord Jesus himself as the Son who prays to the Father. Secondly, when reading or reciting the Lord's Prayer, we pray in the Lord Jesus, since it is through the sonship of Jesus that we are called and accepted as children of God. Thirdly, the Lord's Prayer is a prayer uttered from Jesus' human heart that shows compassion for our needs. Jesus, as the Lord of Life, asks us to pray with all our heart. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are praying to Jesus, praying in Jesus, and praying as Jesus—in imitation of His prayer and life. To pray the Lord's Prayer is to confess that Jesus is the Lord, the Way, and the Teacher.

The Lord's Prayer is therefore the most familiar text for Christians, the prayer that nearly every believer can recite by heart. In the early Church, believers prayed the Lord's Prayer three times a day.⁸ Today, congregations read and recite the Lord's prayer in worship every day. In baptism, granting the Lord's Prayer to the newly baptized means that the recipient gains a new identity as a child of God, born anew "through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). In the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer is usually read in between the thanksgiving and receiving of Holy Communion, showing that the Lord's Prayer plays a pivotal role in our liturgical praying and receiving. In personal prayer, the Lord's Prayer is recited to lead believers into prayer or to conclude prayer. According to the monastic tradition of the Church, Christian monks or nuns need to recite the Lord's Prayer seven times in the Liturgy of the Hours. In the Rosary of the Roman Catholic Church, the Lord's Prayer is also repeated many times.

According to the tradition in Luke, the Lord's Prayer is taught by Jesus to His disciples at their request. "Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'" (Lk. 11:1). This shows that

8 "Didache," in *The Apostolic Fathers: The Loeb Classical Library* 24, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 429–431.

when Christ was born a man and led people on the path of salvation by His words and life, He also passed on to His disciples the model of dialogue with the Holy Father. Praying the Lord's Prayer enables us to be disciples of Jesus and to be united in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

The Lord's Prayer is the summary of the entire gospel and the perfect prayer to describe new life in Christ. As Augustine once said, "if you go over all the words of holy prayers, you will, I believe, find nothing which cannot be comprised and summed up in the petitions of the Lord's Prayer."⁹ The Lord's Prayer is therefore a prayer for pursuing a full life, taking Jesus Christ Himself as the center and foundation of our dialogue with God.,

The Lord's Prayer simply and clearly describes the state of our new life. It enables us to be the children of God, glorifying "Our Father in heaven" and praying to Him as His children. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God in eternal communion with the Heavenly Father, is the foundation of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus Christ lives in us so that we can pray to the Father, granting us the divine mission of our life: to hallow the name of God, to assist in the coming of the heavenly kingdom, and to do God's will on earth. It satisfies the needs of our earthly life, covering the needs of both worldly and spiritual life, encouraging us, as created beings and sinners, to ask God for that which is proper and reasonable. To pray the Lord's Prayer therefore expresses the trust, admiration, and closeness of children to their Father.

9 Chap. 12, in "Letter 130" (412 CE), in "Letters of St. Augustine," trans. J.G. Cunningham, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 1004.

4. LIFE CULTIVATION UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

For the English word “prayer,” the corresponding Chinese characters are *qi* and *dao* (祈祷, pray). Both characters consist of the same component—*shi* (示 / 示), meaning divinity—indicating that human “prayer” must be related to divine beings. The first character of prayer—*qi* (祈)—is composed of the components *shi* (示 / 示) and *jing* (斤, metal ax), implying that the divine helps us cut through the strife and stress of our life, as if with metal blades. The second character of prayer—*dao* (祷)—is composed of *shi* (示 / 示) and *shou* (寿, longevity), the latter of which symbolizes “long-term,” suggesting a long-term, close relationship with the divine being. Thus, Chinese wisdom resounds with the Christian faith, encouraging us to enjoy the cultivation of life through prayer, as *qidao* (prayer) itself cries to God to be with us and to help us with the predicaments and problems of our lives.

We enter into a closer dialogue and relationship with God when we enter into prayer. Prayer is more than just a petition for things (*qiu shi*, 求事); it is a real cultivation and transformation of our hearts (*xiu xin*, 修心). Prayer brings everything in our lives into relationship with God; it is therefore not just words or sentences and far more than what we ask for in prayer. Prayer is both a wish of ours and a gift from God, as prayer is initiated by the Holy Spirit, who sows the seeds of the Kingdom of Heaven into us when we enter into His presence to purify and transform our hearts. As a result, human lives and temperaments will be gradually transformed towards the heart of Jesus Christ and live a life of union with Christ. Transformed by prayer, our hearts enter a new spiritual depth and height, by means of which the Holy Spirit brings about a transformation of all of creation.

Understood interculturally from a Chinese cultural context, spiritual formation through prayer is a process of life cultivation under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit and in imitation of Jesus Christ. Christian prayer-centered spirituality can therefore be called Christian heart-mind learning (*xinxingxue*, 心性学).¹⁰ Its goal is “letting the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, NRSV), a learning (*xue*, 学) that is integrated with exercise (*xi*, 习).

According to the traditional structure of Chinese *xinxingxue* (heart-mind learning), we may also investigate the spiritual and moral dimensions of Christian prayer-centered spirituality, which is a communion of the human heart with the Triune God in prayer. In Chinese culture, prayer can be said to be the communication between the “spirit of the cosmos” (*tian di jing shen*, 天地精神) and human beings living within the cosmos.¹¹ When we enter prayer, the Holy Spirit, who moves around in creation, comes to commune with us. While the Holy Spirit speaks to us, we too speak to Him, and our hearts enter into communion with the Triune God. Morally, prayer cultivates our entire being, as our heart governs, combines, and communicates with both our mind, or rationality, and our emotions (*xin tong xing qing*, 心统性情). Prayer helps Christians nurture their heart, mind, and emotions, beginning their new life. The heart, in communion with the Triune God in prayer, is the source of virtuous human life. As the most exemplary prayer in the entire Bible, the

10 As Jana Rošker nicely captured, “in classical Chinese philosophy the meaning of the Chinese word *xin* 心, which literally refers to the physical heart, is not limited to its common connotations. Unlike Western definitions, the Chinese metaphorical understanding of this notion not only denotes this organ as the center of emotions, but also as the center of perception, understanding, intuition and even rational thought. As ancient Chinese believed that the heart was the center of human cognition, the notion of *xin* is most commonly translated as ‘heart-mind’ in philosophical discourses. This understanding was determined by the absence of the contrast between cognitive (representative ideas, reasoning, beliefs) and affective (sensation, feelings, desires, emotions) states.” Also note that the word *xin* is often combined with *xing* 性, nature (both metaphysical and human), which is located in the heart. Thus, the cultivation of life seeks the union of *xin* (heart) and *xing* (nature), the discourse and practice of which is called “*xinxingxue*” (learning of heart and human nature). See, the entry “Epistemology in Chinese Philosophy” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/chinese-epistemology/>.

11 This idiom comes from the spiritual understanding of Zhuang Zi (庄子), who “chiefly cared to occupy himself with the spirit-like operation of heaven and earth, and did not try to rise above the myriads of things” (*du yu tian di jing shen xiang wang lai er bu ao ni yu wan wu*, 独与天地精神往来，而不傲倪于万物); see James Legge, “Thien Hsiâ” (*tian xia*, 天下), *Texts of Taoism: Chuang Tzu*, bk. XXXIII, pt. III, sect. XI, <https://ratmachines.com/philosophy/chuang-tzu-legge/chapter-33>.

Lord's Prayer encompasses the spiritual and moral lives of humans, including communion between humans and God, the divine mission given to humans by God, and the life formation and living needs of humans in the world. The Lord's Prayer can therefore be considered a guideline for Christian heart-mind learning.

In the Jewish tradition, when one prays, one takes three steps back, then three steps forward. The steps backward at the beginning symbolize withdrawing one's attention from the material world, after which one steps forward to approach the King of Kings to ask for petitions. Although such action is not part of the Christian faith, the first line of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father in heaven," requires that when we pray, we place our whole being in heaven and come to the Father as sons and daughters. In terms of space, the Lord's Prayer is a "knock" at the door of heaven. In terms of time, the Lord's Prayer is our prayer at the "end time" for the passion and resurrection of Jesus to bring an end to this world. All our prayers begin with and are based on the "once and for all" salvation that Jesus has already achieved on the cross, and they also point to the new heaven and new earth that will come. In this way, the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer reflect both our sighs and patience in the present world, expressing our strong expectation that the Son of Man, who sits at the right hand of God, will open the gate at His New Jerusalem in response to our constant "knocking" (Lk. 11:9–10).

To see from this Chinese cultural perspective, the Lord's Prayer serves as a guideline for us to practice heart-mind learning and life cultivation. It answers two key questions: Who is God? Who should we be? Through the Lord's Prayer, God shapes our hearts so that our prayer becomes the "leaven" to transform the world (Mt. 13:33).

Every phrase of the Lord's Prayer has a profound meaning. Its first phrase is "Our Father in Heaven." This cry lifts up our hearts to heaven. In speaking it, our hearts no longer remain in this world but rather are lifted up to heaven, making it possible for us to enter the heavenly realm of serving the Father in heaven and rejoicing in the

eternal blessing in heaven (*shi tain le tian*, 事天乐天).¹² The Lord's Prayer reminds us that we are all God's children, praying together with Jesus Christ.

The order of the seven supplications of the Lord's Prayer also sorts out our order of values. The seven supplications of the Lord's Prayer can be divided into two categories. The first three are for us to fulfill His divine will, which is why they are called the "three wishes" (*yuan*, 愿), and the last four are concerned with our requests for satisfying our needs in this world, which is why they are called the "four requests." Together these supplications are the "three wishes and four requests" (*san yuan si qiu*, 三愿四求). The first three wishes—"hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"—show us the kind of value and life in which God delights. They are the three most important guiding principles of our life. Following them are the four requests: "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." These four petitions cover things needed for one's life in this world. We entrust to God our physical and mental needs, our life journey as pilgrimage, even our life and death through these petitions. Thus, praying the Lord's Prayer enables us to understand what proper prayer is, how the needs of our lives should be integrated with God's will, and how our values should be ordered and our emotions cleansed. When these wishes and petitions are extended to apply to our neighbors, they also become matters of benevolence and justice upon which a good society is established.

In summary, the Lord's Prayer properly sets out the order of life: What God wishes us to do, what is acceptable to God, and how we should behave with regards to our neighbors. It cultivates our life in

12 According to Feng Youlan, there are four types of human spiritual union with heaven: knowing heaven (*zhi tian*, 知天), serving heaven (*shi tian*, 事天), rejoicing in heaven (*le tian*, 乐天), and unifying with heaven (*tong tian*, 同天); see, Feng Youlan, *On Human Being (xin yuan ren, 新原人)* (Chongqing: Commercial Press, 1943), 292; reprinted in *Complete Works of San Song Tang* (Feng Youlan) (*san song tang quan ji*, 三松堂全集), vol. 4 (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 2000), 565.

Christ as it tells us what we should pray for and how we should order our petitions, revealing to us the guiding principles of our lives. As the marker of the spiritual identity for Christians, the Lord's Prayer is a "knock" on the door of heaven and the guideline for a Christian's cultivation of life. We pray with the Lord's Prayer in Jesus Christ so we can clarify our life values, purify our heart, renew our mind, and change our temperament. Inwardly, the Lord's Prayer makes our desires reasonable; outwardly, it helps us place our lives in the hands of our loving God, truly realizing that "we live in Christ and Christ lives in us."

5. AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE CHINESE CATECHISM OF PRAYING

As the term shows, Christian heart-mind learning (*xinxingxue*, 心性学) is both a discipline of understanding and a practice of life-cultivation. With a deeper understanding of Christian prayer, we are able to practice it more fervently. In the Chinese context, Christian prayer should be analyzed in a reasonable and intercultural manner, so that Chinese Christians will be encouraged to love and enjoy prayer more.

Accordingly, to provide a comprehensive, in-depth, and structurally balanced interpretation about the life of prayer, this Chinese catechism will be divided into two parts: the first half (parts II–V) discusses prayer from the perspective of the principles of Christian prayer, while the second half (part VI) contains a detailed interpretation of the Lord's Prayer. They complement and enrich each other. On the one hand, a more accurate mastery of the principles of prayer will yield a better understanding of the content of the Lord's Prayer. On the other hand, a deeper understanding of the structure and words of the Lord's Prayer will lead to a more profound understanding of the general principles of prayer, thereby

encouraging people to pray more eagerly and appropriately.

Part II offers a general framework about the principles of Christian prayer. Part III looks at prayer through the history of salvation in the Bible, in which God-human conversations are like dramatic reenactments of different kinds of prayers, revealing all the aspects of the God-human relationship, thereby serving as the model of prayer for different people at different times. The prayer made by Jesus, the Son of Man, combines all the prayers of God's people, constituting both the apex and fulfillment of all the prayers of human history. Part IV then classifies prayer according to the Christian faith tradition, helping readers gain familiarity with the different types of prayer to develop a comprehensive understanding of these prayers in their life practices. In Part V, I place prayer within the overall framework of Christianity and analyze the intrinsic relationship between prayer and the other elements of our faith lives (such as scripture reading, theological reasoning, ethical living, and liturgical celebration). In so doing, we gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between prayer and our life-growth in Christ and Church, with the Christian life-attitude based on faith, hope, and love.

Part VI focuses on the analysis of the Lord's Prayer, which can be described as the general principle of Christian life-cultivation. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we experience a process of lifting and purifying our hearts. In this part, I explain the nine verses of Lord's Prayer, beginning with the call "Our Father in heaven" and ending with "*Gloria*" to the heavenly Lord, the two of which echo one another. Seven petitions are sandwiched in between, as if held by two heavenly hands. These seven petitions—the "three wishes and four requests"—not only glorify God, nourishing our heart-mind in communion with Him, but also urge us to enact these prayers through a virtuous life. To pray the Lord's Prayer and to cultivate our life in accordance with it is to strengthen our union with the Triune God, placing us within the historical framework of God's salvation, integrating our

remembrance of the past and our hope for the future into an ever-present “now.” Through this and all other prayers, we also remain in close connection with the universal Church and all of creation.

By analyzing the Lord's Prayer in a catechetical manner through a Chinese cultural context, may we always remember this: Prayer is a heart-mind learning and exercise for Christians! The Lord's Prayer builds up Christian heavenly identity, pointing out the proper order of values and entrusting our earthly life to the loving Father. It is truly the guideline, summary, and keynote of the cultivation of life for Chinese Christians.

Lord's Prayer

New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of temptation,
But rescue us from the evil one.
For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever.
Amen

Chinese Union Version (和合本)

(The revised phrases of 2006 are in the brackets)

我们在天上的父。

愿人都尊祢的名为圣。

愿祢的国降临。

愿祢的旨意行在地上，如同行在天上。

我们日用的饮食，今日赐给我们。

免我们的债，如同我们免了人的债。

不叫我们遇见（陷入）试探。

救我们脱离凶恶（那恶者）。

因为国度、权柄、荣耀，全是祢的，直到永远！

阿们！

Part II



Prayer: God Desires Our Desires for Him



1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is the encounter and dialogue between the triune God and humans. In prayer, the triune God invites us to live in His presence so our hearts may commune with Him and partake in His life and eternal blessings. In prayer, our hearts are lifted upwards to trust, obey, and respond to God's plan of love. We ask for appropriate blessings, through which we co-work with Him in His management of the world. We pray in the Church, where the Holy Spirit works, by imitating Jesus Christ, the Holy Son, thereby building a close and active relationship with the almighty Holy Father. Through this relationship built in prayer, our proclamation of faith flows forth in words and our celebration of faith is expressed in our worship and lives.

2. WHY IS PRAYER CHARACTERIZED AS “GOD DESIRES US TO DESIRE HIM”?

Prayer is a gift endowed to us by God, the heavenly Father. Although it is our action, it is even more God's action. Although seemingly emerging from us, prayer is in fact inspired by God, the Holy Spirit. Prayer is our encounter and dialogue with Christ. While we pray to Christ, He is already with us to meet us (John 4:7–14). The reason that God seeks us is because He first yearns for us. Our prayer, therefore, is the encounter of His desire with ours, as God desires us to desire Him.

3. HOW DOES GOD, THE CREATOR, CALL US TO PRAY?

God created the world by His words. Just as the world was called out by God, so heaven and earth tell of His glory in speechless words (Ps. 19:1–4). God's Word became flesh, calling us to listen to and trust in Christ, and the Holy Spirit was sent to inspire and guide us to call on Him (Rom. 8:26). The breadth of our prayers is the breadth of our world.

4. WHY IS JESUS CHRIST THE FOUNDATION OF OUR PRAYER?

The foundation of our prayers lies in God's action in history, with its climax in the birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, who, as the Holy Son, eternally interacts with

the Holy Father in love, and who, being flesh, fully embodied both divinity and humanity. When He was about to be crucified, Jesus prayed as a high priest (John 17). He is indeed the high priest of God, who prays for us, prays in us, and listens to our prayers. Jesus, as high priest, united the divine economy of creation and salvation. In Him, all are reconciled, including God and world, Word and flesh, eternity and time, death and resurrection, His apostles and us, the disciples of later generations. He is the lamb of sacrifice, master of everything, the consummation of the God-human dialogue, and the foundation of all prayer. He gave us the “knowledge” of the indwelling and the intimacy of the triune God (Jer. 24:7; John 17:3, 23), which is the most profound mystery of prayer.

5. WHY IS THE HOLY SPIRIT THE FOUNTAIN OF OUR PRAYERS?

The Holy Spirit is the Lord of life. “And no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). The life communication between God and humans in prayer is empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is the fountain of prayers. “We do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). We can pray to Jesus because the Holy Spirit first gives us grace by guiding us on the way of prayer so that we can let the boat of our life be “put out into the deep water” (Luke 5:4). It is the same Spirit that prays within the people and with the people. The Holy Spirit enables the prayer in our inmost hearts to become the communication between God and Himself.

6. WHERE DO WE MAKE OUR PRAYERS?

It is always our entire being that prays. Humans were created in God's image, which applies to the entire body and soul. Our hearts are syntheses of body and soul, combinations of emotion and reason (*xin tong xing qing*, 心统性情).¹ Our heart governs our temperaments and is the subject of prayer. The heart is the depth of our being and the hidden core of our existence, often transcending our reason and remaining beyond the reach of others. But since "deep calls to deep" (Ps. 42:7), the Spirit of God can recognize and measure our heart. The heart is the place where God encounters humans, where decisions are made, and where we choose to live or die. In our hearts, we form an eternal covenant of life with the Holy Triune God. In prayer, we receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit to imitate Christ. As a result, our natures are cleansed, our heart-minds are renewed, and our characters are transformed (*xin yi geng xin qi zhi bian hua*, 心意更新气质变化).²

1 This is the central motto of Neo-Confucianism. For the most significant neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi, the heart-mind (*xin*, 心) is not just cognitive but also the existential being of a human. The heart-mind governs and structures the inner patterning (*xing*, 性), predisposing us to have characteristically human emotions (*qing*, 情) through protracted spiritual and moral exercises under various sets of conditions. This cultural understanding implies that the whole person is transformed through the praying relationship between God and humans. For an explanation of these three central terms in Zhu Xi, see Kirill Thompson, "Zhu Xi," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/zhu-xi/>.

2 The biblical passage "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2) corresponds to the "character change" (*qi zhi bian hua*, 气质变化) in the heart-mind school of Neo-Confucianism. According to Zhu Xi, the purpose of spiritual practices such as scripture reading is to cultivate a renewed personality. He said: "if you can understand the principles inside the scripture, you will be changed spontaneously." See Zhu Xi, *Conversations of Master Zhu* (朱子语类), ed. Li Jingde (黎靖德) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books [(中华书局)], 1986), bk. VII, vol. 120, p. 2889.

7. WHY IS PRAYER ALWAYS WITHIN THE CHURCH?

All our prayers participate in the prayers of Christ to God the Father in the Holy Spirit. Church is a community where all of creation communes with the Holy Triune God, where Christ is always the High Priest, leading all of creation to sing the heavenly songs of praise. The Church is the body of Christ, and Christ the head of the Church. Within the Church, we, as parts of the body, join in Christ's prayers offered to God the Father. The Church is the bride of Christ. Our prayers in the Church are therefore like words that the bride pours out to her groom. The Church is a palace where the Holy Spirit dwells. In the Church, a universal fellowship of the visible and the invisible commune with each other, and the Holy Spirit prays for us and all of creation with His "sighs" (Rom. 8:26).

8. HOW DOES ALL OF CREATION JOIN US IN OUR PRAYERS?

God called everything out of nothingness by His Word (Gen. 1), and the heavens, the skies, and all things tell the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). They pray with "no speech and no words"; and "their voice is not heard" (Ps. 19:3). Thus, we can learn from all of creation how to pray in silence and deed. Creation, however, was subjected to futility in hopes it would be set free from bondage to decay, and all of creation has been groaning in labor pains up until now (Rom. 8:20–22). Thus, we should also pray for all of creation. When the Word became flesh, Christ became part of creation to transform and sanctify all of it. By the glorious resurrection of His body, the light of Christ penetrates all of creation. When the Spirit intercedes for

us with sighs too deep for words, we are united together with all things in heaven and earth in the Holy Spirit. As priests of the entire universe, we invite, lead, and accompany all of creation to make prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Part III



Prayer in the History of Salvation



9. HOW DOES PRAYER REVERBERATE IN HISTORY?

After humans sinned and departed from God, God repeatedly entered into human history, tirelessly calling people to encounter Him through His words. Prayer is humanity's response to this call of God. Prayer, therefore, is not a "monologue" but rather a mutual calling between God and humans. This God-human dialogue reverberates throughout all of human history, as the Scriptures attest in a special way.

10. HOW DID GOD CALL HUMANS TO PRAY?

Inited by God's call "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), humans entered into a praying relationship with Him. Through God's call, humans realize who they are and where they go. In conversation with God, humans leave behind their fear and hiding place (Gen. 3:10). Through prayer, a sacrifice of fruits, and a call on the Lord's name (Gen. 4:3–4; 4:26), humans open themselves to, and establish an intimate relationship with the Heavenly God.¹ Favored by God because of his righteousness, Noah was called to establish a universal covenant of peace between God and all living things after his prayer of sacrifice (Gen. 8:20–9:17). Prayer to the Creator God and hope for a Savior are universal motifs among all human cultures.

11. HOW DID ABRAHAM PRAY TO GOD?

With regards to prayer, those ancient saints and sages in salvation history served as models for us. Abraham epitomizes the prayers of the Old Testament, his life illuminated by his dialogue with God. Having heard God's call, Abraham did "as the Lord had told him" (Gen. 12:4). Concentrating on this inner call, Abraham demonstrated obedience through his courageous actions, fervently interceding for the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah

¹ In Chinese culture, the transcendent being was named Heaven (*tian*, 天). Thus in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Christian God was named "Lord of the Heaven." Praying to and worshiping Heaven became dominate in the religion and philosophy of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE). With canonization of Zhou documents, the idea of Heaven became foundational for all of Chinese culture. According to Xu Shen (许慎, 58–147), the first editor of a Chinese dictionary, "Tian is composed of One [一] and Great [大], meaning the most high with nothing above [至高无上]"; see *Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters* (*shuo wen jie zi*, 说文解字), bk. I, vol. I (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2018), 2.

and responding to God's call to sacrifice his only son Isaac, both with his affirmative words "Here I am" and with his obedient actions. Thus, he demonstrated the essence of prayer: continual denial of oneself (*ke ji*, 克己) to gain one's true self (*cheng ji*, 成己) through obedience to God,² becoming a "friend of God" (Jas. 2:23) to partake in His life and blessings.

12. WHAT IS THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC OF ISAAC'S PRAYER?

Isaac's prayer was his obedience to the will of his father, Abraham, in silence and speechlessness. Isaac willingly sacrificed himself by being "bound" in silence and lying "on the altar, upon the wood" (Gen. 22:9). This prayer of offering his life as a sacrifice prefigured Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, the tree of life.³

13. WHAT IS THE RICH IMPLICATION OF JACOB'S PRAYER?

God called Jacob at Bethel, appearing to him with the angels of heaven as Jacob fled from his pursuer, displaced from his hometown. Jacob responded to God, who appeared to him with amazement and awe, saying "This is none other than the house

2 In his spiritual advice to his disciples, Wang Yangming (1472–1529) claimed that "the true self could be fully realized, only after humans denied their self" (*neng ke ji fang neng cheng ji*, 能克己方能成己); see Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), 79.

3 Justin Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 646; St. Ephraim, "The Pearl: Seven Hymns on the Faith," hymn IV, verse 1, trans. J. B. Morris, in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, series II, vol. 13, 519.

of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17). This passage makes it clear that wherever God talks to humans, the temple of God, the gate of heaven, and the center of the universe is present. In prayer, the Holy Spirit is present with humans in invisible ways (Gen. 28:15), transforming and shaping everyone who prays in order to make them holy, righteous, and good. In his response to God, Jacob promised to offer “one-tenth” of what God had given him as a sacrifice of thanksgiving (Gen. 28:22). Jacob’s wrestling at the ford of Jabbok, through which he was to enter into the Promised Land, symbolizes the nature of prayer: life is a battle that can only be won by perseverance and patience.

14. HOW DID JOSEPH PRAY TO GOD WITH HIS WHOLE LIFE?

Through a life of ups and downs, Joseph calmly accepted God’s plan for all things, courageously transcending his fate with wisdom and forgiving others by trusting in God. Joseph himself summarized his life in this way: “Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today” (Gen. 50:19–20, NRSV). This indicates that God can fulfill His eternal plan through complex human history and multifaceted lives. Our life is a prayer that we entrust to the merciful Lord.

15. WHAT DID MOSES’ PRAYER REVEAL?

Moses’ prayer was twofold, both personal, on behalf of himself, and communal, on behalf of all of Israel. God called Moses in the burning bush, transforming him by calling him to participate in

God's work of salvation (Exod. 3). In this call, God revealed Himself to Moses, encouraging him, after which Moses eventually submitted to the will of God, accepting the new life that God had initiated for him. While Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness, God spoke to him "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exod. 33:11). This shows that only when one looks upwards to encounter and talk with God can one be faithful to the mission God has called him to fulfill and have the strength to do it. Moses interceded for Israel before God, especially after Israel committed the great sin of betraying the faith (Exod. 32), which foreshadowed the intercession for sinners by Jesus and his Church.

16. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRAYERS OF DAVID AND SOLOMON?

David and Solomon were representatives of the kings of Israel, shepherds who prayed for and on behalf of their people. For David, the Lord God was his only king and lord, in whom he had full trust. David exemplifies the "holy king," as manifested by his courageous confession and repentance, his praise of the Lord's creation and salvation throughout his life, and his hope for and prophecy of the Messiah's coming (Ps. 110). Solomon prayed to the Lord for wisdom to govern his people. In his prayer for the dedication of the Temple, he recalled the Lord's salvation, looking forward to His promises, praising Him for His mighty name, and asking Him for his daily needs and forgiveness of sins. Solomon prayed for himself, for all his people, for descendants to come, and for all people from all the nations on earth.

17. HOW DID THE PROPHETS PRAY TO GOD?

The prophets were “intercessors” between God and humans. Their prayers were characterized by their unique personality. They talked with God face-to-face, drawing strength from their prayers to call people to return to God, teaching them to trust in God. The prophets prayed to God for the needs of the Israelites. The height of the prophets’ prayers was Elijah’s prayer on Mount Carmel, where he cried to God, “Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (1 Kgs. 18:37). The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to call the people to honor God’s name sincerely and to respond to His mercy in repentance. The cry “Answer me, O Lord, answer me” reflects the eagerness of the prophets’ prayers and their faithful trust in God.

18. WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE HOLY TEMPLE IN THE PRAYER OF THE ISRAELITES?

The Holy Temple, which contained the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle, was the visible sign of the name of the Lord on earth, the place where His people were called to pray (1 Kgs. 8:29), and the house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7). When people prayed in the Temple, God, whose dwelling place was in heaven, heard their prayers and forgave their sins (1 Kgs. 8:30). The Temple was an educational place where people learned and practiced how to pray and were taught how to come to God in reverence, to lift up their hands to heaven, to offer sacrifices, to celebrate festivals, and to pray in the morning, afternoon, and evening (Dan. 6:10). The Temple was the body of Christ, the prefiguration of the Church.

19. HOW DO WE PRAY WITH THE PSALMS?

Psalms is a collection of prayers of God's people. It is both the words of God and the cries of humans. It is a collection of Temple songs, the works of a scattered people, the hymns on behalf of all of creation. The *Psalms* praise God's creation, extol His salvation in history, meditate on the wisdom of the world and life, pour forth the weaknesses and sorrows of life, and ask for God's comfort and guidance. Simply and naturally, the *Psalms* express life experiences comprehensively and profoundly. They express what we think, and they help us discover, discern, purify, and improve our prayers. Christ prayed with the *Psalms*, which were completed in Him. With the light of Christ, the meaning of the *Psalms* was purified and renewed. People from all situations and generations should learn to pray from the *Psalms*, which are both personal and ecclesiastical. The *Psalms* echo human desire for God, expressing praise from the hearts of humans through their mouths. It is the voice of God's people, professing their oath of faith in God, speaking for all before the Almighty Creator.

20. WHAT DID MARY'S PRAYER REVEAL?

Mary answered the angel, "let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). This clearly shows that prayer is essentially humanity's free submission to God's love. If we, just like Mary, can say "let it be to me according to your word," then God can live in our lives. We will belong entirely to God in full submission to Him, for God will belong completely to us. In the *Magnificat*, Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"

(Luke 1:46–47). This clearly shows that our spiritual communion with the Lord of life in prayer is our joy. Our souls and spirits are purified and enriched in prayer. When we surrender freely in faith to God's will, such prayer endows us with the heavenly joy.

21. HOW DID JESUS PRAY?

Born as a particular person in a particular culture, Jesus learned the wisdom of prayer from the Israelite faith-tradition, in which the times, rhythms, places, and ways of His prayers were deeply rooted. Jesus, the only Son of God, became a human who cried to God, "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). His Sonship made His heart a hidden spring of prayer to the Father. He prayed for the coming of the kingdom of heaven while He Himself was the beginning and foundation of it. Through and in Him, we cry out to the almighty Lord as God's children, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6).

22. WHEN DID JESUS PRAY?

Jesus, the Holy Son, the Word that became flesh, is always in loving fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, praying without ceasing. His prayer is always accompanied with the action of the Holy Spirit. He prayed at every significant moment as He worked out the mission of salvation on earth in accordance with the Father's will. Jesus prayed when He was baptized publicly and received His mission (Luke 3:21), when He chose His disciples and began to establish His Church (Luke 6:12), when He was transfigured on the mountain to foretell the glory of His resurrection (Luke 9:28), and when He carried out the plan of the Father's salvation through His suffering (Luke 22:41). Jesus prayed for everything, often alone

in deserted places (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). His timeless prayer to the Father in the “inner chamber” of His heart were manifested externally through His words and deeds.

23. WHAT IS JESUS’ TEACHING ABOUT HOW TO PRAY?

Jesus is the Son of God who fulfills our prayers and the master who teaches us how to pray. The fundamental principle of His prayer is His union with the Father in the Holy Spirit and His obedience to the Father’s will. He taught us that when we prayed we should pray with our “heart” (Matthew 6:6), that we should get past our feelings and reasons with a faith that never doubts (Mark 11:24; Matt. 21:22), and that we should pray with the watchful heart of a pilgrim, remembering what He accomplished and hoping for His return so as to avoid the time of trial or temptation (Matt. 26:41) and to know that dedicated practice fulfills prayer (Matt. 7:21).

24. WHAT SYMBOLS DID JESUS USE TO TALK ABOUT PRAYER?

Jesus used many symbols from life to talk about prayer. To pray is to “knock” and to “seek,” with Jesus Himself as the “door” (Matt. 7:7–11). Jesus is the Way to the Father (John 14:6), as well as the one who reveals and completes that Way. The person who prays should be like the friend who keeps asking persistently, praying earnestly and directly (Luke 11:5–13), like the widow who patiently and without ceasing appeals day and night (Luke 18:1–8), like the tax collector who humbles himself, praying with a submissive and repentant heart (Luke 18:13–14). The purpose of prayer is to achieve

constant inner repentance, more fervent conversion, intimate dialogue with the Father, and the practice of God's will with a watchful heart.

25. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' PRAYER ON THE CROSS?

Jesus died on the cross, carrying with Him the suffering of Israel and all people: "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb. 5:8–9). Jesus prayed on the cross, committing Himself to the Father and to those people the Father had given Him in love and obedience (John 17). As the Father answered His prayer, the project of creation and salvation was "finished" by the Son, who died on the cross (John 19:30). All our petitions were fulfilled by Jesus' prayer with the Father on the cross.

26. WHAT IS THE "JESUS PRAYER"?

In the Christian faith-tradition, several short but fundamental prayers from the Gospels were combined together: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:13). Together it is called "The Jesus Prayer." Expressing our love to Jesus, this prayer encourages and sanctifies our actions. "Mercy" represents "love"; by appealing to Jesus Christ, it is expected that His love might bridge the abyss between a righteous God and fallen humans. Although this prayer expresses our helplessness, it is also a cry of hope. It reveals our sinful condition so that we might confront our true self, while also expressing the hope that "every day

is new” (*ri ri xin*, 日日新)⁴ by calling on God’s forgiveness of sins. The Jesus Prayer convinces us that, although we are still sinners, God, full of glory, still accepts, renews, and exalts us out of His love of grace.

27. HOW ARE OUR PRAYERS COMBINED WITH JESUS’ PRAYERS?

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, joining with the prayers of the Son of God. “It is one Savior of His Body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who both prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us, as our Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God. Let us therefore recognize in Him our words, and His words in us.”⁵ Through, in, and to Christ, we pray. With Christ Jesus’ heart as our own (Phil. 2:5), by listening to His Gospel and commandments, we call “Abba Father” with Him and receive the love of the heavenly Father through Him. Only on the foundation of Jesus’ prayer will our prayers to the Father be appropriate and fulfilled (John 14:13–14).

4 The Confucian ideal of life is to renew oneself in daily spiritual and moral practices. This is summarized as follows in the third chapter of the *Great Learning*, a Confucian classic that has exerted a profound influence on Chinese culture: “if you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation” (*gou ri xin ri ri xin you ri xin*, 苟日新, 日日新, 又日新). See James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of The Mean* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991 [1893]), 361.

5 Augustine, “Exposition on Psalm 86,” in *Expositions on the Psalms*, trans. J.E. Tweed, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), para. 1, p. 816.

28. HOW DID THE CHURCH PRAY DURING THE APOSTOLIC PERIOD?

After the Ascension of Jesus, the disciples continually devoted themselves to prayer, waiting for the descending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). After Pentecost, the disciples “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). This shows that the early Church had integrated prayer into their overall faith-life. From the very beginning of the Church, prayer has been rooted in the truth taught by Lord Jesus to His apostles, accomplished in loving fellowship, and nourished in the sacraments, as centered around the Holy Eucharist. The apostolic tradition makes it known to us that prayer fosters our intimate relationship with God, within which we believe, live, and celebrate.

Part IV



The Forms of Prayer



29. WHAT ARE THE EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER?

Each human is willed by God. There is a unique and mysterious relationship between each human and God the Lord. The Lord guides each person to pray by His will, while each person answers the Lord's calling with their tongue, mind, heart, and might. Although the faith tradition divides the basic expressions of prayer into vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplation, these expressions intertwine in a complete living being who is responsive to God. Through these forms of prayer, we integrate our entire being, focus on God's words, and set our heart-minds on God's presence in communion with Him.

30. WHAT IS VOCAL PRAYER?

God created the world and called us by His words. Our desire to communicate with Him is embodied in the meditations of our hearts and the words from our mouths. “Words are the sound of our hearts” (*yan xin sheng ye*, 言心声也).¹ Vocal prayer is the external expression of our hearts and the basic form of our faith life. “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise” (Ps. 51:15). Integrating the subtlest part of our bodies with our inner hearts, we are enabled to pray with our entire being in vocal prayer, making supplications to God with all our strength. Vocal prayer helps the Church to pray with one voice and one mind, with all believers “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:23–32). Even the inmost prayer cannot neglect vocal expression, whether in the form of speaking or writing. The Lord’s Prayer taught by Jesus is the model of vocal prayer both for individual believers and for the public worship of the Church.

31. WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation is a kind of prayer of discernment and exploration undertaken by our heart-mind. To respond to the Lord’s call, to better understand “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10), and to comprehend the purpose and meaning of life, we use our discerning hearts through cognition, thinking, imagination, emotion, and desire, so that “knowledge might motivate action while action might accomplish knowledge.”² There are a multitude of meditative means:

1 Yang Xiong (杨雄, 53 BCE–18 CE), *Conversations (fa yan, 法言)* (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2012), 126.

2 This is a famous saying of Wang Yangming (1472–1529). Wing-Tsit Chan translated it as “knowledge is the beginning of action, and action is the completion of knowledge” (知为行之始, 行为知之成); see *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, 30.

scripture reading, liturgical prayers, the works of the church fathers and saints, nature as a book of mystery, and human civilizations. Through meditation, we can know the “author” by His “works.” By deepening our assurance of faith, meditation strengthens our will to follow Christ, urging us to give our hearts to praise, reverence, and service to the Lord God, indifferent towards all created things.³

32. WHAT IS PRAYER OF CONTEMPLATION?

Contemplation is the purest prayer of heart, which comes nearest to God. With a simple and pure heart, we gaze upon (*wang*, 望着) Him,⁴ “face-to-face” in silence and love, without any means, and beyond our health, work, and emotions. Prayer of the heart allows us to be attracted by the “Almighty Lover” and to empty ourselves, offering our hearts as sacrifices to be cleansed and sanctified, so that we can entrust ourselves to Him and receive His love in Christ with a poor and humble heart. In the prayer of the heart, the true light “which enlightens everyone” (John 1:9) illumines the eyes of our hearts by His light, leading us to see everything in life with His true, honest, and merciful eyes. In a word, the prayer of the heart integrates us into loving fellowship with the triune God.

3 Ignatius of Loyola, “Principles and Foundation,” in *Spiritual Exercise*, trans. Elder Mullan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 22.

4 “Gaze” (*wang*, 望) has a particular meaning in Chinese culture. In the oracle bones, its components includes big eyes, the moon, and a mound, indicating a direct vision of something that is remote and mysterious. According to the ancient Chinese calendar, the day of the full moon is named “*wang*” (gaze, 望). See Xu Shen (许慎), *Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters* (*shuo wen jie zi*, 说文解字), bk. IV, vol. XXIV (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2018), 2710.

33. WHY IS SINGING A FORM OF PRAYER?

“O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!”

(Ps. 98:1). In response to God's love, wisdom, and might in His ever-renewing providence in our lives and in creation, we sing and make music to Him. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). Singing is a form of prayer; moreover, he who sings well prays twice. The choir, as well as song and music, fosters the active participation of people in worship. With instruments, music combines natural sound with the beating of our heart to ascend into heaven and praise and evoke the love of the Triune God. Singing, as a form of prayer, brings us into a deeper understanding of God's salvific works, dissolves our bodily and spiritual hardship, and leads us to cultivate a wholesome virtuous life. “Being stimulated by drumming and dancing, people completely express the human depth endowed by the Divine Being” (*gu zhi wu zhi yi jin shen*, 鼓之舞之以尽神).⁵

34. WHAT ARE THE BASIC ASPECTS OF PRAYER?

In prayer, people who are called by the triune God give their hearts to God, offering Him their appropriate petitions. In accordance with the different states of the heart, the Christian faith-tradition has discerned multiple facets of prayer, including blessing, adoration,

5 “The Great Appendix” of *The Yi King*, which James Legge translated as follows: “They (thus) stimulated (the people) as by drums and dances, thereby completely developing the spirit-like (character of the Yi)”; see *The Sacred Books of China, Part II: The Yi King* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), 377.

petition, lament, repentance, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. These many different facets show that God communes with our hearts in rich and subtle ways. Fundamentally speaking, however, they point to the same thing—the face-to-face dialogue between the human heart and God, in which the heart becomes discerning, purified, renewed, and uplifted.

35. WHAT KIND OF MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANS DOES BLESSING REPRESENT?

According to traditional church usage, “bless” is a verb that can follow the subject “God” or “humans.”⁶ For God, “to bless” is to endow creation with what is good and beautiful so that we may partake of His life and happiness. The triune God’s creation, salvation, and sanctification are His blessings to human beings and the world. As for human beings, “bless” refers to our response to God through thanksgiving, trust, praise, and honor. Blessing is a God-human communication as well as the encounter of God’s gift with humanity’s thanksgiving. God blesses humans, and humans respond to God in thanksgiving. God and humans therefore bless each other, responding profoundly to and indwelling within each other.

6 In Chinese language and culture, “to bless” (*zhu fu*, 祝福) is used only when God is the subject and humans are the object, not vice versa. “To bless” is a single-dimension action; therefore the mutual relationship denoted by the word “bless” in Hebrew, Greek, and English needs to be emphasized here.

36. WHAT KIND OF PRAYER IS ADORATION?

Adoration can be compared to people's attitude towards kings. As creatures, humans express adoration of the Almighty Creator, and as redeemed sinners, they worship the merciful Savior. In adoration, we bow down in the presence of God, the King of kings; we are inspired to willingly participate in God's salvation project through the Church, and we are urged to cry out to God joyfully: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Rev. 4:8). In adoration to God, we become aware of our smallness and insignificance, which yields a gentleness and humility of heart, nourishing our trust in God.

37. HOW DO WE MAKE PETITION IN PRAYER?

The basic meaning of prayer is "petition" in which we open ourselves to turn to the Lord of all beauty and goodness. Our petition in the presence of God marks the beginning of our return to our Father (Lk. 15:18). It helps us come back to true relationship with God in sincerity, aware that we are finite creatures and sinners in need of God's grace. We can petition God for all things. Asking for forgiveness is the initial step of petition. "Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner" is an appropriate and simple prelude for prayer that humbles us and expresses our trust, serving as preparation for our petitions. In line with Jesus' teaching, our petitions should focus on the coming of the heavenly kingdom and on things that are indispensable in preparing for it and assisting in its coming (Mat. 6:33). When our hearts are ever ready to share the salvific love of God, all of our needs can be voiced as an object of petition, thus helping us love and hope with greater eagerness.

38. WHY IS LAMENT A KIND OF PRAYER?

Humans are creatures and sinners, exiled to this world, which is partly dominated by Satan, sin, and death. We therefore often experience physical and mental deficiencies, transgressions of thought, word, and deed, the pain of others' sins, and the threat of death. In prayer, we bring these deficiencies, fears, and weaknesses to the presence of God, pouring them out to Him, arguing with Him, and asking for His mercy. This is a lament. The laments of the Old Testament are outstanding representatives of such prayers. We will be puzzled, confused, and hurt; we might even argue and resent. Yet, in lament, we do not forsake God because we are convinced that only by shouting, lamenting, and praying to Him can we be saved from our suffering. The laments of the Old Testament, therefore, often end in praise. Jesus' prayer on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), is the height and culmination of lament. Ever since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, human laments have been integrated into Him. On the one hand, we trust that "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14); on the other hand, we hope for a new heaven and a new earth at the return of Jesus, who has resurrected and ascended into heaven. Now, our weakness and lament are assisted by the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).

39. HOW DOES REPENTANCE BRING PEOPLE BACK TO GOD?

Jesus began his ministry by saying "repent and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). We repent and return to Christ in response to the calling of God's words, inspired by the love of the Holy Spirit. Through baptism by water, we become "holy and blameless before

him in love” (Eph. 1:4, NRSV). Our human weaknesses and desires, however, often result in transgression. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). The Holy Spirit testifies to the sins in our hearts so that we may be convicted of them (John 16:8). This is the prayer of repentance, through which our hearts return back to the triune God. Repentance is essentially a form of praise that brings forth joy. Repentance urges us to cry for God’s grace so that we might be brought back to Him and ask for a new beginning. “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old” (Lam. 5:21). The prayer of repentance reveals the breath of our hearts in the Holy Spirit, which is a life-long practice. The Holy Spirit is the “Advocate” who listens to our repentance (John 15:26), guiding us to bear fruits of repentance: forgiveness, peace, and goodness. The essence of repentance—as in the corresponding Chinese *hui gai* (悔改, regret and change)—lies in “change.” “For he who repents ought not only to wash away his sin by his tears, but also to cover and hide his former transgressions by amended deeds, that sin may not be imputed to him.”⁷ Furthermore, “once changed, we should have no more regret.”⁸ “Change” contains, transforms, and promotes “regret.”

7 Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance*, bk. II, chap. 5, heading 35, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 10, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896), 770.

8 The Chinese term for repentance, *hui gai* (悔改), is composed of two characters, the first of which (*hui*) means “regret,” the second (*gai*), “change.” Neo-Confucianism developed this term after a long series of interactions with Buddhist and Daoist religious practices that were aimed at the transformation of wrongdoers. As the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi said, “It is necessary to blame and repent oneself, but the feeling of guilt should not abide in the heart for a long time, in case it would turn into self-hatred” (罪己责躬不可无, 然亦不当长留在心胸为悔); see Zhu Xi, *Conversations of Master Zhu (zhu zi yu lei, 朱子语录)*, ed. Li Jingde (黎靖德) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books [zhong hua shu ju, 中华书局], 1986), bk. II, vol. 29, p. 759. Another Neo-Confucian philosopher, Wang Yangming, offered another insightful observation: “Repentance is a good medicine to get rid of the moral sickness, but to change behavior should be the priority. If one keeps the guilty feeling in one’s heart, that is another sickness caused by the medicine” (悔悟是去病之药, 然以改之为贵。若留滞于中, 则又因药发病); see Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living (chuan xi lu, 传习录)*, commentary by Deng Aimin (邓艾民), vol. II (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books [shang hai gu ji chu ban she, 上海古籍出版社], 2012), 70.

40. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERCESSION?

Jesus was sinless yet intercedes for sinners (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). In intercession, we follow and share in Jesus' prayer. The Holy Spirit also intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8:26–27). The triune God is a fellowship full of loving intercession for one another. Intercession for sinners and petition for others enable our hearts to be integrated with and commune in the benevolent heart of the triune God. Abraham made every effort to intercede for sinners (Gen. 18:20–32). Jesus interceded for those who crucified Him on the cross (Luke 23:34). The resurrected Christ makes intercession for us at the right hand of God (Heb. 7:25). Intercession between brothers and sisters helps us live in the Church, within which the saints commune and “heaven, earth, and everything” are integrated into one body (*yi ti*, 一体) and one family (*yi jia*, 一家).⁹ We should make supplication, prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving for everyone (1 Tim. 2:1), including those who reject the gospel (Rom. 10:1–3) and those who persecute us (Mat. 5:44). Christians should reject sin but love sinners through intercession. Such expansiveness of intercession reveals the expansiveness of love.

9 “To be in oneness [one family] with all things in heaven and on earth” (*yu tian di wan wu wei yi ti [jia]*, 与天地万物为一体[家]) is a fundamental tradition in Chinese culture. According to Mencius (372–289 BCE), “That he [the noble person] is affectionate toward his family is what allows him to be humane toward people and loving toward creatures”; see *Mencius* 7A46, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 155. The Neo-Confucian philosopher, Cheng Hao, states that “a benevolent human shall be in one body with all things in heaven and on earth”; see *Works of Cheng Brothers (er cheng ji*, 二程集) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2004), 15. Wang Yangming elaborates this idea more eloquently: “the great human regards Heaven, Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men.... Thus the learning of the great man consists entirely in getting rid of the obscuration of selfish desires in order by his own efforts to make manifest his clear character, so as to restore the condition of forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, a condition that is originally so”; see Wang Yangming, “Inquiry on the Great Learning,” in *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 272–273.

41. WHY SHOULD WE “GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES”?

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:18). Our ability to give thanks in all circumstances through prayer arises from our trust in the almighty heavenly Father who protects all things, our trust in the merciful Holy Son who redeems all things, and our trust in the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and renews all things, turning them back to the heavenly Father. Thanksgiving is praise and gratitude to God, who creates, redeems, and sanctifies everything, just as the Church does. The Eucharist is a thanksgiving prayer in which Jesus offers all of creation to the heavenly Father through the bread and wine, while asking Him to bless it. Every believer’s thanksgiving prayer partakes of, participates in, and points to this sacred liturgy. “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:16–18). These three things complement one another, together constituting the chief features of the Christian life.

42. WHAT KIND OF PRAYER IS PRAISE?

Praise is a direct acknowledgement that God is God. Due to our direct experience of the almighty, mysterious, everlasting, true, and merciful God, humans cannot help but praise Him in amazement and adoration: “there is one God ... and one Lord” (1 Cor. 8:6). It is not God who needs praise; rather, it is we who need to express our joy in God and inner exultation. Praise focuses on God Himself;

therefore, it is direct prayer, a prayer of “no-self” (*wu wo*, 无我).¹⁰ It integrates, purifies, and promotes other kinds of prayer, leading them to the everlasting God who is “I AM.” It is pure prayer that glorifies God for His own sake.

10 “No-self,” a spiritual and moral principle in Chinese culture that is embraced by Daoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism, inspires a cultivating process that aims to minimize or extinguish the self and avoid wrong desires, leading to egolessness or selflessness. The end goal of the self is to attain authentic and durable happiness in a well-functioning self and ultimately to strengthen the true self. According to Confucius, one moral goal for himself was “no self” (no egoism); see Confucius, *Analects* IX.4, in James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of The Mean* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991 [1893]), 217. In later Confucian development, Wang Yangming (王阳明, 1472-1529) was to claim, “Most of the advantages of the ancient Sages are rooted in the principle of ‘no-self.’ Once a human became no-self, he could achieve humility which is the foundation of all kinds of goodness, while pride is the prince of all kinds of evil” (古先圣人许多好处，也只是无我而已。无我自能谦，谦者众善之基，傲者众恶之魁); see Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living (Chuan xi lu, 传习录)*, commented by Deng Aimin (邓艾民), vol. II (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books [shang hai gu ji chu ban she, 上海古籍出版社], 2012). 281.

Part V



The Way of Prayer



43. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PRAYER IN THE OVERALL LIFE OF FAITH?

Prayer transforms the hearts of Christians, because it is precisely through prayer that an intimate and active relationship between God and humans is established. What we believe, what we live, what we celebrate—all of these should be internalized in our lives through our relationship with God in prayer. Prayer is therefore the fountain of life, out of which flows our faith, virtue, and celebration. How we pray reveals how we believe, and how we believe is manifested in how we pray.

44. DOES PRAYER NEED TO BE LEARNED AND CULTIVATED?

In prayer, our intimate and active relationship with God is internalized as a feeling of fervency to God in our hearts. In order to “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Eph. 3:18, NIV), we need the Holy Spirit to guide us continuously to grow through learning from the scriptures and church tradition. Scripture is the Word of God as put down in writing, while tradition is the Word of God as transmitted in the living Church; both are under the breath of the Holy Spirit. They flow from the same divine wellspring, bound together and inter-communicative towards one goal.¹ We can learn and cultivate prayer in all of the following ways: studying the scriptures, following in the spiritual footsteps of our Christian predecessors, practicing the liturgical worship developed by the Church over the ages, meditating on the works of God in creation and history, and exploring profoundly spiritual things among human cultures.

45. HOW CAN WE LEARN TO PRAY IN THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES?

The scriptures are the words spoken through the prophets and apostles by the Holy Spirit and the testimony of Jesus Christ. All scripture is the breath of the Spirit, who pours the love and wisdom of the Holy Trinity into humans and all of creation. Through the study of the scriptures, we are illumined

¹ Cf. *Catechism of Catholic Church*, nos. 80–81.

by Christ's wisdom (2 Tim. 3:15–16) and united with Christ. The Holy Scriptures are letters from our heavenly home. Reading the scriptures with a prayerful heart enacts an intimate conversation with God: we listen to God in reading, and we talk to God in praying. The scriptures possess the most elegant and powerful prayers, through which we join together with the saints of different ages and places, all of whom pray with the words of scripture.

46. HOW DOES THEOLOGY HELP US TO PRAY?

When we pray, we always pray with our entire being. The heart governs, integrates, and communicates with our reason and emotions (*xin tong xing qing*, 心统性情). The heart is the locus not only of emotion but also of reason. A deep understanding of God produces a sincere piety in us, urging us to develop a sound theology. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Prayer is a response to God's truth, guided by God's wisdom. God revealed Himself in Christ and the scriptures; theology is true knowledge about these revelations. Theology helps us know what kind of God we should pray to and with which attitudes, words, and means. With the true knowledge of the resurrected Jesus, we pray to Him, crying, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

47. HOW SHOULD WE LEARN TO PRAY IN LITURGY?

Liturgy is the action and prayer of the entire Church. Attending liturgy, participating in liturgical actions, and reciting and listening to liturgical prayers will deepen our prayers in God's presence. The altar is just like the human heart. Participating in the sacraments, we should internalize the liturgy with an inner prayer, integrating it into our life. The heart is the altar. In joining in the liturgy, we should pray for the Holy Spirit to enter our hearts, purifying and sanctifying our thoughts, emotions, and will, so we can dedicate our whole being to God, joining in the fervent cry of the "bride" for Christ.

48. HOW DOES VIRTUOUS LIVING FURTHER OUR PRAYER?

Knowledge and virtue are manifestations of God's image in the human heart, inner abilities endowed by God. Virtues are what we obtain from above (*de zhe de ye*, 德者得也).² The purer the moral life, the purer the prayer. Faith is the virtue of all virtues. Faith drives people to desire and seek God's presence; faith urges people to listen to and obey God's words. We always pray in hope, expecting God to have mercy on us and to attend

2 There is a long tradition in Chinese wisdom of using characters of the same pronunciation to interpret one another. For example, interpreting "virtue" (*de*, 德) as "obtain" (*de*, 得) is common for both Confucianism and Daoism. Zhu Xi (1130–1200) explicitly claimed that "virtue is what had been obtained in one's heart-mind from the Dao and one did not lose it anymore" (*de zhe de ye xing qi dao yu xin er bu shi zhi wei ye*, 德者得也得其道于心而不失之谓也); see Zhu Xi, "Commentary on chapter 'shu er' (述而) in *Analects*," *Commentary on the Four Books (si shu zhang ju ji zhu*, 四书章句集注) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2010), 91.

to us. We pray without ceasing throughout the years (1 Thess. 5:17), always with the hope of Jesus' return in glory. Our prayer is to receive God's infinite and absolute love through our limited and defective love. He loves us in Christ and endows us with the power of loving Him and other humans. Love is the fountain of prayer, the lasting melody of prayer. A virtuous life of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and loyalty (*ren yi li zhi xin*, 仁义礼智信) will drive us to pray more fervently and practice what we pray more earnestly.³

49. WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

At every moment, in every matter, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us urges our hearts to pray. There are prayer times in the morning and evening, at Sunday services, and for special festivals. All these prayers at specific moments help us abide by the command “devote yourselves to prayer” (Col. 4:2, NRSV) and to learn to pray at every “present.” It is at this present moment that we encounter and talk with Christ. “We ought to think of God even more often than we draw our breath.”⁴ Everyone welcomes the coming of the kingdom of God in their own way, bringing prayer into every moment of their daily life, allowing it to act as the yeast of the kingdom of God to transform the world (Luke 13:20–21).

3 An explanation about the Christian virtues and traditional Confucian values of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and loyalty, see You Bin, *The Ten Commandments: A Chinese Catechism of Living* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2002), 31.

4 Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration XXVII: The First Theological Oration. A Preliminary Discourse Against the Eunomians,” in *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 7, ed. Schaff, Philip (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1893), 580.

50. WHERE SHOULD WE PRAY?

Fundamentally speaking, every place can be the place for prayer (1 Tim. 2:8). Jesus said that the true worshipers will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and truth (John 4:21–23). Jesus prayed everywhere, sometimes in deserted places (Mark 1:35), sometimes on mountains (Luke 6:12). For us, the visible places of worship, which serve as the embodiment of the universal church on earth and the location of the appearance of the “body of Christ” in the world, are indispensable sites for liturgy and public prayer. They are also the preferred places for personal prayer. Family is the key environment of our prayer life. The “family church” prays and reads the scriptures at the dining table and in bedrooms. Wherever people pray and enter into communion with the triune God, the house of God and the gate of heaven are present (Gen 28:17).

51. WHY IS PRAYER SAID TO BE A BATTLE?

Prayer is a gift from God and also a deliberate decision of our heart. It is spiritual growth akin to cultivating a seedling through the art of “neither to forget nor to help hastily” (*wu wang wu zhu*, 勿忘勿助), as well as “a fight against the robbers within the heart” (*xin zhong zei*, 心中贼).⁵ Thus, the Christian faith-tradition often calls prayer a battle. The self, the world, and especially Satan the tempter, who leads us away from prayer, are

5 For this seedling cultivation as a metaphor for spiritual growth, see the story of farmer in *Mencius* 2A, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 30–31. For the idiom of “robbers within the heart,” see Wang Yangming, *Complete Works of Wang Yangming* (王阳明全集), ed. Wu Guang (吴光) et al. (Shanghai: Ancient Books, 2011), vol. 1, p. 188.

the enemies in the battle of prayer. They do their best to confuse, slacken, lure us from prayer, and hinder our communion with God. We should always keep alert and persevere in supplication (Eph. 6:18). So long as we pray, we have not been defeated and the Holy Spirit is still within us. When death comes, even if we are not winners, we are at least fighters.

52. HOW SHOULD WE FACE DISTRACTION IN PRAYER?

A common difficulty in prayer is distraction in which we discover that we are still attached to worldly things that we desire to possess and dominate. In the face of distraction, it is important not to expel distractions but to return to the heart,⁶ to choose to serve our Lord more firmly, to gaze upon the crucified Christ, and to remember His words “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23, NRSV). We should let our minds be corrected, purified, and enhanced by meditating on the cross of Jesus Christ.

6 A Jesuit master, Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), used the example of expelling of flies that “you chase them but they come back again”, in his spiritual instructions for his Chinese literati fellows to explain the problem of distraction in prayer. See, Li Jiubiao, *Kouduo Richao: Li Jiubiao's Diary of Oral Admonitions*, in *A Late Ming Christian Journal*, vol. 1 & 2, trans. Erick Zürcher (Sankt Augustin: Institute Monumenta Serica, 2007), 603.

53. HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH TEMPTATIONS IN PRAYER?

Temptation comes from a disordering of values. When people begin to pray, many ostensibly urgent and captivating matters come to mind, putting themselves before our prayers. We can discern such temptations by asking ourselves, “Who is my Lord?” Prayer could settle our heart and clarify our mind (*cheng xin qing yi*, 澄心清意), helping us to understand the difference between the Creator and the creation,⁷ to look up to the Lord with humility, and to greet and assist in the coming of the kingdom of heaven as our top priority. By pointing out the proper order of prayer, the Lord's Prayer helps us identify and resist temptations.

54. HOW SHOULD WE GET RID OF SLOTH IN PRAYER?

Sloth is a carelessness and aimlessness of the heart. Sloth in prayer can be attributed to focusing our prayer on what God gives to us instead of on God's own love. Sloth reflects our self-reliance, which is shown not only in our pride and conceit when our goals are achieved but also in our depression and disappointment when we fail to achieve them. In prayer we should understand that we cannot rely on ourselves but rather must entrust ourselves to God. We can make progress (*jing jin*,

⁷ This spiritual exercise comes from the book of *Huai Nan Zi* (淮南子), compiled by Liu An (179–122 BCE), “The learner should understand the distinction between the heaven and human and be masterful of the cause of social order or chaos, then settle the heart and clarify the mind to keep it carefully (学者能明于天人之分, 通于治乱之本, 澄心清意以存之, 见其终始, 可谓知略矣).” See Liu An, *Huai Nan Zi* (淮南子), trans. Chen Guangzhong (陈广忠) (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2012), vol. 2, p. 1224.

精进) without slacking off only by taking every moment as an occasion to empty ourselves anew, willing to “start from scratch,” firmly trusting the support of Christ, and obeying wholeheartedly the Almighty Creator. Through prayer, one learns to live not by relying on oneself, not by living for oneself, and not by living by oneself alone.

55. HOW SHOULD WE REGARD UNHEARD PRAYERS?

We often complain about unheard prayer. But we should instead ask: how can our prayers be counted as heard? Are we praying for the right thing? How can our will be combined with God's? As frail human beings, we should empty ourselves (*xu ji*, 虚己)⁸ and pray with the attitude “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom. 8:26). Instead of sticking to our will, we should seek the will of the Lord and deepen our trust in Him. When people pray for “pleasures” and “worldly” things, “asking wrongly,” they naturally do not receive these things (Jas. 4:3–4). If the prayer is not immediately answered, it is often because God wants our will to be tested so that we can discern, transform, and enhance our will to accept the gifts He has prepared for us in His own way and at His own time. The Father of all spirits disciplines us in various ways for our good so that we may share His holiness (Heb. 12:10). We should not despair because our prayers are not answered; rather, we should trust Him with courage and resolution, thirsting for Him

8 In Chinese culture, *xu* (虚) is formless and generative emptiness. According to the early Daoist philosopher, mystic, and poet, Zhuang Zi, “it is in the empty chambers that light appears, and all auspicious things come to roost only where there is stillness” (*xu shi sheng bai ji xiang zhi zhi*, 虚室生白, 吉祥止止). For a person who is single-mindedly focused, the highest act of will is to enter into a state of “vacuity” (*xu*, 虚), in which one waits for the presence of whatever may come, since it is only in vacuity that the Dao is manifested; see Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuang Zi: The Complete Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2020), 37–38.

even beyond our will. Such a life of faith and love is precisely God's perfect answer to us.

56. HOW SHOULD WE REGARD THE EFFECTS OF PRAYERS?

God's fundamental response to our prayers is to transform and improve our hearts, which is our assurance that our prayers are heard. Our prayers should focus on seeking God's will and developing a closer relationship with Him rather than on a specific form of grace. In prayer, we are united with Christ, who died and rose from the dead. In Him, we pray to the "Father in heaven," who pours into us the Holy Spirit of wisdom, revelation, and joy (Eph. 1:17; 1 Thess. 1:6). The communion of the heart with the triune God is the most essential effect of our prayers.

57. WHAT IS DARKNESS IN PRAYER?

Dullness and fatigue in prayer are a part of the benighted experiences of the heart in its search for the supreme Lord. In such times, our heart seems to be abandoned by God, and our thoughts, emotions, and will, as well as all kinds of spiritual motives, seem meaningless. However, in these dark experiences we in fact participate in Jesus' distress in Gethsemane and accompany Him to the grave. Thus we become aware of the infinite transcendence of the Creator, the weakness of human nature, and the abyss between the Creator and creation. This motivates us to pray for trust in the Lord with more resolve, for hope beyond all visible things, and for simple and pure love.

58. HOW SHOULD WE “PRAY WITHOUT CEASING”?

The Bible requires people to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17, Eph. 6:18). Prayer is the continuous breathing of our hearts in the holy triune God. We can pray at any time and place. We are connected with Christ through prayer, so that we may practice His self-denying love in life. Love never ends (1 Cor. 13:8), nor does prayer cease. An active life of love is an entrance to contemplation. “Since works of virtue and the keeping of the commandments have a part in prayer, the person who prays ‘ceaselessly’ is the one who integrates prayer with good works and noble actions with prayer. For we can only accept the saying ‘Pray ceaselessly’ as realistic if we say that the whole life of the saint is one mighty, integrated prayer.”⁹

9 Origen, *On Prayer*, in Alistair Stewart-Sykes, trans. *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, On the Lord's Prayer*, Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004, Chap. 12, para. 2, 137-138.

Part VI



What is The Lord's Prayer



59. WHAT IS THE LORD'S PRAYER?

The Lord's Prayer, taught by Lord Jesus Christ Himself, is a prayer made to the Father in heaven. It is the way that leads us to the heart of the Father in heaven. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord's Prayer is included in "the Sermon on the Mount"; in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus preached the Lord's Prayer to others at the request of a disciple. Lord Jesus is both the way of prayer and the teacher of prayer. Luke recorded five petitions while Matthew recorded seven. Based on the liturgical tradition formed by the early Church, many denominations ended the Lord's Prayer with a doxology.

60. WHY IS THE LORD'S PRAYER SAID TO BE THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF PRAYERS?

The Lord's Prayer encompasses all the prayers in the scriptures. It points out every holy and good thing: love God and love our neighbors. It tells us we should purify ourselves and pursue justice. The Lord's Prayer not only brings us to the heavenly Father to pray but also tells us what to pray for and in what order. It is the model prayer for us and the guiding principle of all prayer.

61. WHAT DOES THE POSITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER IN "THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT" ILLUSTRATE?

“The Sermon on the Mount” represented to the disciples the principles of new life in Christ, while the Lord's Prayer is the prayer made to the heavenly Father by our new hearts in Christ. The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13) is in the core of “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5–7), showing that a new heart is the fountain of a new life. The Holy Spirit urges us to pray, which fills our life with vitality. We live as we pray. Only when we pray in the way taught by Lord Jesus, can we live in the way commanded by Him.

62. HOW DOES THE LORD'S PRAYER WORK IN THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATION OF THE CHURCH?

The Lord's Prayer starts with “our Father in heaven” rather than “my Father in heaven,” indicating that the Lord's Prayer is the prayer of the entire Church and rooted in the liturgical life

of the Church. In the baptism of the Church, the Lord's Prayer is given to the baptized. From then on, the reborn can pray to God the heavenly Father as children and will be answered by the Holy Son. The Holy Spirit transforms the words of Jesus into the "spirit and life" for believers (John 6:63). In the Eastern and Western Holy Communion, the Lord's Prayer is recited before receiving the Eucharist, showing that only after listening to the Lord's words, receiving His teaching, and loving each other in the Holy Spirit, can people pray to the Father like Lord Jesus. The Lord's Prayer is a "knock" on the door of the "heavenly banquet," the Eucharist. It is a prayer of communion with the blood and flesh of the Holy Son. Since ancient times, the Church has formed the tradition of the Liturgy of the Hours (or Divine Office) and recited the Lord's Prayer according to the hours.

63. HOW DOES THE LORD'S PRAYER INSPIRE HOPE FOR THE COMING OF JESUS?

We should recite the Lord's Prayer with a feeling of living in the last days. God's salvation has been fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ and will be fully completed when the Lord comes again. We live in the last days when salvation has been fulfilled but not yet completed. The Lord's Prayer inspires our hope in the Lord's reappearance, which has not yet been revealed (1 John 3:2), integrating this hope into our mission, longing, and struggle, as reflected in the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. To recite the Lord's Prayer is to cry out, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

64. HOW DOES THE LORD'S PRAYER PURIFY OUR HEARTS?

The best test of our desires is to pray in the light of the Lord's Prayer, which teaches us to discern, clarify, and purify our desires. The Lord's Prayer enables us to consider our current situation and the fundamental goal of our life. In prayer, the Lord's Prayer reminds us: do you really need those things? Lord Jesus taught us to pray in His name, so that we may see and transform life with His eyes. In such prayer, some of our desires will wither away, while others will grow. The Lord's Prayer clears our hearts and purifies our lives.

65. HOW SHOULD WE PREPARE OUR HEARTS TO RECITE THE LORD'S PRAYER?

When we recite the Lord's Prayer, we pray to the Father with Christ in the Holy Spirit. If our heart is not inspired by the Holy Spirit, how dare we, the humble people of dust, call God our Father? Everyone who recites the Lord's Prayer is God's child. When reciting the Lord's Prayer, we should prepare our spiritual state as true children: faith (inseparable trust), humility (sincere humbleness), simplicity (simple and straightforward purity), joy (happiness of being in the care of the heavenly Father), and love (calm and relaxing in love).

66. WHAT IS THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER?

The Lord's Prayer consists of nine clauses with "Our Father" as the opening and "for yours is ..." as the ending, after which comes the "Amen" (Yes) in Jesus. Altogether there are therefore ten clauses. Jesus taught the disciples seven petitions (or supplications). According to the Chinese translation, the first three are "wishes" (*yuan*, 愿) and the other four are "requests" (*qiu*, 求). The first three "wishes" are God's plans concerning His name, kingdom, and will. The later four "requests" address all of our life in this world. Thus the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer cover God's divine plan for the world and our human needs and life purposes. It is therefore the guiding principle for spiritual formation of Christian heart-mind.

67. WHAT DO THE PETITIONS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER SHOW ABOUT THE MULTIFACETED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN US AND GOD?

Each of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer points to a certain aspect of the relationship between the heavenly Father and us: the Creator and the creature (hallowed be your name); the king and his people (your kingdom come); the master and the servants (your will be done); the giver and receiver of food (give us this day our daily bread); the benefactor and the sinners (and forgive us our debts); the guide and the pilgrims (and do not bring us to the time of trial); and the protector and the helpless (but rescue us from the evil one). Each time the Lord's Prayer is recited, we are reminded of these core relationships with God. The

Lord's Prayer brings us to God, the king, the master, the giver, the forgiver, the mentor, and the marshal. Every day we experience each of these relationships.

68. WHAT ARE THE FIRST THREE PETITIONS IN THE LORD'S PRAYER?

In the popular Chinese version, the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer begin with "may/wish" (*yuan*, 愿), leading our hearts to the heavenly Father to pray for "Your" (His) matters: Your name, Your kingdom, Your will. These prayers pour forth our love, turning us from self-love to "loving You." This love urges us to forget about ourselves, thinking first and only of the One whom we love. The first three petitions do not mention "I" or "we" at all; there is only "you." They awaken our firm faith, our trust that Christ has answered these three petitions in His death and resurrection. They nurture our fervent hope of their full accomplishment at the return of Christ. They inspire us to love boldly, adoring Christ, who dwells within us and guides us to fulfill these three petitions.

69. WHAT IS "MAY/WISH"?

As its Chinese character shows, "may/wish" is composed of "original" (*yuan*, 原) and "heart-mind (*xin*, 心),"¹ signifying the indestructible inherent ability of the human heart. When God first created Adam, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,

1 *Yuan* (愿) can be both a verb and noun. In Chinese, it is a strong vow made before the divine. It is composed of two phono-semantic compounds, with *yuan* (原) on top and *xin* (心) on bottom. "*Yuan*" (原) is its phonetic indicator, meaning "original" or "beginning," and its semantic element is "*xin*" (心), meaning "heart."

after which Adam became a “living being.” The image and likeness of God in which humans are created enables people to know themselves, decide for themselves, entrust themselves, connect with others, and establish a covenantal relationship with God. Such is the “original heart-mind” of humans. Through the redemption of the Holy Son and the illumination and sanctification of the Holy Spirit, God brings us into loving fellowship with the triune God. Our “original heart-mind” communes with, allies with, and is in covenant with the triune God. We are not spectators in God’s plan to administer the created world. When we participate in His plan and carry out His will with our “original heart-mind,” we are “God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9), “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11).

70. WHAT ARE THE OTHER FOUR PETITIONS IN THE LORD’S PRAYER?

The other four petitions in the Lord’s Prayer may be spoken of as the four “requests.” These show that we are creatures and sinners, revealing the human condition from which we join God’s project of love in the world. These requests offer God our realities and desires, expecting Him to hear and answer. The first request refers to our daily life; the second involves the healing of our hearts and spirits; and the third and fourth are concerned with the battle for eternal life. These four petitions taught by Lord Jesus make known to us the truth of the created world, entrusting us, as creatures confined in the world and human history, to the loving heavenly Father who predestined eternal life and blessings for us in Lord Christ before creation (Eph. 3:11).

1



“Our Father in Heaven”

71. WHY SHOULD WE ADDRESS OUR FATHER “IN HEAVEN”?

“Heaven” is not a spatial concept referring to the “remoteness” of God; rather since the Chinese character of “heaven” (*tian*, 天) is composed of “one” and “great,”² it emphasizes God’s transcendence and majesty. Father in “heaven” reminds us that we are facing God, who is “ever higher.” God “in heaven” is more extraordinary than most extraordinary, more innermost than most inmost. “Heaven” indicates that God is the “Holy One,” “no mortal” (Hos. 11:9). Out of his steadfast love, God in heaven takes the initiative to come to sinners, approaching the humble and the repentant heart. We call our Father “in heaven” in expectation that He will enter our hearts to deliver us.

2 According to Xu Shen (许慎), “Tian is composed of One 一 and Great 大, meaning the most high and nothing above it 至高无上”; see *Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters* (*shuo wen jie zi*, 说文解字), bk. I, vol. I (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2018), 2.

72. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CALL GOD “FATHER”?

Beginning with “our Father in heaven,” The Lord’s Prayer lifts our hearts upward, which is the first step in the upward movement of our lives. As sinners, we dare not look up to heaven, yet we are forgiven in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Thus, we become children of God who open ourselves to the Creator of whole universe and dare to call him our “Father.” To call God “Father” is not to regard him as of a human gender, but to go back to our “great parent” (*da fu mu*, 大父母), the source of our being.³ The call “Father” is the key to prayer; only after this unambiguous call can the gate of prayer be opened. Thus, this call endows the Lord’s Prayer with the character of heavenly celebration. Calling God “our Father in heaven” expresses our praise to Him, enabling us to know Him and to acknowledge Him in ever-renewing praise and reverence. It also helps us present our subsequent petitions to Him with closeness, trust, and the firm belief they will be answered.

73. WHAT DOES “OUR” IMPLY?

“Our” indicates that Christian prayer is always the prayer of the community. When we pray to the heavenly Father, we first honor, revere, and praise “our” Father with the Son in the Holy Spirit. “Our” also includes all who know Christ and are reborn in water and the Holy Spirit. They are “united in the same mind and

³ In the Chinese interpretation of God as Creator in the Late Ming and Early Qing period (16th to 18th centuries), a common term for God was “the great parent” (father and mother). One Ming Dynasty representative of Chinese Christianity, Wang Zhen (王徵, 1571–1644), claimed that “it is a pity that people know the duty of serving their human parents but do not know that God is the great parent (*da fu mu*, 大父母) to serve”; see Wang Zheng, *Complete Work of Wang Zheng* (*wang zheng quan ji*, 王徵全集), ed. Lin Lechang (林乐昌) (Xi’an: Sanqin Press [三秦出版社], 2011), 124.

the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10), becoming one body in Christ. Every member's prayer is the common prayer of the whole body. Finally, "our" also includes those who do not yet know Christ and the heavenly Father, as well as all of creation. The Lord's Prayer asks us to intercede for them, "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). The Father's love is without boundaries; so should our prayer be. The Lord's Prayer begins with "our" so that we might imitate Christ in whom every prayer is God's love, expanding through us to our brothers and sisters, even to all of creation.

74. WHAT KIND OF "HEARTS OF CHILDREN" SHOULD WE HAVE?

Our relationship with the heavenly Father is obtained in Christ and maintained by the promotion and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which surpasses all human parental emotions. In the presence of God, we are not slaves without dignity and freedom; nor are we employees who earn remuneration according to contracts; rather we are the apple of his eye (Deut. 32:10), children who share and spread His goodness and wisdom. In the presence of the heavenly Father, we should fix our eyes on Him with the hearts of children (*chi zi zhi xin*, 赤子之心),⁴ pure and simple. Having been liberated from ignorance and evil, we should preserve and fulfill our identity, as given by the heavenly Father. Only in the love of the heavenly Father are we able to obtain the most profound intimacy and the greatest freedom.

4 "The Child's heart" enjoys a deep spiritual and moral significance in both the Daoist and Confucian traditions. As the Daoist sage Lao Tzu put it, "He who has in himself abundantly the attributes of the Dao is like an infant" (含德之厚比于赤子); see *Tao The King (Dao de jing)*, chap. 55, trans. James Legge, in *Texts of Taoism, The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXXIX (Oxford: Clarendon, 1891), 99. Mencius also said, "The great person is one who does not lose the child's mind" (大人者不失其赤子之心者也); see *Mencius* 4B12, trans. Irene Bloom, 88.

75. WHAT KIND OF ASPIRATION DO WE FORM IN LIFE BY PRAYING "OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN"?

“Heaven” refers to a dimension that reminds us that our Father’s home is in heaven and that we are separated from it by sin. Encouraged by the Holy Spirit and with the new heart given to us by Christ, we can return to our Father’s home, which is forever new. Praying “our Father in heaven” shows that, although we are in the flesh, we do not live after the flesh; rather, we pass our days on earth as citizens of heaven.⁵ When we call God the Father, our minds, words, and deeds should match the identity of God’s children, because to be able to call God “Father” is the profession of a blameless life.⁶ We must continue imitating the example of Christ, the firstborn, so “we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). When people see the work of His hands on us, they will hallow His name, fear, and praise Him (Isa. 29:23).

5 “The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus” chap. 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 80.

6 John Chrysostom, *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, trans. George Prevost, rev. M.B. Riddle, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 10 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), 246.

2



“Hallowed Be Your Name”

76. WHAT IS THE BASIC MEANING OF “HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME”?

This first petition actually covers the following six ones. The Lord who sanctifies humans is holy (Lev. 21:8), and the Lord's desire is that humanity can be holy by doing His will (Num. 15:40). For humans, the most proper response to God's will is to hallow God's name in the company of all of creation. This first petition, therefore, is the general guiding principle of the Lord's Prayer. It is praise, as humans cannot sanctify the name of God but can only acknowledge, revere, and praise the holiness of His eternal name in truth. It is also thanksgiving for God's eternal plan to sanctify humankind in Christ, the Holy Son. And it is expectation, our desire to be sanctified by Him and brought into the depths of His mystery by hallowing His name and therefore being made “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph. 1:4, NRSV).

77. WHY SHOULD HIS “NAME” BE HALLOWED?

God's nature is an inaccessible mystery for created beings. Out of God's love, however, He revealed Himself and gave His name to the world. His holy name, subtle and profound, comes from His deepest silence. All the works of creation and salvation are attributed to His holy name. He revealed His holy name at every important moment of His salvation project. In Exodus, He revealed His holy name as YHWH; in incarnation, as Jesus. The Lord sanctified His name for the people of Israel (Eze. 36:23), and Jesus made the holy name of the Lord known to the people with His words and deeds (John 17:6). Our reverence and love for His holy name is the source of our intimate relationship with Him.

78. HOW DO WE “HALLOW” THE NAME OF GOD?

God revealed His name to the world and fulfilled His salvation project in the world to confirm His holy name. To hallow His name is to honor Him by “becoming holy,” thereby honoring His name *in* us and *by* us. In baptism, we are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11), so that we may share His sonship and eternal life. In the life of faith, in which the Holy Spirit works, we make Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), and we are united closely with Him. For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness (1 Thess. 4:7). In short, “hallowed be your name” is the mutual indwelling of us and the Lord of life, a cleansing of our sin with the holiness of Christ, so that we may live out the sanctified grace initiated by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and of water.

79. HOW IS THE HOLY NAME OF THE LORD REVEALED IN JESUS?

The holy name of the Lord is fully revealed and given to us in Jesus and His words and deeds. Jesus is the light of life, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all people” (John 1:4). He is “light of light.”⁷ He came to the world to restore the deficient glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Having gone through the new Passover of death and resurrection, Jesus was given “the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). Jesus sanctified His name for the purpose of our sanctification. In His prayer as a high priest, Jesus said, “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth” (John 17:19).

80. HOW DO WE HALLOW THE NAME OF JESUS?

Jesus is the living Word of God. As the sanctified one who dwells in us, He enables the love with which the Father loved Him to dwell in us (John 17:26). He made known to us the name of God and showed us the way of life. To hallow Jesus’ name, people develop a fellowship of life through the Holy Spirit and worship the heavenly Father in the Church, the body of Christ. To hallow Jesus’ name, we unite what we are, what we say, and what we do with Jesus’ name, integrating our lives with the mission of working for the kingdom of God, and we preach the way of repentance and forgiveness in His name, treating “the smallest of the brothers” with humility and mercy. In His name, we feed the hungry, give drinks to the thirsty,

7 “The Creed of Nicaea,” in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 25.

clothe the naked, invite the strangers, look after the sick, visit the prisoners, and bury the dead (Matt 25:40–45). In His name, we exhort others with kindness, enlighten the foolish, comfort those in suffering, exhort with warm words, forgive those who hurt us, forgive the weakness of others, take the well-being of all people to heart and pray for them, and welcome Jesus' return in the hope of "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

81. WHAT KIND OF INNER ATTITUDE SHOULD WE HAVE TO "HALLOW YOUR NAME"?

To hallow the name of the Lord, the heart should be sanctified and renewed in communion with the holy triune God in response to his call. We should fear His name (Ps 86:11), trust in His name (Ps 124:8), remember His salvation in history and abide by His law (Ps 119:55), ask Him to give us humble and wise hearts to discern ourselves and righteous hearts to be salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13–14), and become His vessel to proclaim His name (Acts 9:15).

82. HOW SHOULD WE HALLOW GOD'S NAME WITH OUR LIFE?

“Hallowed be your name” is not only verbal praise but also a continuous sanctification of our hearts to live good and beautiful lives. The actions and words of God's creation, salvation, and sanctification of all the creation are always attributed to His holy name. To hallow the name of the Lord, we should ask His holy name to clear away the hidden idols in our hearts, filling the time and space of our life with the power of His holy name so that we can bear the fruits of life from the Holy Spirit. To hallow God's name, we

pray that His name will be hallowed by our actions and behaviors. To practice a virtuous life is to hallow God's name, while a wicked life blasphemes His name.

83. HOW MAY HIS NAME BE HALLOWED BY "PEOPLE"?

“Hallowed be your name” is translated as “May humans hallow your name” in Chinese. By adding the word “human,” the Chinese version changes the voice from passive to active. But it seems to show more clearly that we pray for the name of God to be hallowed not only by us but also by others. And not only are we sanctified by hallowing the name of God but others are too. God loves all of creation, including all human beings and all things. That Jesus taught us to pray in this way implies that we must intercede for all things, including those who stand against us. Hallowing the name of the Lord requires us to preach Christ with our lives, words, and deeds, so that the name of Christ may be hallowed by people in all nations. This prayer can therefore be regarded as a commandment for us to preach the Gospel.

3



"Your Kingdom Come"

84. WHAT IS THE "KINGDOM OF GOD"?

God's promise to the people of Israel was summarized as "the kingdom of God" (or "the kingdom of heaven") in the preaching of Lord Jesus Christ. This means that "God is with us." The term "kingdom" has multiple connotations: in a concrete sense, it refers to the realm of God's kingdom; in an abstract sense, to God's sovereignty; and in a sense of action, to God's rule or governance. "The kingdom of God" is not a place but God's presence, which is not confined by time or space. Christ initiated the invisible kingdom of God in this world through His incarnation and resurrection. By preaching and through the sacraments, the kingdom of God has been established on earth, with the Church as its seed and beginning. Through the action of God's grace and the conversion of our hearts, we have been reborn from water and the Holy Spirit, thus becoming a people ruled by Christ who will enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Our practical ethical life in accordance with the Ten Commandments and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are the signs of God's kingdom in this world. Nevertheless, the kingdom of

God cannot be completed merely by human efforts. We still look forward to the glorious coming of the kingdom of God when Christ returns.

85. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JESUS CHRIST AND “THE KINGDOM OF GOD”?

Jesus of Nazareth is Himself the kingdom of God. He is Immanuel—God with us. He leads us into the kingdom of God with His words and deeds, especially with His own life. In faith and baptism, we died and rose again in Him, becoming the people of the kingdom of heaven. Christ now rules over us, sitting enthroned in our new life through our obedience. We become good citizens of the kingdom of heaven by following His commandments. Each day we call on him earnestly, “Lord Jesus, come!” (Rev. 22:20), with a hope that He will return and bring about the kingdom of God.

86. WHAT IS “COME”?

The word “come” can be translated both as “coming from above” (*jiang lin*, 降临) and “approaching from ahead” (*lai lin*, 来临). It refers not only to the coming in a temporal and spatial sense but also the renewal of all created things. The crucifixion of Christ revealed to us that the kingdom of Christ does not belong to this world and the world cannot go to heaven by itself. The development of society and culture should not be confused with the growth of the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of heaven can only come into the world completely through the second coming of Lord Jesus. For us, the kingdom of God lies in “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). To earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts to guide us to follow the

decrees issued by Jesus, to purify our thoughts, words, and actions constantly, to help us fight against the selfish desires of the world, and to reject the dominion of sin over our bodies, is to cry to the Lord, "Your Kingdom Come."

87. IN WHAT WAYS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD RELATED TO US?

We honor God as our King and we want to be His kingdom and people. He is "above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). His kingdom is related to us in three ways: the kingdom of God is coming, the kingdom of God is in our midst, and the kingdom of God is all around us.

88. WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COMING"?

The Bible reveals to us that the coming of the kingdom of God may not be as marvelous as some people think, because "in the last days there will come times of stress" (2 Tim. 3:1). Therefore, we should face the darkness of the world soberly when praying for the kingdom of God. The coming of the kingdom of God, however, is not destruction as some other people think. Since we have been redeemed by Him, He will be with us. When we pass through the waters, they shall not overwhelm us; when we walk through fire, we shall not be burned (Isa. 43:2). We cry, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20), which expresses our trust and hope as well as the assurance of the coming of the kingdom of God; therefore we dare to face the dark reality with optimistic expectation.

89. WHAT DOES “THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN OUR MIDST” MEAN?

“The kingdom of God is in our midst” refers to the fact that

Christ sits on the throne of our hearts and makes our hearts His kingdom. He dwells within us and rules our heart and our life. We pray for His kingdom to come: “that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:16-17). The kingdom of God is real because Christ has power in our inner life.

90. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AROUND US —WHAT DOES THIS COMMAND US?

Christians are called to be the light of the dark world and the salt of the corrupted world (Mat. 5:13-14). The kingdom of heaven, which grows within us, bellows deeply, urging us to testify to and work for the kingdom of heaven in our surrounding world. “Your kingdom come” demands that we should make good use of the gifts and talents endowed by God to serve the justice and peace of our world.

91. HOW SHOULD WE GREET THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

“Your kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer expresses our hope for the return of Christ. Such hope helps us to be more focused on our mission in this world, because Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to continue His work in the world, bringing His grace to perfection and leading us towards the coming of Christ in the last days. When Christ becomes the visible king in our lives, the kingdom of God becomes visible.

4



“Your Will Be Done on Earth As It Is In Heaven”

92. WHAT IS THE WILL THAT GOD REVEALS TO HUMANS?

According to the Bible, God's will is that He “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” by knowing Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:4). Lord Jesus announced His will to people in the form of commandments: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34).

93. HOW CAN WE DISCERN WHAT THE WILL OF GOD IS?

God's good and perfect will is shown in the fact that He gives eternal life to the world in Christ, in which all things are gathered together. “He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which

he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9–10). God's good and perfect will to manage the world will be fulfilled on earth. Through union with Christ, we are set free to obey the law of God and to follow His example by doing what is pleasing to the heavenly Father (John 8:29): to love each other and to practice the Ten Commandments and the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, so as to live like Christ.

94. HOW DID JESUS DO GOD'S WILL ON EARTH (HEB. 10:9)?

Jesus is the perfect union of God and humans, heaven and earth, freedom and obedience. His life is the perfect realization of "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus came into the world to say to the heavenly Father, "I have come to do your will" (Heb. 10:7). On the eve of His sacrifice, He prayed, "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Christ gave himself up, "for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal. 1:4). In Jesus, human nature freely submits to God's omnipotent love. The will of the Father, the obedience of the Son, and our sanctification (on earth as in heaven) are all perfectly unified in the offering of the body of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 10:10).

95. HOW CAN WE BE UNITED WITH CHRIST TO DO HEAVENLY FATHER'S WILL ON EARTH?

We are accepted by God as His children in Christ. "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" asks us to have the heart of Jesus as a son and to be united with Him through the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we are able to fulfil the will of the heavenly Almighty Father. The life of Jesus is our model. We should imitate

Him and “always do what is pleasing to him” (John 8:29) with our free will. With the heart of Christ as our own, we try to live out what Jesus lived—to carry out the will of the heavenly Father on earth.

96. WHAT IS “ON EARTH”?

“On earth” means all over the earth, both in the human realm and among all of creation. This once again shows the cosmic dimensions of the Lord's Prayer. The will of the heavenly Father cannot be done for us alone. It asks us to think about all of the world and to be one with all things in heaven and earth, “with all people as my brothers and all things as my companions” (*min bao wu yu*, 民胞物与).⁸ With the encouragement and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should eliminate the fallacies of the world with truth and rid the evil practices in the world with action, making things “on earth” as “in heaven.”

97. HOW SHALL WE DO THE WILL OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER ON EARTH?

The human beings created by God are meant to be free people. Christ and the Holy Spirit have set us free from the bondage of sin. That God's will is done on earth does not mean we should passively accept the arrangement of fate, but to do what pleases God in freedom. To do the Father's will on earth, we must practice these

⁸ After the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhang Zai (1020–1077) elevated this principle as the Neo-Confucian moral goal, it became an ideal for Chinese intellectuals of later generations. Its full English translation is: “All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.” See Wing-Tsit Chan, ed. and trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 497.

virtues. First, be courageous to use our free will. God's will operates through our wisdom, will, and power, for it is God who is at work in us, enabling us to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Second, be patient in pursuing God's will (*jian yi*, 坚毅). Nothing can go beyond God's will. He sometimes accomplishes His will by hiding Himself or even by acting in seemingly contrary ways. "And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account" (Heb. 4:13). "It is patience which firmly fortifies the foundations of our faith. It is this which lifts up on high the increase of our hope. It is this which directs our doing, that we may hold fast the way of Christ while we walk by His patience. It is this that makes us to persevere as sons of God, while we imitate our Father's patience."⁹ With patience, we can do God's will on earth (Heb. 10:36). Third, be earnest in practicing (*du xing*, 笃行).¹⁰ It is not by empty words such as "Lord, Lord" that we enter the kingdom of heaven, but by doing the will of the Father in heaven (Matt 7:21).

9 Cyprian, "On the Advantage of Patience," treatise IX, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ANF05, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885), 1108.

10 Being earnest or firm in action is a virtue praised by Confucius. In his *Analects*, he elaborated it often as a virtue of the *junzi* (superior person). In one conversation, Confucius said: "Let his words be sincere and truthful, and his actions firmly and reverentially, such conduct may be practiced among the rude tribes of the South or the North" (*Analects* XV.5, my own translation with reference to James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of The Mean* [Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991 (1893)], 295–296). According to *The Doctrine of Mean*, "earnest practice" is among the extensive study, accurate inquiry, careful reflection and clear discrimination of the way of heaven (*bo xue zhi shen wen zhi shen si zhi ming bian zhi du xing zhi*, 博学之, 审问之, 慎思之, 明辨之, 笃行之), one of the five principles of the superior person to achieve sagehood; see James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of The Mean*, 413.

5



“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”

98. WHAT IS “DAILY BREAD”?

“Daily bread” refers to things needed by the human body and the whole person, including material, technological, and social things. It includes “everything that nourishes our body and meets its needs, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, yard, fields, cattle, money, possessions, a devout spouse, devout children, devout employees, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors and other things like these.”¹¹

¹¹ “Question and Answer” V, part three, in *The Small Catechism of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert E. Smith (1994), <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/luther/smallcat.htm>.

99. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “GOD GIVES” AND OUR WORK?

The earth is a gift from God to us; we are not masters of the earth. God gives us the mission to labor on the earth; as a result, we receive daily bread through our work. “We should pray as if everything depends on God, and work as if everything depends on us.”¹² We turn it all over to God in prayer while working tirelessly and urgently to do God’s work. On the one hand, we make our best effort to work; on the other hand, we accept God’s reward with gratitude. We can alleviate anxiety and worry by asking only about the cultivation of crops, leaving the harvest to the will of God (*zhi wen geng yun bu wen shou huo*, 只问耕耘，不问收获).¹³ This petition covers all forms of thanksgiving, including daily grace (prayer before meals), thanksgiving during agricultural harvests and for the flourishing of industry and commerce, and gratitude for a prosperous country, strong people, and world peace.

12 Ignatius of Loyola expresses this idea as follows: “in matters which he took up pertaining to the service of our Lord, he made use of all the human means to succeed in them, with a care and efficiency as great as if the success depended on these means; and he confided in God and depended on His providence as greatly as if all the other human means which he was using were of no effect.” See Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1964), 148.

13 Literally, “What you need to care is to plough and sow, but not to harvest,” This is an idiom created by the Neo-Confucian Tang Jian (唐鉴, 1778–1861), but made popular in Chinese culture after being used by Zeng Guofan (曾国藩, 1811–1872).

100. HOW DOES THIS PRAYER REMIND US OF THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING FROM HUNGER AND THIRST?

By this petition, Jesus would like us to remember those suffering from hunger and thirst due to the lack of food and drink. There are many people in the world who cannot obtain their “daily bread” each day. This petition, therefore, requires us to take responsibility for our brothers’ “bread.” At the beginning of creation, the earth and nature were given to all human beings as a whole (Gen 1:26; 29), and it is human’s natural right to get “daily bread” from it. With the blessing “Blessed are you poor” (Luke 6:20), Jesus encourages us to share our wealth with others with willing hearts. We are the utensils of “daily bread” given by God to all people. “For our money is the Lord’s, however we may have gathered it. If we provide for those in need, we shall obtain great plenty. This is why God allowed you to have more: not for you to waste, but for you to distribute to those in need.”¹⁴ Praying with this supplication can help us cultivate the virtues of moderation and generosity.

101. HOW SHOULD WE COME WITH A HEART OF “HUNGER AND THIRST” TO THE LORD EVERY DAY?

The hunger and thirst of the flesh encourages us pray to the heavenly Father for daily bread. But there is another kind of hunger and thirst, that of the “heart.” “Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 49–50.

This prayer reminds us to come to the Lord with “a heart of hunger and thirst”: hunger and thirst for the word of God, for the body and blood of Christ, and for the Holy Spirit. It is through “eating” that original sin entered this world, and it is also through “eating” that we are saved. Christ is the medicine of eternal life that can heal our sins.¹⁵ He is also the bread of life that can support us to take the journey of eternal life until we “eat” the twelve kinds of fruit from the tree of life in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 22:2).

102. WHAT IS “THIS DAY”?

“This day” means we need to pray and be grateful every day. That we only pray for one day (this day) at a time demonstrates our childlike trust in and contentment with the heavenly Father. “Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on.... Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” (Matt 6:25–34). There is great benefit to be derived from practicing godliness together with contentment—for we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these (Tim. 6:6–8).

15 Ignatius of Antioch believed that “the Eucharist, as the medicine of immortality [φάρμακον ἀθανασίας], is the antidote that prevents us from dying, a cleansing remedy driving away evil that causes us to live in God through Jesus Christ.” See Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (1885), 162. Irenaeus of Lyons also held that just as “the Eucharist, consists of two realities, earthly and heavenly, so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.” See “Against Heresies,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, bk. IV, chap.18, para.5, p. 1213.

103. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTENTMENT AND GODLINESS?

When we are anxious, we will be greedy; and when we are greedy, we will be anxious. But just as greed and anxiety give rise to each other, so do contentment and godliness. The key to this petition of our daily bread lies in believing, praying, and thanking God for providing “this day’s” food rather than grabbing and hoarding out of the anxiety and greed. This petition sets people free from the control of their material desires so they can be satisfied and have a peaceful spirit. It also helps humans look out for and support one another with compassion.

6



“Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Also
Have Forgiven Our Debtors”

104. WHAT DOES “DEBTS” MEAN?

This petition, which follows “daily bread,” reminds us of the vulnerability of our souls. We are creatures and sinners still caught in the snare of sin. Not only will we commit sins ourselves; we will also be hurt by the sins of others. We come to the heavenly Father, asking Him to free us from this snare. Although this petition that acknowledges “our debts” begins with confession, it is also full of hope, trusting in the Father’s love and forgiveness in Christ.

105. WHAT DOES “AS WE ALSO HAVE
FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS” IMPLY?

The word “as” indicates that the forgiveness of the Father to us is inseparable from our forgiveness of our brothers and sisters. Forgiveness on earth is united with forgiveness in heaven. Love is inseparable. Love on earth must be sourced by love in heaven, while

love in heaven must appear on earth. If you refuse to open the door of your heart to your brothers and sisters, you will also shut out the love of the heavenly Father. “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15, NRSV). The Holy Spirit transforms our heart-minds into Jesus’, and His into ours (Phil. 2:1–5), integrating our forgiveness in Christ. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). To forgive others is to open our hearts and accept the forgiveness of the heavenly Father.

106. WHY SHOULD WE PRAY TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER THAT “WE HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS”?

We should not only ask the heavenly Father to forgive our debts but also pray to Him to give us the heart and ability to “forgive our debtors.” All “knots” and “unknots” take place in the heart. Changes in the depth of our hearts are often beyond our ability to decide. How can we not take others’ offenses to us to heart with our merely human hearts? Only by giving our hearts to the Holy Spirit and combining it with Christ’s forgiveness of humans on the cross can our hearts expand. This petition asks the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts and cleanse our memories. Only by His power and love will we turn offense into empathy, harm into mercy.

107. WHY IS FORGIVENESS SAID TO BE THE HEIGHT OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER?

At its root, forgiveness comes from God, whose mercy is immeasurable and without boundary. The words and deeds of

Jesus revealed the abundant love and truth of God (Matt. 18:21–22). On the cross of suffering, He prayed for the forgiveness of human beings, saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Forgiveness is a gift from the heavenly Father to the world and the height of Christian prayer. It is only through prayer that our hearts are integrated into God’s love so that we can forgive others. The Chinese character “forgive” (*shu*, 恕) is composed of “the same as” (*ru*, 如) and “heart” (*xin*, 心), indicating that forgiveness is to take a heart that is the same as the other. To apply the same forgiveness that we received from God to others is what the petition reveals to us. “Forgiveness is an expression of our benevolence” (*shu ren ye*, 恕仁也).¹⁶ Forgiveness, a fruit of Christian prayer, bears witness to the Christian faith that love overcomes and melts away sin.

108. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FORGIVENESS IN INTERCESSION?

The heavenly Father does not have to wait to forgive us until we have forgiven others. However, if we cannot “forgive our debtors,” we cannot sincerely pray to the heavenly Father for forgiveness. Jesus said, “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23–24, NRSV). When we sincerely ask the heavenly Father for forgiveness, the spiritual impulse of forgiving others, combined with prayer, becomes our inner impulse. The triune God is a fellowship of love as well as the source and force of people’s

16 Xu Shen (许慎), *Discussing Writing and Explaining Characters* (*shuo wen jie zi*, 说文解字), bk. III, vol. XX (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 2018), 2156.

communion in love. This petition asks us to intercede for our brothers before the heavenly Father. Intercession does not bring others to God in judgment; rather it recognizes their lack and need, treating them as sinners in need of grace. Intercession bathes our souls, washing and cleansing individuals and fellowships every day. By this, the Christian fellowship and human fraternity of “all under heaven” (*tian xia*, 天下) are established.

109. HOW DOES THE PETITION FOR FORGIVENESS DEEPEN OUR CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HEAVENLY FATHER?

Asking the heavenly Father to “forgive our debts” is not an exchange with the heavenly Father based on the prerequisite that “we have forgiven our debtors.” Confession, sorrow, and repentance constitute the beginning of our prayer. This petition expresses our strong desire to be reconciled with God, our brothers and sisters, and even our enemies in the trust of God’s boundless love. It not only prays for forgiveness for the sins we have committed but also helps us avoid and root out these sins. The best gift we can offer to God is peace. Making peace with God and our neighbors in forgiveness brings us closer to the loving heavenly Father.

7



“And Do Not Bring Us To The Time Of Temptation”

110. WHAT IS THE CONNOTATION OF THIS PETITION?

Temptation is lure and deception. This petition deepens the previous petition for the “forgiveness of sins” since our sins are the result of listening to and falling into temptation (Gen. 3; Rom. 7). This phrase can also be translated “Do not let us fall into temptation”.¹⁷ It reveals our actual situation: first, the seducer, Satan, exists; second, we are fragile creatures and human beings that can be hurt by original sin (Jas. 1:14–15). On the one hand, this petition prays for obedience to the will of the heavenly Father. On the other hand, it prays for our victory in the battle against both the Tempter and our own selfish desires.

17 The Chinese Union Version of 1919 rendered the verb “to bring to” in this passage as “to encounter” (*yu jian*, 遇见); the Revised Union Version of 2006 rendered it as “to fall into” or “to be entrapped into” (*xian ru*, 陷入).

111. WHAT IS “TEMPTATION”?

“Temptation” is the Tempter’s seduction of us, while “falling into temptation” means we consent to temptation, taking action and suffering consequences. Usually, “falling into temptation” consists of the following steps: first, the appearance of temptation (e.g., Satan’s offering of temptation); second, the feeling of the temptation (e.g., Eve thinking it was “good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” [Gen. 3:6]); third, the fall into temptation (e.g., Eve and Adam “ate” [Gen 3:6]); fourth, bearing the outcome of sin and death (Rom. 6:12–16). By teaching us this petition, Jesus reminds us that the human heart is always a battlefield. Whether our temperament is guided by the Holy Spirit or driven by temptation and selfish desire, this is part of everyone’s spiritual struggle.

112. WHY WOULD GOD ALLOW US TO BE TEMPTED?

God does not tempt people, but He allows us to be tempted and to be tested in temptation. Confronting and experiencing temptations is an opportunity for us to know ourselves and enhance our spirituality. “The utility of temptation is thus something like this: through temptation the things which our souls have admitted, unknown to anyone except God, unknown even to ourselves, are made manifest, so that we should no longer be unaware of what kind of people we are, but may recognize this and should we so wish, perceive our own evil and give thanks for the good things which have been made manifest to us through the temptation.... Temptation comes upon us so that our true nature may be revealed to

ourselves, and so that we may discern what is hidden in our hearts.”¹⁸ Therefore, the phrase “do not bring us to the time of temptation [or trial]” is actually a prayer to God to let us not fall into unbearable temptation. It reminds us to look to God’s almighty protection and faithful promise in difficult situations: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). God’s protection enables us to grow spiritually and morally when we undergo temptation (Rom. 5:3–5).

113. WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR WHEN CONFRONTING TEMPTATION?

The petition “do not bring us to the time of temptation [or trial]” encourages us to call on the Holy Spirit boldly and to ask him to give us the virtue and strength to resist the Tempter and overcome selfish desire. There will always be temptations in our life, and we often walk in darkness. This petition encourages us to invite Jesus to walk with us in the dark journey and to lead us so that we do not stray from the way to the holy city of New Jerusalem.

114. HOW SHOULD WE GROW THROUGH OUR TEMPTATIONS?

No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He himself tempts

¹⁸ Origen, *On Prayer*, in *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, On the Lord's Prayer*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), chap. 29, para. 17, p. 203; quoted with minor modifications.

no one. Rather, one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death (Jas. 1:13–15). In the face of temptation, we may understand our weakness more clearly and learn to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to inspire, purify, and enhance our faith by imitating Christ. The scriptures, therefore, encourage people to endure trial and resist temptation, turning trials into tests that promote the growth of life. “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (Jas. 1:12).

115. HOW CAN WE NOT “FALL INTO TEMPTATION”?

Jesus repeatedly warned His disciples to “watch” (or “take heed”, Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33) so as not to fall into temptation. “Watching” consists of the following aspects. First, clear discernment (*ming bian*, 明辨).¹⁹ We should pray for the gift of “wisdom and understanding” (Isa. 11:2) from the Holy Spirit, so that we can see the world in God's eyes, understand the truth of temptation, and discern our temperament, which is the first step to resist temptation. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). Second, alert. We must keep our hearts alert with the hope of Jesus' return, which gives our resistance to temptations an ultimate meaning at each moment. “Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place,

19 Confucianism proposed in *The Doctrine of Mean* that clear discernment is one of the five procedures of the Heavenly way to achieve moral perfection: extensive study (博学之), accurate inquiry (审问之), careful reflection (慎思之), clear discernment (明辨之), and earnest practice (笃行之). See James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of The Mean*, 413.

and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). Third, fortitude. A wise and firm heart disapproves temptation, bearing it with fortitude. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

116. WHY IS THE PETITION “DO NOT BRING US TO THE TIME OF TEMPTATION” SAID TO BE A BATTLE?

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would” (Gal. 5:17). The petition “do not bring us to the time of temptation [or trial]” shows how the Christian life is a battle in which we overcome temptation with prayer. The Christian faith tradition points out that if we obey “the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches,” then we have the sin of “lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, rage, envy and pride.” But if, on the other hand, we “live by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25), the Holy Spirit will lead us to practice the virtues of “chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility,” overcoming those sins.

8



“Rescue Us From The Evil One”

117. WHAT DOES “EVIL” REFER TO?

Our petitions for the grace of the heavenly Father in the Lord's Prayer deepen in correspondence with our real life experience. The above petition “do not let us fall into temptation” implies that temptation is Satan's tool, which has two sides: a good appearance and an evil essence. This current petition “rescue us from the evil one” faces the naked ferocity of Satan himself and his accomplices. Here, “evil” refers to the universal evil in the human condition as well as the evil one, Satan the Devil. From the beginning of creation, he interrupted God's plan of creation (Gen. 3), also trying to foil God's plan of salvation, which was completed in Jesus (Matt. 4:1–11).

118. HOW IS TODAY'S WORLD "IN THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE" (1 JOHN 5:19)?

Evil is universal—a fact Christians need to face. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). On the one hand, Jesus has defeated Satan on the cross; on the other hand, Satan and his servants are still allowed to move around in the world. Each day we need to pray to the heavenly Father to rescue us from all kinds of evils that harm our body, soul, family, social order, and the whole of creation.

119. HOW DOES THE EVIL ONE ACT THROUGH THE HUMAN HEART?

The evil one acts through the human heart. “An evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart” (Luke 6:45, NIV). Jesus pointed out that evil thoughts in people’s hearts could defile a person. “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile” (Matt 15:18–20, NRSV). Evil thoughts, malice, evil words, and evil deeds all bear witness to the rule of the evil one over people’s hearts. The petition “rescue us from the evil one” prays to the Holy Spirit to give us an awareness of sin (John 16:8), to guide us to repent constantly in our hearts, to commit ourselves to follow Christ who is the good doctor of our hearts, and to ask him to heal the “evil” hidden and dwelling in our hearts.

120. HOW DOES THE EVIL ONE ACT THROUGH THIS FALLEN WORLD?

The Devil is “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30). Until Jesus returns, the Devil rules the old world (1 Cor. 15:24). He damages the plans of God and His love, creating and maintaining “evil” through both internal values and external organizational systems and institutional structures. Certain social and political movements have tried to replace Christ and the Gospel, mocking the cross and claiming they could eliminate the evil one, but in fact they only created new evils. Jesus did not ask us to leave the world (John 17:15). He said, “rescue us from the evil one,” which means we should intercede for all human beings and our cosmic family of the whole creation. With His actions and words, Jesus revealed to us the spiritual and living standards required by the new kingdom. This petition encourages us to discern the “evil one” working in the fallen world and to restrain these “structural sins” in society with love and justice as taught and empowered by Christ. Even in the suffering brought by the persecution of the world, we still patiently look forward to the return of Christ and pray within the Church: “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20), because His coming will completely rescue us from the evil one.

121. HOW SHOULD WE PRAY WHEN FACING DEATH?

Death is the ultimate power of Satan, the evil one, and is “the last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor. 15:26). We pray to the heavenly Father in faith: “rescue us from the evil one,” for Christ has “the keys of Death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:18), and He is the one “who is

and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). We still feel bitterly the power of evil in our lives. Faith does not yet free us from the destructive forces of evil and Satan’s accomplices. With this petition, we pray that God Himself would battle for us. At last, when the hour of death comes, the heavenly Father may grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven. God has power over Satan.²⁰

122. HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND THE SEQUENCE OF THE FOUR PETITIONS IN THE LORD’S PRAYER?

The four petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, on the one hand, contain one another, but on the other hand, possess a linear sequence. “Our” needs being the content, the petitions start from the supply of daily bread, next turn to the forgiveness of sins, then to the guarding of the soul in the face of temptation, and finally to hope in God even in the presence of ultimate evil. These petitions cover all aspects of our life, from daily eating and drinking to matters of life and death, from our external diet to our internal cultivation. They are also all part of our relationship with God. To pray the Lord’s Prayer is to present our entire life in the presence of the Ruler of the universe, our heavenly Father.

20 Cf. Martin Luther, “Small Catechism,” in *Catechism: Christian Doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland* (Helsinki: 2000), 62–63.

9



Doxology

123. THE LORD'S PRAYER ENDS WITH "FOR THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY ARE YOURS FOREVER." WHAT DOES THIS IMPLY?

The Lord's Prayer ends with this doxology, which reconfirms the identity of the heavenly Father as the king of the universe and a complete overthrow of the "evil one" who imposes all nations, power, and glory onto himself (Luke 4:5–6). It echoes the very beginning of the Lord's Prayer—"Our Father in heaven"—as well as the first three "wishes": God's holy name, kingdom, and will. These "echoes" imply that our "prayer of the heart" is in fact a liturgical celebration in heaven, our worship of and thanksgiving to God in the temple of heaven. The beginning and ending of the Lord's Prayer therefore "sandwich" the four petitions on earth between these two glorious praises to heaven, as if the hands of the Father and the Son were placed together, protecting our needs.

124. ACCORDING TO THE DOXOLOGY, WHAT KIND OF HEART SHOULD WE HAVE IN PRAYER?

The Lord's Prayer ends with this doxology, reminding us once again that the power of prayer should come solely from God, that we should praise Him in prayer, and that we should believe our prayer will be heard. The kingdom, power, and glory are all God's. His faithfulness, goodness, and love are unparalleled. He is willing and able to give us what we ask for. He alone is the source of our prayers. "We do not present our supplications before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, give heed and act; delay not! For your own sake, O my God" (Dan. 9:18-19). All our prayers should be praises to Him: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever" (1 Tim. 1:17). We, in assurance and gladness, deeply believe that our prayer is heard by Him, "who, by the power at work within us, is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

10



Amen

125. WHAT DOES “AMEN” MEAN?

“Amen” means faithfulness, indicating “all these will come true.”

It is the expression of faith and the entrustment of our being. We sing “amen” and entrust our whole being to the heavenly Father. We also pray to God, our heavenly Father, to entrust his whole being to us. Every time we say the Lord’s Prayer we engage in self-examination. Like a mirror, the Lord’s Prayer helps us see ourselves clearly, examine our desires, and clarify the priorities of our lives. It urges us to pray sincerely like Jesus and to fulfill these prayers in our life.

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Epilogue

Prayer enables us to go deep into the innermost part of our hearts, calling to the Most High, who is invisible. In the words of the Psalms, it is the beholding and singing of “deep to deep.” We establish a relationship of communion with the triune God in our hearts through prayer. In this relationship, we believe, we love, and we celebrate. Through God’s actions and words in history, we know how to respond to Him with our words and actions. Such is the Christian prayer: we pray by the guidance of the Holy Spirit; we pray in Jesus Christ; we pray in the ways taught by the scriptures; we pray in the liturgical celebrations of the Church; and we respond to the living God by living a holy and good life. The whole content of the Gospels is condensed in the Lord’s Prayer taught by Lord Jesus.

Our prayers guided by the Lord’s Prayer help us to hear our voice in Lord Jesus and His voice in us. We practice the same mind/heart of Christ by reciting the Lord’s Prayer. It is the spiritual guiding principle for Christians, which depicts our lives in Christ. The integrity of a person’s life lies in whether the desire in their heart is appropriate. Like a teacher, Jesus taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer so that we could examine our desires and order our lives. The Lord’s Prayer opens the eyes of our hearts; as a result, we see the deeper reality of life and are endowed with strength by the Almighty God to face these realities. Christians everywhere and at all ages should pray sincerely like Jesus, fulfilling these prayers in life.

The Lord’s Prayer is deeply loved by Christians all over the world. The Mount of Olives in Jerusalem now boasts a forest of tablets of the Lord’s Prayer printed in many different languages of the world. Chinese Christians are also very keen to pray the Lord’s Prayer, widely applying it to their spiritual (ling, 灵), ethical (de,

德), and liturgical (li, 礼) lives. At the same time, Chinese culture is rich in philosophy of the heart-mind, which can be used as a cultural resource by Chinese Christians to establish and deepen the relationship between the human heart and the triune God through prayer. This book undertakes great effort in explaining the Lord's Prayer in the tradition of the ecumenical Church, attempting an indigenized interpretation of Christian prayer with Chinese culture, especially through the ideas and practices of "heart-mind school" (xinxingxue, 心性学).

The writing of this book was aided by many friends. Kuang Quan, Li Lin, Du Fengying, and Yao Dafang participated in discussions of certain parts of it. Dr. Pan Shaoduo read through the entire manuscript and made detailed suggestions for revision. Deep thanks to Wang Biyan and Gao Yi for translating my original Chinese version of the Lord's Prayer (2019) into English, on which this updated and revised English version is based. I am very grateful to Professor Timothy Knepper of Drake University for his copyediting of the text; many precious suggestions from him have improved the suitability of this book for an international audience. Thanks to Professor Christoph Stückelberger, who acted as the series editor and gave me a lot of important advice for the catechism. I, however, am singularly responsible for any mistakes in this book, and I sincerely welcome criticism and correction from people of all walks of life.

You Bin
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Author: Prof. Dr You Bin 游斌 is Professor of Christian Studies and Director of its Academy of Religions at Minzu University of China. He founded several centers in seminaries in China for theological research and training. He has a PhD in New Testament and is involved in comparative scripture and intercultural theology in a variety of ways.