CHAPTER 15

Gethsemane and the Lord’s Prayer

This chapter argues that the Lord’s Prayer, particularly the petition “Your will be done,” often came to be seen together with Jesus’ dictum in the garden that his Father’s will be done. The Gethsemane story provided a narrative background for this particular prayer in the Pater Noster. It is implied that the Gethsemane prayer resonates in the Lord’s Prayer, and vice versa.¹ This is worth noting since this prayer, due to its origin in Christ himself, became the “Urgebet” of the Christ-followers² and shaped Christian identity in a special way.³ The genre, use, and role attributed to the Lord’s Prayer were such that it must have been prone to foster patterns, shape practices, and perpetuate traditions. I surmise that what we observed in Mark’s Gospel is but one example of that process. Simply put, this prayer occupied a role supremely different from other texts in early Christianity. Before turning to see how Tertullian and Cyprian, the two oldest commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer, addressed the prayer on God’s will, we will sketch some New Testament passages that pave the way for the conclusion that Gethsemane and the Lord’s Prayer were seen as adjacent texts.

15.1 Echoing the Lord’s Prayer

It is a plausible assumption that the Lord’s Prayer came to perpetuate the memories of Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane.⁴ The fact that this prayer resonated as the catechetical prayer par excellence has repercussions for how the Gethsemane prayer came to be understood. The juxtaposition of these two prayers made the exemplary nature of Gethsemane evident and served to narrow the perspective on this prayer. Since the Lord’s Prayer was taught to the

¹ Chapters 5.5 and 6.4.
⁴ The role of the Lord’s Prayer in remembering Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane, but also in shaping this remembrance, has been overlooked in much research. I note that Clivaz, L’Ange et la sueur de sang, in a study so steeped in much early Christian literature, does not include it at all.
disciples, the function of Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane is turned into what they could learn from him and from that prayer in particular. Hence, the Lord’s Prayer is constantly said to be about “what the Lord taught us” (Dom. or. 3:29; sicut magister Deus docuit). By being drafted for a didactic purpose, something is gained and something lost with regard to Jesus’ appearance in the garden. The role of Jesus and his own destiny becomes more shadowy when coupled with the prayer for God’s will to be done in the Pater Noster.

15.1.1 New Testament Passages

In the New Testament, the Pater Noster is attested in Matthew (6:7–13) and in Luke (11:1–4). To be sure, the petition about “Your will be done” is missing in the older manuscripts of Luke’s Gospel, but this is not an exercise in finding the initial text. It is about finding the text most commonly used and therefore setting parameters for practices of interpretation. In that regard, the relevant prayer is attested to in Codex Sinaiticus prima manus (with some minor changes), in Codex Alexandrinus, Ephraemi, and Bezae including some other majuscules. It also finds support in most translations and the Majority Text. These readings most likely represent a harmonization with Matthew, but precisely in so doing they affirm that this prayer was formative and contributed to shaping traditions. A process towards conformity and unity clearly comes into view here.

Paul was likely familiar with the Lord’s Prayer (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). In both passages, the status of being “sons” finds its true expression in κρᾶζον/κράζομεν αββα ὁ πατήρ, echoing the address found in the Lukan version of the Lord’s prayer in particular (cf. Mark 14:36). Is this an abbreviation for the Lord’s Prayer? Hans Dieter Betz says that the doubling of the invocation (Abba Father) in

5 We have seen that this catechetical reading of Gethsemane finds an analogy in the chreia patterns discernible in Mark’s story of this incident.

6 Many interpreters point out that John’s Gospel shows familiarity with the Lord’s Prayer. John 14:13–14 (cf. 15:7; 16:23, 26) sounds like the Fourth Gospel’s idiosyncratic rendering of the traditional prayer found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:7–11), which in Luke 11 is seen as part of Jesus’ instruction on prayer, which includes the Lord’s Prayer. More particularly, the prayer in John 17 includes motifs that evoke the Lord’s Prayer; see Wm. O. Walker Jr., “The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew and John,” NTS 28 (1982): 237–56, and more recently Andrew T. Lincoln, The Gospel According to John (BNTC, New York: Hendrickson, 2005), 432–33. Interestingly, Jesus’ prayer in John 17 comes narratively where the synoptic tradition places the Gethsemane prayer; see Chapter 8.4. The evidence of Did. 8 is well known; the Lord’s Prayer is here attested as part of a liturgical setting.

7 That is Papyrus 75, Codex Vaticanus, the Vulgate and some Syrian versions, including some other manuscripts. In his commentary on this prayer, Origen also attests to this difference.