

Pope Francis on the Lord's Prayer and Historical Reflections on Syriac Influence on the Lord's Prayer in Old English

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This paper is primarily a theological and linguistic study on why Pope Francis is recommending a change of wording in the Lord's Prayer from "Lead us not into Temptation" to "Do not let us be led into temptation." This paper shows that a change is necessary in the wording of the Prayer in Modern English but not in Old English, which was most likely composed correctly under the leadership and directions of the Syrian Saint Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury in the seventh century.

The following report from the "Guardian" really encapsulates and explains the current observations of Pope Francis on his perceived need to change the wording in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation" into "Do not let us fall into temptation" instead. Theologically, linguistically, comparatively, and historically speaking, the Pope raises another interesting point about the role of the devil in the formula of the Lord's Prayer. I think Pope Francis makes two important points with his comments, which I shall discuss in this short essay. I shall even try to suggest a practically impractical resolution to the problem of possibly changing the text of the Lord's Prayer recommended by Pope Francis.

Pope Francis has called for the English wording of the Lord's Prayer to be changed, because it implies God "induces temptation".

The prayer asks God to "lead us not into temptation".

But the pontiff told Italian broadcasters he believed the wording should be altered to better reflect that it was not God who led humans to sin.

He told the TV2000 channel: "It is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation."

He added: “I am the one who falls; it’s not him pushing me into temptation to which I have fallen.”

“A father doesn’t do that, a father helps you to get up immediately. It’s Satan who leads us into temptation, that’s his department.”

The 80-year-old also highlighted that the Catholic church in France had adapted the prayer, and uses the phrase “do not let us fall into temptation” instead.

The [two versions of the Lord’s Prayer](#) most commonly used in England both say “lead us not into temptation”.

“I’m not aware of any plans to change the translation in the English-speaking world but you can certainly see the logic of doing so,” said Austen Ivereigh, the pope’s biographer.

“It is not God who tempts us into sin but the enemy of human nature. But tradition and familiarity are also important factors in weighing up any decision to modify a translation.”

The Rev Ian Paul, an Anglican theologian, said the pope’s comments would make traditionalists nervous.

“The word in question is *peirasmós* [from New Testament Greek] which means both to tempt and to be tested. So on one level the pope has a point. But he’s also stepping into a theological debate about the nature of evil.

“In terms of church culture, people learn this prayer by heart as children. If you tweak the translation, you risk disrupting the pattern of communal prayer. You fiddle with it at your peril.”

The Lord’s Prayer, which is memorised by millions of Christians across the world, appears in the Bible.¹

I. “LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION”: CORRECT IN ENGLISH?

Let us examine the theological and linguistic implications for changing or retaining the

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/08/lead-us-not-into-mistranslation-pope-wants-lords-prayer-changed>

formula “Lead us not into temptation.”

1. Theologically Speaking:

Pope Francis emphasizes the traditional Catholic position that grace and free will are not opposed to each other and that we enjoy the freedom of will to cooperate with grace as we work out our salvation away from the temptations of the devil, of the world, and of human nature corrupted by original sin. In accordance with this Christian theology, it is we humans who commit sins and do good freely, with the help of grace of course, and not God alone who determines solely our bad deeds and good deeds. That is, God does not lead us into temptation and make us commit sins out of the necessity of predestination. Also, understandably in this traditional Christian perspective we often attribute the source of our proclivity to evil to the devil as in the case of Adam and Eve. However, in regard to salvation, God and we work together while we also admit that the human will cannot attain salvation by itself. As Erasmus reminds us that in working out our salvation, “Grace is the principal cause and the our free will secondary, which can do nothing apart from the principal cause since the principal cause is sufficient in itself.” That is why Christians recite the Lord’s Prayer especially when we say that we forgive freely those who have sinned against us because we are capable of doing so almost exactly as God would freely forgive our own sins by virtue of our supplication. That is why Pope Francis says that it is not God who leads humans to sin. He adds: “I am the one who falls; it’s not he [God] who is pushing me into temptation to then see how I have fallen. A father doesn’t do that; a father helps you to get up immediately. **It’s Satan who leads us into temptation**, that’s his department.” Therefore, the Pope says that wording of the English Lord’s Prayer should be: “Do not let us fall into temptation.” Now also from a linguistic perspective the Pope is correct, as I shall try to show next.



2. Linguistically Exploring: The meaning of the word “lead” in the Lord’s Prayer, *leads us to* the literal meaning, as Pope Francis says, that it is God who is leading us into temptations. We find the same expression with the same literal meaning in its current German counterpart “Führe uns nicht in Versuchung.” On the other hand, the literal meaning of the clause is different in both languages because they use the words *gieidi/gileitets* because we have a different word both in Old English and Old High German: “Ne **gelaed** us in costnunge” (Old English) and “Endi ni **gileidi** unsih in costunga” and “inti ni gileitēst unsih in costunga” (Old High German). The shared meaning in Old English and Old High German, as opposed to the current *lead us not* and *führe uns nicht* is that the prefix *-ge* alters the meaning to: “Do not let us be led into temptation.” That was the way our learned and erudite Germanic ancestors translated the Greek phrase “*μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς*” or the Latin phrase “*ne nos inducas*” (but not “*ducas*”) or the Aramaic phrase “*la tayelein*”; that is, they meant that God does not directly lead us into temptations as Pope Francis emphasizes.

Now why and how does the prefix *ge-* accomplish this purpose?

Very simply stated, the prefix *ge-* in Old English has the passive meaning as in the inscription on the *Alfred the Great Jewel*: “ÆLFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN.” That translates to “Alfred had me made.” *wyrcan* would mean “to make,” whereas *gewyrcan* would mean “to be made.” Therefore, “Ne *gelaed* us in costnunge” means “Do not let us be led into temptation.” Though the *ge-* prefix has almost disappeared from Modern English, one interesting case for the survival of *ge-* is seen in the word *handiwork* from Old English *handgeweorc*.

Now how did *ge-* disappear almost totally in Modern English? In Old English we have 183 verbs beginning with *ge-*, denoting completion or result of an action. During Middle English period (AD 1000-1500) the *ge-* prefix became *y-* as in *ybaptised*, *yoccupied*, and *yclept* (Edmund Spenser was fond of using it), but finally the *y-* prefix fell into disuse as in the case of *Lead us not into temptation*. In Modern English we do not seem to have any verb beginning with the *ge-*

prefix. The reason for its disappearance was the instressing tendency of Modern English to place the stress on the initial syllable of the root of the word even in words like *alike* and *aware*, which may be examples of the survival of the Old English *ge-* prefix.

In all the fourteenth-century-to-seventeenth English translations of the Bible like the Wycliffe version of AD 1389 (“leede us not in to temptacioun”), the Tyndale translation of AD 1526 (“Leede vs not into temptacion), the King James Version of AD 1611 (“And lead us not into temptation”), and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer of AD 1549 (“And leade us not into temptacion”), the Old English *GELAED* had already become *LEEDE/LEAD*.

How did the Old English translation found in the sophisticated use of *gelaed* and the rest of the prayer “And forgyf ūs ūre gyltas./Swā swā wē forgyfaþ ūrum gyltendum./And ne gelæd ðū ūs on costnunge,ac alȳs (redeem, ransom, free) ūs of yfele.(DATIVE), translation from the equally sophisticated Greek/Latin/Syriac, enter the Anglo-Saxon culture probably as early as the seventh century? The answer is very simple. The scholars responsible for this careful translation were erudite Greek/Latin/Syriac scholars. One distinguished English bishop who was responsible for such an accomplishment was St. Theodore of Canterbury as well as the school he had established in Canterbury for the education of the English clergy. He was a Syrian by birth and training.

Saint Theodore of Canterbury was Syrian by birth; he was born *c.* 602, like St. Paul, in Tarsus, Cilicia, Asia Minor and died Sept. 19, 690, Canterbury, Kent, England. He was the seventh archbishop of Canterbury and the first archbishop to rule the whole English Church. A distinguished historian writes in *Encyclopedia Britannica* writes:

Appointed by Pope St. Vitalian, Theodore was consecrated in 668 and then set out from Rome with SS. Adrian, abbot of Nerida, Italy, and Benedict Biscop, later abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Durham. In 669 they reached Canterbury, where Theodore made Adrian the abbot of SS. Peter and Paul monastery, afterward named St. Augustine’s. There they created a famous school influential in the lives of such brilliant scholars as the



celebrated historian St. Bede the Venerable and the skilled church architect St. [Alhelm](#). Theodore organized the English Church, many sees of which were vacant on his arrival and others of which needed to be divided. In 672 he called at Hertford the first general synod of the English Church to end certain Celtic practices and to divide dioceses. The division issue was postponed, but the synod imposed the date of the Roman Easter, established obedience for clerics and monks, forbade bishops to interfere in other dioceses, and reaffirmed the church teaching on marriage and divorce.

During this period Theodore came into sharp conflict with [Wilfrid](#), whom he had made bishop of York but whom he soon deposed. Wilfrid went to Rome in 677/678 to protest. Meanwhile, in 678, Theodore helped settle relations between King [Aethelred](#) of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia and King [Ecgfrith](#) of Northumbria, whom Aethelred had defeated in battle. Theodore's synod at [Hatfield](#) in 679 cleared the English Church from associations with the heresy of the [Monothelites](#). In 686 he mended the conflict with Wilfrid by admitting his error and effecting Wilfrid's restoration. Theodore's *Penitential*, a collection of his rulings made by his [disciples](#), became influential in [England](#) and on the Continent.

Theodore's greatest achievement was to adapt the Roman ideal of a centralized church to English conditions. His establishment of a centralized church under the archbishopric of Canterbury in close alliance with [secular](#) rulers was maintained by his successors.²

Indeed, Theodore and the members of his school knew their Greek, Latin, Syriac, and English well enough to give a faithful translation of the originals so much so they translated the Lord's Prayer found in the original Greek and Syriac versions of Matthew correctly into Old English. They translated the Greek *καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν* (*kai mē eisenenkēis hēmas eis peirasmon*) and the Syriac "U la Teye lein l'nezyona" as "ne gelaed

² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Theodore-of-Canterbury>

us in costnunge.” In other words, they deliberately refused to use the word *laedan* meaning “lead” in the sentence and instead the loaded word *gelaed*.

In the Old English version *costnunge* means “trial” or “tribulation” or even “tentatio” as long as the word is understood as “trial,” not as “temptation” in the current meaning of the word. In addition, they also followed the Greek and Syriac versions of the Lord’s Prayer “ἀλλὰ ρῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ. (*alla rhusai hēmas apo tou ponērou*) and “Ella pazane min bisha” as “Save us from the Evil One” because the Greek *apo tou ponerou* and Syriac *min bisha* mean “from the Evil One” especially if we translate the Greek *ponerou* in masculine (not neuter) gender as in Syriac. That means also that in the Latin “*Sed libera nos a malo*,” the word *malus* in *a malo* is meant in the masculine gender “from the Evil One” and not in the neuter gender ‘from evil.’”

Another likely question to ask here is whether a theological change instituted this linguistic change or whether the linguistic change brought about a theological change. I personally believe that it worked both ways, Let me explain.

There is some reason to believe that perhaps during the Reformation period or Martin Luther’s reformation movement, which itself was influenced by the Wyciffite or Lollard Movement, might have given a theological justification to this change. Both Jan Wycliffe and Martin Luther were scholastic philosophers, theologians, Biblical translators, reformers, and seminary professors one at Oxford and the other at Wittenberg. Both were influential dissidents within the Roman Catholic priesthood during the fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Hus was influenced by the ideas of Wycliffe to lead a reform movement in his native Bohemia. Historians point out that Wycliffe’s influence on Martin Luther came through the sermons of Jan Huss (+1415) of Bohemia (Czech Republic). Hus was condemned and executed as a heretic. Luther wrote about Hus: “I was overwhelmed with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill.”

Pope Francis and Martin Luther: Disagreement

All three reformers, Wycliffe, Hus, and Luther, declared the Bible as the sole source and authority (*sola scriptura*) of Christian faith. In fact, Luther went further and proclaimed the absolute sovereignty of God in every human act to the point of rejecting any agency to human freedom in working out salvation. Let me explain further.

As a devout but a fiery biblical literalist, Luther based his views about necessity and freedom on what he claims are the explicit teachings of the Scriptures: Does the Bible teach with absolute certainty that fallen man has free will? Luther's answer was no because the Bible nowhere teaches that we are endowed with a free will that will help bring about our salvation. On the contrary, he argued that St. Paul teaches in his Epistle to the Romans 3:28 that it is by faith [Luther added *alone* here in his translation of the Epistle!] and not by works that we are saved. That is why the Church had already unequivocally rejected, Luther emphasized, Pelagius' teaching that original sin did not taint human nature and that the human will is still capable of choosing good and evil as Adam and Eve did. Therefore the question of the freedom or bondage of the will is in no way an irreverent, inquisitive, or superfluous issue; instead, it has to do with the central issue of the Christian faith: what does God do in salvation, and what do we humans do? Luther's answer is straightforward: we are by nature children of wrath, slaves to sin and to Satan, so that if we are to be saved it must be by God's grace only. The Creator directly energizes and controls all the acts of His creatures. All events are necessitated by His sovereign will. Therefore, Luther continued that to give freedom to something that has no freedom is to apply to it a term that is empty of meaning, which means free will is a term applicable to the Divine Majesty only, for only He can do and does what He wills, and, therefore, to ascribe free will to mortals is blasphemy. If human will is not free but is under God's sovereign control, it follows logically that God is the ultimate cause of evil.

Understandably Pope Francis, as the expected upholder of the traditional biblical and Catholic tradition on the role free will and good works in the economy of salvation, would reject

Luther's theory on the bondage of will and of God as the necessary cause of our evil deeds. But he and Luther agree on the inherited doctrine on the Devil.

II. THE ROLE OF THE DEVIL IN THE LORD'S PRAYER: "DELIVER US FROM EVIL OR FROM THE EVIL ONE?"

In the second part of this paper let us examine Pope Francis' statement that "It's Satan who leads us into temptation, that's his department

Francis and Luther on the Devil

." Since both Pope Francis and Father Martin Luther appear to agree with the view that the Devil plays an important role in our spiritual struggles, let us start with their views on the Devil though they have different views on human freedom.

Luther on the Role of the Devil

As a profound scholar of the theology of the Church Fathers and as a fierce explicator of the biblical teaching on salvation, Martin Luther saw the role of Christ as a conqueror of Satan.

According to Heiko Obermann, the distinguished scholar on the theology of Luther, writes:

Luther's world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon and only his faith in Christ is retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real



to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end. To argue that Luther never overcame the medieval belief in the Devil says far too little; he even intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic war for mastery over Church and world. No one can evade involvement in this struggle. Even for the believer there is no refuge—neither monastery nor the seclusion of the wilderness offer him a chance for escape...

There is no way to grasp Luther's milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the Devil: without a recognition of Satan's power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ—and Luther's faith becomes a confused delusion in keeping with the tenor of his time. Attempts are made to offer excuses for Luther by pointing out that he never doubted the omnipotence of God and thus determined only narrow limits for the Devil's activities. Luther himself would have been outraged at this view: the *omnipotent* God is indeed real, but *as such* hidden from us. Faith reaches not for God hidden but for God revealed, who, incarnate in Christ, laid Himself open to the Devil's fury.... To Luther Christmas was the central feast: "God for us." But that directly implies "the Devil against us." (Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp.104-6).

Francis Also preaches the same doctrine on the devil in his sermons:

Starting with his very first homily as the bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has regularly reminded believers that the Devil is real, that we must be on guard, and that our only hope against him is in Jesus Christ.

Here are 13 of Pope Francis' most direct quotes on the matter:



1) “When one does not profess Jesus Christ, one professes the worldliness of the devil.”
First homily, 3/14/2013 – [Text](#)

2) “The Prince of this world, Satan, doesn’t want our holiness, he doesn’t want us to follow Christ. Maybe some of you might say: ‘But Father, how old fashioned you are to speak about the devil in the 21st century!’ But look out because the devil is present! The devil is here... even in the 21st century! And we mustn’t be naïve, right? We must learn from the Gospel how to fight against Satan.”
Homily on 4/10/2014 – [Text](#)

3) “[The Devil] attacks the family so much. That demon does not love it and seeks to destroy it. [...] May the Lord bless the family. May He make it strong in this crisis, in which the devil wishes to destroy it.”
Homily, 6/1/2014 – [Text](#)

4) “It is enough to open a newspaper and we see that around us there is the presence of evil, the Devil is at work. But I would like to say in a loud voice ‘God is stronger.’ Do you believe this, that God is stronger?”
General audience, 6/12/2013 – [Text](#)

5) “Let us ask the Lord for the grace to take these things seriously. He came to fight for our salvation. He won against the devil! Please, let us not do business with the devil! He seeks to return home, to take possession of us... Do not relativize; be vigilant! And always with Jesus!”
Homily, 11/8/2013 – [Text](#)



6) “The presence of the devil is on the first page of the Bible, and the Bible ends as well with the presence of the devil, with the victory of God over the devil.”

Homily, 11/8/2013 – [Text](#)

7) “Either you are with me, says the Lord, or you are against me... [Jesus came] to give us the freedom... [from] the enslavement the devil has over us... On this point, there are no nuances. There is a battle and a battle where salvation is at play, eternal salvation. We must always be on guard, on guard against deceit, against the seduction of evil.” Homily, 10/11/2013 – [Text](#)³

Therefore, We should Pray “Deliver Us From the Evil One

Indeed, thus both men, Francis and Luther, appear to echo faithfully the biblical teaching on the place of devil in the universal struggle of the believer who is trying to live a good life. Since that is the case, at least the modern English version of the Lord’s Prayer woefully mistranslates the petition clause on the devil as “But deliver us from evil.” It should rather be translated as “But deliver us from the evil one.” Let me explain further.

Simply stated, the Old English version of the Lord’s prayer (*of yfele*) retains the meaning “from the Evil One” (the Devil) as in the Latin (*a malo*), Greek (*ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ*), and especially as in Syriac (*min bisha*).

Arguments from linguistics, theology, and comparative religion support this position.

Linguistically speaking:

³ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/blog/13-warnings-from-pope-francis-on-mans-oldest-foe-the-devil>.



The Syriac version has always understood *min bisha* to mean “from the Evil One,” by understanding *bisha* in the masculine gender, whereas the neter “from evil” would be *min bishtha*. In Old English, Latin, and Greek the same should be the case, though one may argue that though the ablative case is the same in masculine, feminine, and neuter genders, “from evil” in the neuter gender is an acceptable translation. But the Syriac version does not support that argument especially in the light of the evidence from theology and comparative religion.

Theologically speaking:

The classic theory of atonement endorsed by the Bible and taught in the Christian churches for the first one thousand years until the time Anselm declares redemption as a conflict between God and the Devil and victory of Christ over the Devil and his minions who had held humankind in bondage because of the sin of Adam so much so humans were all slaves of the Devil. Paul exhorts Christians: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:11-12). I Peter 5:8 admonishes: “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.” It is natural then that salvation be expressed in terms of a transference “from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18); “He has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the Kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins (Colossians 1: 13-14); “He has overridden the Law and canceled every record of the debt that we had to pay ... and so he got rid of the Sovereignities and the Powers, and paraded them in public, behind him in his triumphal procession” (Col. 2:14-15).

Augustine’s clarification of the control of the Devil over humankind is relevant to the understanding of the Lord’s Prayer because he rejects the view that God lead us into temptation: “The manner in which man was handed over into the power of the devil should not be understood

in this way, namely, that God did it or ordered it, but that he only permitted it, justly however. When the sinner deserted Him [God], the author of sin [the Devil] enslaved the sinner.”⁴

How did the powerful persona of the Evil One or the tempter and adversary of God as portrayed in the Gospels enter Christian theology? The answer in simplistic terms is twofold: from Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, with which the Gospel writers were familiar in the Jewish environs of Palestine and in the Jewish milieu of Greek-speaking Libya and Egypt. It is noteworthy that evangelists composed their Gospels in North Africa where most manuscript fragments of the Gospels, beginning with the Rylands Library Papyrus P52 of the middle of the second century AD from Upper Egypt, survive.

1. Zoroastrian Influence on the Satan of the Bible

The influence of Zoroastrian thought (from at least c. 1000 BC) on Judaism is easily traced to the Babylonian/Persian captivity of Israel from 607 to 537 BC. The clearest Gospel admission to Zoroastrian influence can be seen in Matthew’s reference of to the presence of the Persian *magi* (Zoroastrian priests) during the infancy of Jesus (Matthew 2:10). Suffice to say for brevity’s sake that the Zoroastrian influence may be traced to the presence of the Zoroastrian devil Ahriman (Angra Mainyu) as the precursor of the biblical “Satan” (“accuser” or “adversary”). As Wikipedia puts it, “According to Zarathustra, Ahura Mazdā created the universe and the cosmic order that he maintains. He created the twin spirits **Spenta** Mainyu and Angra Mainyu (**Ahriman**)—the **former** beneficent, choosing truth, light, and life; and the latter destructive, choosing deceit, darkness, and death.” Spenta Mainyu is the precursor of the biblical Holy Spirit starting from Genesis 1:2. As an aside, let me point out that the Iranian one supreme God Ahura Mazda (“Mighty Wisdom”) appears in the plural as gods (devas/suras) in the polytheistic Indian Vedic religion; also, in Indian scriptures the Asuras (derived from *ahura* “powerful”), even though of divine origin, are enemies of the suras or devas (“heavenly” or mighty” probably formed by

⁴ *De Trinitate*, XII, 16: PL, 42:1026.

removing the putative negative prefix *a-* of ahura/asura; it is also noteworthy that Iranian *h* tends to become *s* in Sanskrit as in Hindu becoming Sindhu (Indus River). To resume: The Wikipedia author continues:

Satan is a malevolent figure in the Abrahamic religions who seeks to seduce humans into falsehood and sin.[1][2] In Christianity and Islam, he is usually seen as a fallen angel, or a jinn, who used to possess great piety and beauty, but rebelled against God out of hubris. God allows Satan temporary power over the fallen world and grants him a host of demons. A figure known as "the satan" first appears in the Tanakh as a heavenly prosecutor, a member of the sons of God subordinate to Yahweh, who prosecutes the nation of Judah in the heavenly court and tests the loyalty of Yahweh's followers by forcing them to suffer. During the intertestamental period, possibly due to influence from the Zoroastrian figure of Angra Mainyu, the satan developed into a malevolent entity with abhorrent qualities in dualistic opposition to God. In the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, Yahweh grants the satan (referred to as Mastema) authority over a group of fallen angels to tempt humans to sin and punish them.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Satan tempts Jesus in the desert and is identified as the cause of illness and temptation. Satan is described in the New Testament as the "ruler of the demons" and "the God of this Age." (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satan>).

2. Buddhist Influence on Temptation Narratives

We have established the theory of how Satan or the Evil One has entered the biblical narratives due to the influence of Zoroastrian theology on the exiled Jews in Babylon/Persian Empire. During the early years of Christianity when the Gospels came to be written, it was Buddhism that had the greatest influence on those Christian writers. One of the many striking Buddhist sources found in the Gospels is the story of Jesus' temptations at the hands of the Satan, which parallels Buddha's own temptations engineered by the Evil One called "Mara" in the Buddhist Scriptures. Let us very briefly compare the Christian narratives of temptation with their Buddhist counterparts.⁵

⁵ Like Christian Lindtner, Michael Lockwood, Duncan Derrett, and a host of distinguished scholars, I have also demonstrated the influence of Buddhist doctrines on the Christian Gospels in my books *Buddha and*



Temptation Stories: Christian

According to Matthew and Luke, Jesus, after having fasted for forty days and [after having been enlightened like the Buddha], is overcome by hunger while in the wilderness; the devil tempts him and demands that Jesus turn stones into bread, throw himself down from Temple pinnacle and thereby commit suicide obviously, and finally worship him (the devil) in order to become the master of the world; Jesus rebukes the devil, who “departs from him for a while.” This last sentence “[The Evil One] departs from him for a while” takes on great significance in all the four Gospels, especially in the Fourth Gospel, with the arrest of Jesus.

Temptation Stories: Buddhist

Though in the Buddhist tradition Mara (the Devil) appears in different guises or with different interpretations, in the temptation stories he appears as a demon or as the embodiment of the power of evil. The word *mara* comes from the root *mr*, which means “die”; that is, Mara, the demon is associated with death as well just as the Devil is in the writings of John: “He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning.... He is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44-45).

The Buddhist texts in general include the following: Buddha’s temptation in solitude, the devil in person with the name of Mara, fast and hunger, rejection of the request for the miracle of transformation of the Himalaya mountain into gold (with an indirect reference of turning stone into meat in the *Padhana Sutta*,⁶), the specific demand of voluntary suicide (entering into nirvana), and the generous offer of dominion over kingdom,⁷ and the temptation that Buddha

Christ: Nativity Stories and Indian Traditions and *The Trial of Jesus and His Death on the Cross: Buddhist Sources of Gospel Narratives*.

⁶ *Padhana Sutta, Sutta Nipata*, III.2, trans. John Ireland: “Mara: “For seven years I followed the Lord step by step but did not find an opportunity to defeat that mindful Awakened One. A crow flew around a stone having the colour of fat: ‘Can we find even here something tender? May it be something to eat?’ Not finding anything edible the crow left that place.”

⁷ *Samyutta Nikaya*, trans. H. Oldenberg; cited by Richard Garbe, p. 53: “At one time the Exalted One (Buddha) was living in the land of Kosala, in the Himalaya, in a log hut....He thought: ‘It is really being possible to rule as a king in righteousness without killing or causing to be killed...without suffering pain or inflicting pain on another.’ Then Mara, the Evil One, perceived in his mind the thoughts of the Buddha and spoke thus: “May the Exalted One be pleased to rule as a king in righteousness without killing...without suffering pain or inflicting pain on another....” If the Exalted



commit suicide

To summarize the longish Buddhist passages (especially the first one) of the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*: When Buddha had attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree (the tree of knowledge)⁸ and had extinguished all desire within himself, he finally escaped the power of the Evil One. Being well aware of this, the Evil One still cherished the hope of keeping mankind in his fetters, and so he wanted the Enlightened One to abandon his mission of proclaiming the truth he had obtained and to depart from this life. He addressed Buddha: “Now that he has obtained Enlightenment, may the Exalted One enter into Nirvana.” Knowing the true intentions of the Evil One, Buddha declares that he would not put an end to his life until he had assembled enough disciples, monks, nuns, and converts in order to ensure the continuance of his doctrine and virtuous living among mankind.⁹ It is in this context that I see Jesus’ refusal to jump off the pinnacle of the Jerusalem Temple; that is, Jesus refuses to commit suicide because he is well aware of his mission to save humankind and to welcome death only when his foreordained time comes (John 7:6).

Interestingly, the Buddhist Scriptures give elaborate theological explanations to the temptation stories; on the other hand, the Synoptic Gospels seem to present the temptation scenes as a tightly organized short debate with each side quoting Hebrew Scriptures to make his point, which is not the case in the Fourth Gospel, where the conflict between Jesus begins in the first chapter (Word of John 1:1-5) and ends only with his death on the cross and his descent into the abode of the dead (Acts 2:27; 2:31; 1 Peter 3:19-21; See Harrowing of Hell portrayed in the Gospel of Nicodemus) and finally in his ascent into heaven.

One...desired, he could ordain that the Himalaya, the king of the mountains should become gold, and it would turn into gold.’ Buddha motions him away. ‘What would it profit the wise man if he possessed even a mountain of silver or of gold? He who has comprehended sorrow, whence it springs, how can he bend himself to desire? ... Then Mara the Evil One said, “The Exalted One knows me,” ... and disconcerted and disheartened he rose and went away.”

⁸ The Fourth Gospel refers to the enlightenment episode and Mara’s acknowledgment of Siddhartha’s Buddha status in the story of Nathanael: “When you were under the fig tree, I saw you; Nathanael says to him, ‘Rabbi, you are the son of God; you are the King of Israel’” (John 1:48-49).

⁹ Garbe, 55.



One notable difference between the Christian and Buddhist scenes of the enlightenment of the protagonists is that, whereas the baptism of Jesus and the epiphany with the descent of the Holy Spirit take place in the Jordan before the temptation episode, in the Buddhist tradition the baptism (bath) of Buddha in the river Nirañjana with the vision of Sujata takes place after Buddha's fast. Remarkably we Syrian Christians in the East have always celebrated the Feast of Epiphany as the Baptism of Jesus and have called the Feast *Rakkuly* ("night-bath") in Malayalam.

Further, the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, while preaching the good news, is very active in casting out demons¹⁰ whereby Jesus is trying to redeem mankind from the dominance and control of Satan (Mara), who continued to enslave humans by possessing them: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them" (Matthew 4:23-24).

Just as in the Buddhist tradition the Buddha commands Mara, the Evil One, to leave him, Jesus commands the demons to leave the possessed ones.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke viewed Jesus' acts of exorcism primarily as the defeat of Satan, the Evil One. Dunn and Twelftree write:

He [Jesus] was casting out Satan himself (Mark 3:23). He was the one stronger than the strong (Satan) who had overcome Satan and was now plundering his goods (Mark 3:27). His response to the disciples who rejoiced at the demons being subject to them in Jesus' name was, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven' (Luke 10:18). In other words, Jesus saw his exorcisms not so much as cures of some merely physical ailment or mental illness,

¹⁰ Jame D. G. Dunn and Graham Twelftree, "Demon-Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament," at http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/094-03_210.pdf. For the numerous examples for casting out demons in the New Testament, see <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Bible-Verses-About-Casting-Out-Demons/>.



but as the wresting of particular individuals and personalities from the grip of the dominating influence of Satan. That is to say, Jesus not only saw various maladies as manifestations of the single power of evil (Satan), but he also claimed that release could be won by tackling the malady (whatever the physical manifestation) at its spiritual root and source.¹¹

On the contrary, The Fourth Gospel does not give the Temptation episode in one single narrative but scatters the ideas embodied in the temptation story in several parts of his Gospel, beginning with the Prologue, and ending in the Apocalypse, as I have shown in a separate article.¹²

Chronology: Buddhist and Christian Temptation Stories

One may justifiably ask: Is it at all possible from a historical perspective that the Gospel writers did use Buddhist Scriptures and traditions as they composed their gospels. Chronologically speaking and briefly stated, the Buddhist Temptation stories are much older than their Gospel renditions since we find Mara's attack and Temptation as well as the scene of Buddha receiving homage from the animals of the forest¹³ carved in stone on the North Gate and East Gate of Stupa I at Sanchi respectively, dating from the first century BCE.¹⁴ Therefore as for the question who borrowed from whom can be unequivocally answered: The Christian Gospel writers used their Buddhist sources judiciously, but not slavishly, for developing their own religious ideas; that is, the Gospel writers cleverly adhered to the classical literary conventions not only of imitation but also of emulation/transformation (*mimesis* and *diegesis*).

¹¹ http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/094-03_210.pdf.

¹² It is an unpublished article so far.

¹³ See Mark 1: 12-13: "Thereupon the spirit sent him away into the wilderness, and there he remained for forty days tempted by Satan. He was among the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴ Michael Lockwood, *Buddhism's Relationship to Christianity*. (Chennai, 2010), p. 36: "Mara is seen seated [just to the left of] the middle of the panel as a god of the sixth heaven with an umbrella over his head. The Bodhi tree at the left represents the would-be Buddha symbolically. Sujata [the small figure, to the extreme left] appears with an offering of food for him. The figure opposite [standing, immediately to the right of the tree] also represents Mara [worshipping the Buddha-to-be, post-conflict] with one of his sons and daughters. On the extreme right are the grimacing figures of his army. The panel portrays the contest between Mara, the lord of the world of desire, and the Bodhisattva, the annihilator of lusts and desires."



Therefore, on account of the ubiquitous presence of the Evil One in the Gospel records of the ministry of Jesus especially in all the miracle stories where he cast out devils in the process of healing the sick, I am even inclined to suggest that the Lord's Prayer itself is a celebration of the victory of Jesus over the Evil One and an invocation that the faithful too to become victorious over the Evil One; in fact, in the Aramaic version of the Lord's Prayer, to repeat, we say, "Deliver us from the Evil One (*min bisha*)" [as you have been delivered]; besides, we also have the tropes of seat or abode in heaven, bread, kingdom, temptation, and worship of God are all found in this prayer.

One Word on Luke's Version of the Prayer

My study has already shown how complicated the origin and development of the Lord's Prayer is in the early Christian community. Let us also keep in mind that there is a shorter version of it in Luke 11:2-4: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And do not let us be led into temptation/trial." Luke omits "But deliver us from the Evil One. " But in both Matthew and Luke, according to the Syriac Pshitta version, one condition for our seeking God's forgiveness for our sins is that we should already have forgiven those who have offended us. The Syriac version in both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels say, "Forgive us our sins as we have forgiven our debtors (or those who sin against us) (*Washwokh l'an houbain wahathahein aikanna d'aap hanan shwakkhen I'hayyawein*)."

Suggestions/Recommendations

As for the English versions of the Lord's Prayer, we have seen that there are various versions as developed throughout the history of the evolving English language as in every other language. What are the best options for addressing this issue?

1. Practically speaking, it is impossible to change the current version of the Lord's Prayer which we have all memorized and recited from childhood.
2. If the Pope recommends any changes, we can institute the changes during Mass when Catholics recite the Lord's Prayer during Holy Mass. We have done it before many times as is the case with the present Lord's Prayer itself. The Spanish version ("Ne nos dejes caer en la tentacion") does not require any change; the French-speaking Catholics in Benin and Belgium have already begun using the new translation starting at Pentecost last June. The German bishops of the land of Martin Luther do not think that a change is needed, which I think is a smart decision.
3. English-speaking Catholics may be instructed to recite the Lord's Prayer in Latin or Old English during Mass. As a purist-linguist of the old school I would welcome this change. However, I also know that, as St. Paul's Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles repeats the wise admonition of Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1624, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).

Without adding any personal observations, let me just point out that James, Apostle and brother of Jesus has these things to say on two relevant points under discussion here: (1) temptation not by God and (2) Justification and salvation not by faith alone.

(1) God Does not Lead us into Temptation

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has

conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:12-13).



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(2) Justification and Salvation are not by Faith Alone.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (James 1: 14-26).

Understandably Pope Francis, as the expected upholder of the traditional biblical and Catholic tradition on the role free will and good works in the economy of salvation, would reject Luther’s theory on the bondage of will and of God as the necessary cause of our evil deeds. But he and Luther agree on the inherited doctrine on the Devil.