

Jimmy Akin, “No, Pope Francis Is Not Changing the Lord’s Prayer| National Catholic Register” in *National Catholic Register*, Blog December 11, 2017.

Newspapers & websites erupted over the weekend with headlines like:

*Lord's Prayer*: Pope Francis calls for change (BBC)

Pope Francis proposes change to the *Lord's Prayer* (AOL)

Pope Francis wants to change the *Lord's Prayer* - Here's why (Catholic.Org)

Pope Francis calls for *Lord's Prayer* translation to be changed (Catholic Herald)

Shame on all of them. The pope didn’t call for any changes. This is a classic case of the pope saying something & the media going hog-wild & completely distorting it.

### ***How did all this start?***

Italian television aired an hourlong interview with Pope Francis in which he was asked about a new version of the *Lord's Prayer* in France.

### ***What did the French church do?***

They adopted a new translation of the *Lord's Prayer* for use in the liturgy. It went into effect on the first Sunday of Advent (which is why Pope Francis was being asked about it).

Basically, they changed the line that in English reads “& lead us not into temptation” to one that means “do not let us fall into temptation.”

### ***What did Pope Francis say about this?***

He reportedly said:

The French have changed the text & their translation says “don't let me fall into temptation,” . . . It's me who falls. It's not Him who pushes me into temptation, as if I fell. A father doesn't do that. A father helps you to get up right away. The one who leads into temptation is Satan.

Various accounts also report him saying that the “lead us not into temptation” rendering is not a good translation because it is misleading to modern ears.

### ***So he isn't about to impose a new translation on everybody?***

No. Commenting that a translation can be misleading is not the same thing as mandating a new one. People have grown up with the *Lord's Prayer*, & changing it is a big deal.

The French bishops thought it was worth making a change, but it's up to local episcopal conferences what they want to do in this regard.

The New York Times reports, though, that “the pope suggested that Italian Catholics might want to follow suit.”

### **What does the “lead us not into temptation” line really mean?**

It depends on what kind of translation you are doing. The Greek verb in this passage – *eisphero* - means “bring,” so “do not bring us into temptation” or “lead us not into temptation” are good, literal translations. However, that’s not all there is to the story.

Theologically speaking, God does not tempt anyone. Thus the book of James states:

*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted with evil & he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured & enticed by his own desire (Jas. 1:13-14).*

The petition in the *Lord’s Prayer* thus needs to be understood as a request that God protect us from temptation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

CCC 2846 This petition goes to the root of the preceding one, for our sins result from our consenting to temptation; we therefore ask our Father not to “lead” us into temptation. It is difficult to translate the Greek verb used by a single English word: the Greek means both “do not allow us to enter into temptation” & “do not let us yield to temptation.” “God cannot be tempted by evil & he himself tempts no one”; on the contrary, he wants to set us free from evil. We ask him not to allow us to take the way that leads to sin. We are engaged in the battle “between flesh & spirit”; this petition implores the Spirit of discernment & strength.

### **Shouldn’t we use as literal a translation of the Lord’s Prayer as possible?**

We’re already not doing so. The previous petition in the standard Catholic version reads “& forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

That’s not what the Greek literally says. It says, “& forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt. 6:12).

Debts are a Semitic metaphor for sins, & the English translators have rendered this non-literally as “trespasses” to make the concept clearer to English-speakers.

Lk did the same thing for Greek-speakers in his version of the *Lord’s Prayer*, where this petition reads, “& forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us” (Lk 11:4).

Notice how Lk shifts the first reference to “debts” to “sins” to make the meaning clearer. Also note that, since Lk is divinely inspired, God doesn’t have a

fundamental problem with using less literal translations to help people understand.

***If the Catholic Church changed its translation, we'd be out of sync with other Christians. Shouldn't all Christians who speak the same language use the same version of the Lord's Prayer?***

We're already not. Not only do English-speaking Catholics use "trespasses" where Protestants use "debts," English-speaking Protestants also typically add a coda at the end:

*For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever.*

That's not in the original Greek manuscripts & apparently started in the liturgy & then crept into some later copies of Mt, which were used by Protestant translators early on. (Modern Protestant translations typically omit this line or relegate it to a footnote as a result.)

***But surely it's a violation of God's will for Christians to be using different versions of the Lord's Prayer!***

You might think that, but the Bible indicates otherwise. There have been differences in how the *Lord's Prayer* is said going all the way back to the beginning.

We know that in the first century some Greek-speakers were using Mt's version, which reads:

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy 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 lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Mt. 6:9-13).*

But other Greek-speakers (especially those evangelized by St. Paul) used a quite different & shorter version:

*Father,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Give us each day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us;  
And lead us not into temptation (Lk 11:2-4).*

There might be a certain desirability for all Christians to be able to say the same version of the same prayer, but think about what we've got here: Two different divinely inspired versions of the prayer.

Whatever utility there may be to a common recitation of the *Lord's Prayer*, it isn't a fundamental priority for God or he wouldn't have given us two different inspired versions in the Bible.

***Are the French doing something innovative & unheard of by changing their version of the translation?***

No. The standard Spanish & Portuguese translations already have the equivalent of "*Do not let us fall into temptation.*" The French are just doing the same thing now. (Incidentally, the fact the pope is a native Spanish-speaker means he's used to the Spanish version with "*Do not let us fall into temptation,*" so one might expect him to have a preference for it.)

***Should Protestants be worked up about this?***

Not really. They should be able to recognize the points made above - which are not controversial - & the pope isn't planning on doing anything at all here, much less anything that would affect them.

Protestants also have different versions of the *Lord's Prayer* in circulation in their own communities. Some use the version straight out of the King James - with old-fashioned words like "*art*" & "*Thy*." But others use more modern language versions, with terms like "*is*" & "*your*."

For that matter, some less-literal Protestant translations already vary the last petition along the lines discussed above. Here are some examples:

*& don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one* (New Living Translation).

*Don't allow us to be tempted. Instead, rescue us from the evil one* (GOD'S WORD Translation).

*Keep us from being tempted & protect us from evil* (Contemporary English Version).

*Do not let us be tempted, but keep us from sin* (New Life Version).

***So who's right here?***

Nobody is definitively in the right or in the wrong. The divinely inspired word of God gives us two very different versions of the *Lord's Prayer*, which shows us that God does not mind different versions being in circulation.

Further, one of these inspired versions (Lk's) uses a less literal translation of Jesus' original Aramaic (i.e., "*sins*" instead of "*debts*"), so God doesn't have a fundamental problem with less literal translations as a way of helping people understand what they are saying.

We can acknowledge the benefits of having a common version we use together in the liturgy, & personally, I wouldn't favour changing the English version of it. However, that's not anything anyone is proposing - not the pope, & not the U.S. bishops. So let's chill & recognize this for what it is: Yet another case of the media doing a sloppy, incompetent job.

Jimmy Akin was born in Texas & grew up nominally Protestant, but at age 20 experienced a profound conversion to Christ. Planning on becoming a Protestant pastor or seminary professor, he started an intensive study of the Bible. But the more he immersed himself in Scripture the more he found to support the Catholic faith. Eventually, he entered the Catholic Church. His conversion story, "*A Triumph and a Tragedy*," is published in *Surprised by Truth*. Besides being an author, Jimmy is the Senior Apologist at Catholic Answers, a contributing editor to Catholic Answers Magazine, & a weekly guest on "*Catholic Answers Live*."

