

Msgr Charles Pope, "Why I Oppose Changing the Words of the Our Father" in *National Catholic Register*, Blog June 11, 2019

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/why-i-oppose-changing-the-words-of-the-our-father>

In asking that God not lead us into temptation, we are asking that he not lead us there without sufficient graces.

Given the recent decision of Pope Francis to approve a change in the translation of the Our Father in Italian from "*lead us not into temptation*" to "*do not let us fall into temptation*," I want to repeat what I have written before & intensify my opposition to such a change.

I will state, for the record, that I do not speak Italian & accept that there may be nuances to the Italian translation of which I am unaware. However, as we can surely expect, there is now going to be pressure to change the English translation as well. I oppose this & want to revisit why.

Most fundamentally, there is a notion expressed by the Pope himself & others that God does not lead us into temptation. The Pope said, "*A father does not do that...*"

But this is simply not true & is contrary to Scripture. Scripture states plainly: "*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*" (Mt 4:1). & thus, we see that it is part of the providence of God that his Son, & all who are members of Jesus' body, experience temptations & trials of various sorts. God leads us forth in life to experience & overcome these things by his grace.

So the purpose of these trials & temptations for us is that we grow by facing down opposition, error & sin, & by exhibiting obedience to the commandments of God.

This becomes clearer when we understand that the Greek word often translated as "*tempted*" is *peirasmós*, which can refer either to being "*tempted*" or to being "*tested*." &, of course, life is filled with many tests. By them we learn to master the challenges & vicissitudes of life.

Good fathers & mothers routinely expose their children to challenges, even moderate dangers, so that they can grow & learn to live in a world filled with temptations & lights contrary to the Gospel.

For example, there comes a day when a good father takes the training wheels off a bike &, despite the danger of some injury, leads his child to the test so that he or she may learn to face the danger without succumbing to the temptation

to fear. By the end of that challenging day, most children are happily riding a bike the way it is supposed to be, & they have conquered their temptation to fear.

Good fathers do this sort of thing. They are near at hand to assist or ameliorate the challenges, but they do not draw back from leading their children into such challenges, tests & into a tempting world. Good fathers also punish their children, as Scripture well attests.

So fatherhood is not a mere doting protectiveness. It also includes subjecting children to trials & tests that help mature them & prepare them for life.

Saying, as the Pope & others do, that a good father “*does not do this*” says a lot more about us & the crisis of fatherhood in our culture than it does about God. There is a tendency today to turn God into a pushover who never challenges us & wants to protect us from all difficulties. But he is our Father, not our grandfather.

It is true: We must also be careful to insist on a distinction that God does not directly tempt us to sin. Scripture also makes this clear: “*Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God ... tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured & enticed by his own desire. ... Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him*” (James 1:12-14).

So, while God does not directly tempt us to sin, he *does* lead us forth into life & into a world that has temptations; &, as James says, when we have stood the test, we will receive the crown of life. God sends us forth with his graces, but will not cancel our lives in order to preserve us from all temptations, trials or difficulties.

Rather, through Jesus he says, “*In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*” (John 16:33). & Jesus prays to his Father: “*I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one*” (17:15). So, indeed, this world, wicked & tempting though it is, is the theatre of our redemption & in it we are tested, quickened & ultimately perfected by grace. God protects us with his grace that offers us the power to overcome, though not avoid, all trials.

Consider a parent who, in an effort to protect his child from suffering or temptation, never lets the child out of his room. We would not call this love. We would not think it healthy. A good parent exposes a child by degrees to the world & imbues the child with principles to discern & overcome the lies of the world & grow in virtue by the very opposition faced.

So, of course, God leads us into temptation, into tests & trials — for our own good! He does not himself tempt us, but he permits some degree of it, assisted

by his graces, in order that we grow & our virtues develop. In asking that he not lead us into temptation, we are asking that he not lead us there without sufficient graces.

Changing the Our Father covers all this over and distorts the image of God as Father. “*Lead us not into temptation*” is the most straightforward & linguistically accurate rendering of the Greek καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν (*kai me eisenenkēs hemas eis peirasmon*). It should not be altered. Rather, we should alter our view of the Father & regain a better & more balanced notion of true fatherhood. Almost every commonly read English Bible renders it as “*lead us not into temptation*” or “*do not bring us into temptation.*” & for the good reasons already stated, leave it alone.

The biblical text is teaching us something important: namely, that we accept that God must often lead us through certain difficulties, & thus we ask that he not lead us there without the needed graces to endure & grow thereby.

I thus argue that altering the English translation of the *Our Father* to an inaccurate translation of the Greek in order to make us more “*comfortable*” surrenders a healthy notion of true fatherhood — a fatherhood that is not a mere doting love, but which is vigorous & seeks to better secure our final end more than our merely present pleasure.

Finally, in the English-speaking world, the *Lord’s Prayer* is one of the few prayers we have in common with non-Catholics. While unity with Protestants & other non-Catholic Christians is not our highest theological priority, we ought not to consider lightly making unilateral changes to the *one* prayer we do have in common.

Enough now of all this toying with sacred things. We have had far too much of this in our times. It is time we learned from Scripture & sacred Tradition & not alter it to suit our modern &, I would contend, flawed & passing notions.

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