

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Why two versions?

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Dear Father Kerper: Recently I attended a Protestant wedding service and noticed that when the soloist sang the Our Father she added an extra line. Why were these words added? I thought Catholics and Protestants have the same Scriptures.

Your great question hearkens back to the time when many Christians had a keen awareness of differences between Catholics and Protestants. Some were clearly important; others were not.

The difference between the Catholic and Protestant versions of the Lord's Prayer is an excellent example of a minor issue that sadly became inflated. Now it's been resolved, at least for most Christians.

When people use the term “Protestant Our Father,” they mean the Lord's Prayer with the additional words, “for thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory now and forever.”

Contrary to what many Catholics used to believe, these extra words were not written by Protestants. Rather, they come directly from an ancient Catholic text called The Didache, which was composed as early as 60 AD, many centuries before Protestants even existed. Much of The Didache describes in detail how Christians of the first century celebrated the Eucharist, which included several acclamations prayed aloud by the people.

One popular acclamation, also called a doxology, was: “For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever.” These words eventually disappeared from the Mass. For example, if you participate in a Mass celebrated in the Extraordinary Form – the old Latin version –

you will not hear the “extra words.”

After Vatican II, the Catholic Church restored this ancient prayer to the Mass, though not by direct attachment to the Lord's Prayer. Instead it appears between a short prayer called the “Liberate nos” and the prayer that precedes the sign of peace. By the way, this was not a wild innovation but the recovery of something quite traditional.

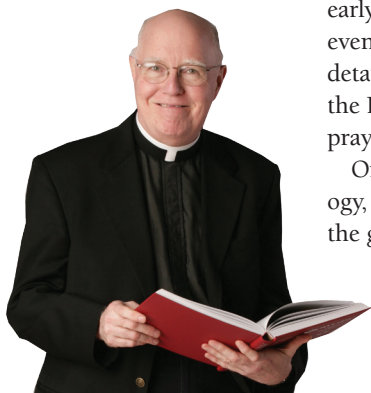
This brings us to the key question: How did Bibles come to have two versions of the Lord's Prayer? Two things happened.

First, some Greek manuscripts of St. Matthew's Gospel, which contains the text of the Lord's Prayer, had the additional words (the acclamation found in the The Didache) and others did not.

Please remember that all versions of the Bible are translations of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century, worked with a Greek manuscript that lacked the extra words. As a result, the shorter version of the Lord's Prayer contained in St. Jerome's Latin Bible entered into the Latin form of the Mass as well as the people's private vocal prayer.

Protestants acquired the longer version of the Lord's Prayer because they desired entirely new translations of Sacred Scripture based directly on the Hebrew and Greek. Up until the Protestant



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Reformation, literate people usually read Bibles that were translations of the Vulgate, St. Jerome's Latin Bible. In effect, then, people were reading a "translation of a translation." Many Protestants suspected that the Latin Bible had errors, and so demanded a return to the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

As chance would have it, the Protestant translators relied on Greek manuscripts that had the longer Lord's Prayer. Hence, the longer version appeared in Protestant vernacular Bibles and liturgical books. Over time, the shorter Lord's Prayer inevitably became identified as Catholic and the longer form as Protestant.

This brings us to the second question: How did we get two different sets of Greek manuscripts? Through glosses!

A gloss is a notation written in the margin of a page. Glosses may offer clarifications or commentary on a word or sentence. However, some glosses were little prayers added by monk-copyists. Considering the immense importance of the Lord's Prayer, it was a prime target for a gloss.

For a long time, scholars have suggested that the words "for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory now and forever" was actually a gloss that gradually – and accidentally – crept into the biblical text.

Please remember that all biblical manuscripts were meticulously copied by hand from older texts also written by hand. Though biblical manuscripts are remarkably consistent, one will also find occasional discrepancies, though never about truly important points.

Which Greek manuscripts, then, are more authentic and reliable? The ones used by St. Jerome or the ones favored by Protestant translators? No one can be sure. Moreover, most Christians now agree that that presence or absence of the "extra words" matters little, if at all. This cooling of controversy actually began 70 years ago.

In 1946, a group of scholars carefully revised the King James Bible, the much revered English translation of Sacred Scripture, which first appeared in 1611. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible, which most Protestants used until recent times, omits the so-called Protestant line in the Lord's Prayer. Moreover, almost all contemporary "Protestant" Bibles, such as the New International Version (NIV) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), now use the shorter Lord's Prayer favored by Catholics.

Some Protestants, of course, complain bitterly that this "changing" of the Lord's Prayer is an unacceptable concession to Catholics, just as some Catholics still assert that the inclusion of "Protestant words" in the Mass is a corruption of our tradition. Neither is correct.

My overly technical – and maybe even boring! – answer to your simple question shows the necessity of checking old "tales" against the historical facts. I hope we can agree that the emergence of competing Catholic and Protestant versions of the Lord's Prayer was not motivated by malice but happened quite by accident. Knowing these facts brings us a bit closer to the unity desired by Christ. ■



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