

## Prayer in the Protestant Confessions of the Sixteenth Century

When Hendrikus Berkhof included a chapter on prayer in his dogmatics, he added a brief historical survey. He concluded on the basis of this material that prayer is neglected in dogmatics. He mentions as positive exceptions Calvin, Schleiermacher, Brunner, and K. Barth. However, several proofs are given to show that prayer has not received much attention in Reformed theology in general. First, in the well-known surveys of Lutheran and of Reformed theology, the theme of prayer is not discussed. Second, the famous Leyden Synopsis, a very influential dogmatic handbook written by four professors at Leiden and published in 1625, did not devote a chapter to prayer. Third, H. Bavinck mentions prayer only occasionally.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Berkhof blames not only Reformed but also Barthian theology does not really soften the severity of this indictment of Reformed theology.

Berkhof also offers a possible explanation for this neglect of prayer. It could be an indication of the fact that either the freedom of man or the power of God is underrated. In his view, Reformed theology with its emphasis on predestination underrates the freedom of man, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century existentialism underrates the power of God.<sup>2</sup> This makes Berkhof's accusation in the direction of Reformed theology even worse. The very fact that it wanted to maintain election rendered it incapable of doing justice to prayer. There are problems with this interpretation, to be sure. To mention one, how is it possible that Calvin, who was so

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<sup>1</sup> H. Berkhof, *Christelijke Geloof* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1973) 517.

<sup>2</sup> Berkhof, *Christelijke Geloof*, 518. Berkhof qualifies this explanation by adding that there is no absolute certainty.

strong on predestination, at the same time dealt extensively with prayer.<sup>3</sup> But the seed of doubt was sown, and the nagging question remains as to whether Reformed theology in general has not neglected prayer.

L. Doekes took up the challenge in an article on “Prayer in Reformed Dogmatics after Calvin.”<sup>4</sup> He dug up the following facts:

1. During the sixteenth century, prayer was discussed extensively, not only by Calvin, but also by Olevianus, Ursinus, and F. Junius.

2. When Berkhof says that the Leyden Synopsis does not devote a chapter to prayer, he is mistaken. The Synopsis devotes a whole chapter (ch. 36) to prayer.

3. Early seventeenth-century theologians who discussed prayer were, among others, Wollehius, Bucanus, Amesius, Ussher, and Voetius. It is noteworthy that Wollehius earned his doctor’s degree with a dissertation on predestination, while Amesius and Voetius were present at the Synod of Dort. They did not see a contradiction between predestination and prayer.

4. Doekes adds quotations on prayer from theologians of the second half of the seventeenth century: Hoornheek, Coccejus, Van Maastricht, Pictet, and others.

Doekes’ article indicates what caused Berkhof’s mistake: Berkhof did not study the sources but based his historical section on general surveys. It is regrettable that the English translation of Berkhof’s *Christelijke Geloof* was published in the same year that Doekes published his devastating criticism of Berkhof in Holland.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Berkhof’s unfounded accusation of Reformed theology goes unchallenged on this continent.

It is important for the church today to know what has been taught about prayer in the past. Since the Reformation expressed its foundational convictions in its confessions and catechisms, this confessional literature is

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin discusses prayer in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. J. T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 3.20, the chapter preceding those dealing with election, *Institutes*, 3.21–24. The number of pages Calvin spends on the two topics is roughly equal.

<sup>4</sup> L. Doekes, “Het gebed in de gereformeerde dogmatiek na Calvin,” in *De biddende kerk: Een bundel studies over het gebed aangeboden bij gelegenheid van het 125-jarig bestaan van de Theologische Hogeschool te Kampen* (ed. C. Trimp; Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1979) 43–83.

<sup>5</sup> H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An introduction to the Study of the Faith* (trans. S. Woudstra; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 495. The English translation includes the changes in the fourth Dutch edition.

even more important for the views of the Reformation than the dogmatic handbooks. If we would go by the indexes in handbooks, however, we would get the impression that prayer was not important in the confession of the churches. Neither the handbook for the Lutheran Confessions, Schmidt, nor, ironically, Doekes' own handbook for symbolics contains a separate chapter on prayer.<sup>6</sup>

The fact is, however, that prayer is discussed as a separate topic in the confessional literature of the sixteenth century. Study of the confessions will reveal that prayer was one of the focal issues of the Reformation. The confessions witness to the fact that the Reformation brought about a restoration of prayer. In the following, I will present several aspects of their teaching. We are not, however, primarily interested in a historical survey. In that case, more confessions and catechisms should have been included. We first of all hope to come to a better understanding of our own confessions by looking at them against the background of their time. We also want to evaluate their teaching, especially where differences appear.

First, we will pay attention to what is taught about prayer in general; here we will mainly use confessions. In the second part, we will investigate how people were taught to pray; here we will mainly discuss catechisms.

## Prayer in General

### Worship of the Saints

The burning question in sixteenth-century discussions on prayer was the worship of the saints. Invocation of the saints was allowed in Roman Catholic practice and had an important place in the everyday life of the church members. The tone was set in the Augsburg Confession. This is the main confession of the Lutheran church. It deals with the worship of the saints in Article 21. The article begins in a positive vein by stating that the saints may be used as examples, to encourage us to follow their faith and good works. But worship of the saints is forbidden. Two reasons are given for this.

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<sup>6</sup> E. Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1948). Schlink refers for prayer to "church." Under "church" only four references can be found. In L. Doekes' handbook on Symbolics, prayer is not mentioned in the list of topics of ch. 7, but several references are given in the index, *Credo: Handboek voor de Gereformeerde Symboliek* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1975). P. Biesterveld did not pay special attention to prayer in his *Schets van de symboliek* (Kampen: Kok, 1912).

In the first place, “Scripture teaches us not to invoke the saints.”<sup>7</sup> Here one important tenet of the Reformation is mentioned: *Sola Scriptura*. It was, by then, tradition in the church to pray to the saints. The authority of honoured leaders and important theologians was invoked in support of this kind of prayer. The Augsburg Confession, however, wants to argue the issue on the basis of Scripture alone.

The second reason is “Christ alone is the Mediator, Propitiatory, High-priest and Intercessor.” Prayer must be directed to God through a mediator. There is, however, only one who can be that mediator: the one who has atoned for our sins. This shows that two central themes of the Reformation together caused the Reformed opposition to invocation of the saints: *Sola Scriptura* and *Solus Christus*. The doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of Christ and his work of atonement are essential for a prayer that is pleasing to God.

When this confession was presented to the emperor, Charles V, the opposition had to come with an answer. About twenty theologians produced a *Confutation* which was accepted by the German Diet as a sufficient refutation of the Augsburg Confession. That this issue was as important for the Roman Catholic side as it was for the Protestants can be seen in a remark Melancthon made in his *Apology* for the Augsburg Confession. He says about the *Confutation*’s defense of the invocation of saints: “Nowhere else do they expend so much sophistry.”<sup>8</sup>

Melancthon’s own discussion of this topic is one of the larger chapters of the *Apology*. He answers the *Confutation* on four issues:

1. The first deals with proofs from history. The *Confutation* had given examples of prayers to the saints in Cyprian and Jerome, incorrectly, according to Melancthon. To say it in the colourful language of the time: “These asses do not see that in the controversy between Jerome and Vigilantius there is not a syllable about invoking, but only about honouring the saints. Nor do the rest of the ancient Fathers before Gregory mention invocation.” There is no support for prayer to the saints in heaven in the church fathers.

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<sup>7</sup> See for the text of the Augsburg Confession, Ph. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (3 vols.; rev. D. S. Schaff; Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.) 3.3ff., where the Latin text and an English translation are printed side by side. Art. 21 can be found on p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> For the English translation of the *Apology*, I used *The Book of Concord* (ed. and trans. Th. G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). The section on the invocation of the saints can be found on 229–236. See for the Latin text, J. T. Müller, *Die symbolische Bücher der evangelisch-lutherische Kirche* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1876) 223–232.

2. Melanchthon does not want to deny that the saints in heaven pray for the church in general. Remarkable is his reasoning on this particular issue: since the saints prayed for the universal church while they were alive, so they pray in heaven for the church in general, although there is no proof for this in Scripture with the exception of the dream in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 15:14.<sup>9</sup> For Melanchthon, the prayer of the departed saints is not stated explicitly in Scripture; it is not more than a correct conclusion from Scripture. He does not want to debate this point, however, since the real issue for Melanchthon is not whether the saints in heaven pray, but whether we may pray to the saints.

3. This prayer to the saints is rejected, first of all, because it is not based on Scripture: “Neither a command nor a promise nor an example can be shown from Scripture for the invocation of the saints: from this it follows that consciences cannot be sure about such invocations.” We cannot prove from the Word of God that the saints are aware of the prayers directed to them. And even if they are, we cannot prove that God approves of such prayers to the saints.<sup>10</sup>

4. The most important argument for Melanchthon is clearly that invocation of the saints dishonours Christ; his opponents “even apply the merits of the saints to others and make the saints propitiators as well as intercessors. This is completely intolerable, for it transfers to the saints honour belonging to Christ alone.” Melanchthon proves this point extensively. He shows that in Roman Catholic theology the saints pray on the basis of their merit. And he brings in many passages from Scripture against this practice.<sup>11</sup>

The Protestant confessions are united on this point, with one early exception: The Ten Articles of 1536, made for King Henry VIII after his breaking away from Rome. The seventh article agrees with the honouring of the saints and the Virgin Mary; the eighth approves of the invocation of saints.<sup>12</sup> The later confessions of the English church, however, are quite clear in their rejection of prayer to the saints. To give an important example, the 42 Articles of 1552, later reduced to 39 Articles of 1562, quite

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<sup>9</sup> It seems that the German translation is more hesitant. It says no more than that it is possible that the saints in heaven pray for the church in general: “Und wiewohl wir nachgeben, dass, gleichwie die lebendige Heiligen für die ganze Kirche bitten ingemein oder in genere, also *mügen* für die ganze Kirchen die Heiligen im Himmel bitten ingemein, in genere.” See Müller, *Die symbolischen Bücher*, 224.

<sup>10</sup> *Book of Concord*, 230.

<sup>11</sup> *Book of Concord*, 230–236.

<sup>12</sup> See Schaff, *Creds of Christendom*, 1.612; and Doekes, *Credo*, 63.

clearly reject this, together with other Roman Catholic practices:

The Romishe doctrine concernyng purgatorie, pardons, worshipping and adoration, as well of images, as of reliques, and also invocation of, Saintes, is a fonde [‘futile’] thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrantie of Scripture, but rather repugnaunt to the worde of God.<sup>13</sup>

We find only one reason for the rejection here: Scripture does not teach it. That the second reason (that this practice dishonours Christ) is not given is due to the fact that the article rejects more Roman Catholic abuses.

The Belgic Confession devotes one of its largest articles to this topic (Art. 26).<sup>14</sup> The conclusion makes it abundantly clear why the invocation of the saints is rejected:

According to the command of Christ, we call upon the heavenly Father through Christ our only Mediator, as we are taught in the Lord’s Prayer. We rest assured that we shall obtain all we ask of the Father in his name.<sup>15</sup>

Seen against the background of the previous confession, we notice that the Belgic Confession is squarely in the Reformed tradition. Article 26 gives the same two-fold reason for rejecting prayers to the saints: the doctrine of Scripture (“the command of Christ”), and the doctrine of Christ (“our only Mediator”). The emphasis is, however, on the christological issue. Many texts are used to prove that Christ is the only Mediator. The Belgic Confession continues the opposition that began with the Augsburg Confession.

The Heidelberg Catechism brings forward the same two doctrines of Scripture and of Christ when it says in connection with prayer:

We must rest on this firm foundation that, though we do not deserve it, God will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord (2) as he has promised us in his Word (1).

The Heidelberg Catechism differs from the Belgic Confession, however, in

<sup>13</sup> See the text in Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, 3.501.

<sup>14</sup> At this point there is a striking difference between the Belgic Confession and its model, the Gallican Confession. Art. 24 of the Gallican Confession is not only shorter, but it also deals with other Roman Catholic wrongs: purgatory, monastic vows, etc. See J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, ed., *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976) 140. In other words, the Gallican Confession follows the pattern of the 42 Articles while the Belgic Confession goes its own way.

<sup>15</sup> For the Three Forms of Unity, we used the *Book of Praise* (rev. ed.; Winnipeg: Premier, 1993). See for Article 26: 460–461.

the absence of any polemical element in this Lord's Day.<sup>16</sup> The reason is that the Heidelberg Catechism discussed this before, in its explanation of the first commandment: "That for the sake of my very salvation I avoid and flee all idolatry, witchcraft, superstition, and *prayer to the saints or to other creatures.*"

For all the differences in organisation, the Lutheran and the Calvinist Reformation formed a unified front against the popular practice of praying to the saints. Scripture teaches us that prayer should be directed to God not through the saints, but through the only Mediator Jesus Christ.

### Prayer in the Worship Service

Another area that needed reformation was the worship service. Not all confessions contain a section on prayer in worship (for instance, our Forms of Unity do not deal with this area). Yet, the remarks that are made in other confessions are important enough to merit a brief survey.

In general it can be said that the thrust is again strongly anti-Roman Catholic. An example is Article 24 of the English 39 Articles. It states:

It is a thing playnely repugnaunt to the worde of God, and the custome of the primitive Church, to have publique prayer in the Church, or to minister the Sacramentes in a tongue not understood of the people.<sup>17</sup>

This is obviously directed against the use of Latin, the language of Rome, in the worship service. Neither the prayer directed to God, nor the administration of the sacraments to God's people should be expressed in a language the people cannot understand.

Far more extensive is chapter 23 of the Second Helvetic Confession. This confession began as a private confession of Bullinger which then became the most generally accepted confession in Switzerland (1566). The issues dealt with in this chapter characterized church life in the sixteenth century. When they sound obvious to us today, this only shows how much we take for granted.

There is, first, the rule that private prayers may be said in any language one understands. Prayers in the public worship services, however, should be said in the language the people know. The Reformed rejected public prayers in Latin.

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<sup>16</sup> The polemical element is not even present in Ursinus' explanation of the catechism; see the translation of G. W. Williard, *Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1852; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.) 622ff.

<sup>17</sup> Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, 3.502.

The Second Helvetic Confession agrees with the churches of the Reformation when it states that every prayer of the believers should be directed to God through the intervention of Christ alone. The priesthood of Jesus Christ and the true religion forbids us from calling on the saints in heaven or to use them as intercessors.

Another rule is that one should pray willingly, not by force and not for money. This does not mean that we should only pray spontaneously, when we feel like it.<sup>18</sup> The rule appears to reject two Roman Catholic customs: saying a number of prayers as a penalty (“not by force”) and paying a priest for saying prayers (“not for money”).

The second Helvetic Confession also rejects the custom of binding prayers to a certain place, as if one can only pray in a church building. It speaks of superstition here. This is an attack on the view that prayers are worth more, and will be heard more, when they are said in church buildings.

It says further that there is no need for public prayers to be the same in form and time in all churches. Churches are free in this matter. This is not directed against prescribed prayers as we have them in the liturgical forms, but against the prayers to be said at set hours in all churches.

Not all regulations in the Second Helvetic Confession are anti-Roman Catholic, however. The confession contains the positive rule that the church should pray for the government, for kings and all who are in a high position, as well as for the ministers of the church and the needs of the church.

This confession also advocates moderation in public prayers. It warns against lengthy and affected prayers. The reason is particularly interesting: the “evangelical doctrine” (i.e. preaching) should be given the most important part in the worship services. It should be prevented that people are so exhausted by lengthy prayers that they desire to leave the worship service or that the meeting is dissolved altogether.<sup>19</sup>

The Reformation needed to rethink the whole worship service. The second Helvetic Confession gives a splendid example of the Reformed approach to prayer in the worship service. It shows how much the Reformed

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<sup>18</sup> E. Koch misunderstands this passage, in my view. He summarizes it as saying that the spontaneity of prayer does not allow that it is restricted to a place of worship; see his *Die Theologie des Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968) 342. He mixes what is separate in the confession. This confession first says that one should pray *sponte* (“willingly”) and rejects two different motives for praying: *coacte* (“by force”) and *pro ullo pretio* (“for money”). The next line rejects the restriction to the place of worship as being superstitious (*superstitiose*).

<sup>19</sup> See Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, 3.296–297.

churches had learned in just fifty years. Our practice in the Reformed churches today is determined by the convictions expressed in the Second Helvetic Confession.

### **Prayer from the Heart**

Another element that deserves attention is the emphasis that prayer should be from the heart. This can be found in Lord's Day 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The first question deals with the necessity of prayer, the second explains what prayers are pleasing to God, and the Lord's Day ends with the Lord's Prayer. The second answer states that we have to call on God "from the heart." This expression, too, has to be understood against the background of its time.

We find this already in the writings of Calvin. There is first the Confession of Faith for the citizens and inhabitants of Geneva, 1537. In this very brief confession of only 21 articles, surprisingly, two articles are devoted to prayer. The first (12) deals with the well-known Reformed tenet that we should pray to God through Jesus Christ; rejecting the intercession of the saints. The second of these says:

Since prayer is no more than hypocrisy and imagination unless it proceeds from the inner affection of the heart, we believe that all prayers must be said with intelligence. And therefore we learn the Lord's Prayer, in order to know what we should ask of him.<sup>20</sup>

Calvin's main thesis here is that prayer should be from the heart. We could easily interpret that as meaning that prayer should be said with feeling, or with emotion. This is not what Calvin says, however. According to him a prayer from the heart is a prayer that is said with intelligence. There is a second surprising element; a "prayer from the heart" would be for us a freely formulated prayer. Calvin, on the other hand, connects this with a form prayer: The Lord's Prayer.

The Catechism Calvin wrote in 1542 after his return to Geneva helps us understand his opinion. The section on prayer is quite substantial (Lord's Days 35–42<sup>21</sup>), but we will only deal with this one point. When Calvin discusses the manner of praying he asks whether it is enough to pray with the tongue, or whether prayer also demands the mind and the

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<sup>20</sup> See for the text *Calvini Opera Selecta* (5 vols.; ed. P. Barth and G. Niesel; Munich: Kaiser, 1970) 1.422; a translation is given in K. S. Reid, ed., *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.) 29.

<sup>21</sup> See the translation Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 119–129.

heart. His answer is that the tongue is not always necessary, but true prayer must never lack intelligence and devoutness. Calvin proves this in the following way: “Since God is a Spirit, and in other cases always requires of men their heart, so especially in prayer by which they communicate with him.”<sup>22</sup> In this context, we have to understand Calvin’s insistence on prayer from the heart. A prayer from the heart is the opposite of a prayer with the tongue only. A prayer from the heart is a prayer with intelligence and devoutness. This does not mean an emotional prayer; it is a prayer where man knows what he says, a prayer in which he is totally involved.

This is the background of the expression in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 45: “We must from the heart call upon the one true God only.”<sup>23</sup> This prayer from the heart is the opposite of a superficial prayer, when the tongue speaks and the thoughts are somewhere else. It means a prayer in which our intellect is involved, in which we know what we are praying and saying. This does not exclude form prayers, for the same Lord’s Day begins dealing with the Lord’s Prayer. The “heart” is not taken as the seat of emotion, but as the centre of awareness and involvement.

## The Discussion of the Lord’s Prayer

For the discussion of the Lord’s Prayer, we can again begin with the early Lutheran confessions. Luther wrote two catechisms, the Shorter Catechism meant for the home and the Larger Catechism meant for the church service. The father was supposed to teach his children the Shorter Catechism; the minister was supposed to preach the Larger Catechism to the congregation. We will deal mainly with the Shorter Catechism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 120.

<sup>23</sup> I cannot find the background in one of the catechisms printed by M. A. Gooszen, *De Heidelbergsche Catechismus: Textus Receptus met Toelichtende Teksten* (Leiden: Brill, 1890) 218–223. The Minor of Ursinus comes closest, but here the “heart” is mentioned in what is rejected. This question and answer reads in translation: “What invocation pleases God and is heard by him? When we, from the one true God, in the name of Christ, ask all that he requires us to ask of him, not with feigned affection of the heart but with a true understanding of our need, and with a sure trust that we will be heard by him as he has promised us in his word,” 219.

<sup>24</sup> The Larger Catechism of Luther gives a general introduction to prayer, which can be used with profit in preparing a sermon on Lord’s Day 45, esp. for Q&A 116 of the Heidelberg Catechism; see *Book of Concord*, 420–424.

## How Many Petitions?

Luther explains the Lord's Prayer in nine questions and answers. He begins by discussing the address, "Our Father in heaven," and ends by discussing the meaning of the word "amen." He does not pay attention, however, to the sentence, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Instead, he divides the middle part of the prayer into seven petitions. What we know as the sixth petition is two petitions in Luther. "Lead us not into temptation" is taken as a petition by itself, asking God to guard and preserve us from the devil. The last petition, however, is in Luther's translation, "Deliver us from evil." He sees this as a summarizing petition to the Father, to deliver us from all kinds of evil, and finally take us to himself in heaven.<sup>25</sup>

Calvin, however, distinguishes only six petitions. In his catechism of 1537 he says:

This form and rule of prayer consists of six petitions, of which the first three are directed particularly to the glory of God.... The other three are directed to the care for ourselves and for acquiring the things that belong to our good.<sup>26</sup>

The catechism of 1542 follows the same division:

*Teacher:* Let us divide it into heads to understand better what it contains.

*Student:* It has six parts, of which the first three refer to God's glory as their end without respect to ourselves; the remaining parts refer to ourselves and consider our interest.<sup>27</sup>

The Heidelberg Catechism is obviously in the tradition of Calvin, not of Luther.

We are, therefore, confronted with the question what is better: to distinguish seven petitions, as Luther did, or six, as the Reformed tradition is. We cannot reject Luther's division out of hand, since the Bible nowhere says that this prayer consists of six petitions. The prayer is in this respect different from the law, for here the Bible speaks of the "ten words" (Ex. 34:28). Since no number is prescribed, Luther is in principle free to distinguish seven petitions.

Luther's traditional division<sup>28</sup> does not recommend itself, however. In

<sup>25</sup> See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.84.

<sup>26</sup> See the text in *Calvini Opera Selecta*, 1.405.

<sup>27</sup> Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 123.

<sup>28</sup> It can already be found in Augustine, see H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical*

the first place, the fact that there are two sentences does not compel us to divide it into two petitions, for the third and the fifth petition, too, consist of two members. Secondly, the strongly adversative word “but” indicates that the following is the positive side of what was expressed negatively. Thirdly, the two lines are related in content: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”<sup>29</sup> If the Lord’s Prayer is to be divided into petitions, the Reformed division is better than the Lutheran.

Modern exegesis, however, questions whether the Lord’s Prayer is meant to be divided into petitions with each having its own meaning. This approach is radically different from that in the Catechisms of the Reformation, where the Lord’s Prayer is explained line by line, giving to each line its special meaning. Newer exegesis states that the approach of the catechisms is not in agreement with the original intention of the Lord’s Prayer. Since this view has important implications for the explanation as given in the Catechism and for catechism preaching, we will discuss it as it is presented by Dr. J. Van Bruggen in his commentary on Matthew.<sup>30</sup>

The usual division of the prayer, he says, is in six petitions—three for God and three for our needs. This approach deals with the Lord’s Prayer as a collection of prayer topics, while it is in fact concerned with the quality of prayer. Jesus Christ is teaching not so much what to pray for, but how to pray.

This can be seen, first of all, in the teaching leading up to this prayer. Jesus Christ rejects a prayer like that of the hypocrites (Matt. 6:5) and of the priests of Baal who did not trust their god and therefore tried to talk him into doing them a favour (v. 7). Another indication is given in the in-

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*ical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. P. Christie; Winona: Alpha Publications, 1980) 151.

<sup>29</sup> Another difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran tradition is the translation of *ponerou*. It can be seen as a genitive of the masculine (‘of the evil one’) and as a genitive of the neutral (‘of the evil thing’). The neutral meaning occurs in the New Testament; see e.g. Rom. 12:9 where it is the opposite of *to agathon*. In the Lord’s Prayer, however, the masculine is to be preferred because of the preposition and because of the context. Concerning the preposition, ‘to rescue from something’ is expressed as *ruomai ek* (2 Peter 2:9; Luke 1:74), but when the verb is used for ‘to rescue from someone’ it is *ruomai apo* (Rom. 15:31 and 2 Thess. 3:2); in 2 Tim. 4:18 the meaning can be ‘to rescue from something.’ Concerning the context, the same *ponerou* is used in Matt. 5:37, which is to be taken in a personal sense; see also Meyer, *Gospel of Matthew*, 150; and J. van Bruggen, *Matteüs: Het evangelie voor Israel* (Kampen: Kok, 1990) 102–103.

<sup>30</sup> See for the following Van Bruggen, *Matteüs*, 110ff.

roduction of the Lord's Prayer: "This, then, is how you should pray" (*houtōs*, v. 9). The context indicates that Jesus teaches here the correct way of praying in contrast to wrong ways of praying. The first objection against making the Lord's Prayer into a collection of separate petitions is that in Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6 it is not just the content of the petitions that is important but the manner of prayer as well.

The second argument is based on the structure and content of this prayer. The first three lines are, in fact, one three-fold, intensive prayer for the coming of Christ's heavenly kingdom. The three sentences are parallel in form and identical in content. The addition, "on earth as it is in heaven" belongs to the three previous sentences. This section of the prayer begins with heaven ("our Father in heaven") and ends with it. The Lord's Prayer begins with an emotional and three-fold petition for the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

If Dr. Van Bruggen's exegesis is right, then the explanation given in the Catechism has no exegetical foundation, at any rate for the Lord's Days 47–49. The question needs to be investigated as to whether this newer exegesis is right. Reversing the order of the arguments, we will first discuss the question of whether the addition "on earth as it is in heaven" belongs to all three sentences. This may be possible, but it will be hard to prove. It is quite obvious that these words belong to the preceding words but how can we be sure that they belong to the three statements? Van Bruggen comes with one argument, that "heaven" in the addition corresponds with "heaven" in the address. But the simple fact that "heaven" is mentioned twice cannot support a reasoning concerning the content of the verses in between. The word "heaven" functions in a different context. In the address, the word "heaven" indicates the place where the Father resides; in the petition "your will be done," it indicates where God's will is fully obeyed. "Heaven" is mentioned in different contexts. The repetition of "heaven" does not prove that the three sentences have to belong closely together.

Van Bruggen also argues that the three sentences are identical in content. At first glance, it does not look that way, however. The subjects, God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will, are different things. The verbs used in connection with the subjects are all different too. How can it be proven that the sentences have an identical meaning? The reasoning is that this is one intensive prayer for the coming of God's heavenly kingdom. "For the sanctification of God's name takes place when his kingdom comes in which his will is done."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Van Bruggen, *Matteüs*, 111, with reference to W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Ex-*

Can the fact that the three lines are fulfilled at the same time prove that they have the same content? Imagine the following trivial example. The duke is giving a dinner party at his castle. He says:

May all the invited guests be present.  
 May the cook prepare a meal that exceeds our expectations.  
 May the wines I have chosen be the perfect complement.

These three wishes will be fulfilled at the same time. That does not mean, however, that the presence of the guests is the same as the work of the cook or the taste of the wine. In other words, admitting that the three first lines of the Lord's Prayer find their final fulfilment at the same time, does not imply that the petitions are identical in content.

Van Bruggen reduces the three to one petition, the prayer for the coming of God's kingdom. In order to prove that, it should be shown that the sanctification of God's name is the same as the coming of God's kingdom or the obedience to God's will. That, however, is obviously not right. To give an example, the prayer that God's will be done asks something for our obedience now, not just for the future when God's kingdom has come. The content of the petitions argues against the identity.

Another problem with this newer exegesis is the context in which the prayer occurs. It is true that the verses preceding the prayer emphasize the manner of prayer. Jesus warns against wordiness in prayer.<sup>32</sup> It would not agree well with this preceding rule if the first three lines are taken as repetitious.

Another consideration is that the second part of the Lord's Prayer is generally seen as consisting of three petitions. Since here a new sentence indicates a new petition, it would be consistent to take the first part, too, as three petitions.

We can conclude that every element within the prayer points towards a division into six petitions, not one three-line petition and three one-line petitions. Van Bruggen, however, came with yet another argument: the context indicates that this prayer is meant as an example for the character of prayer.<sup>33</sup>

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*egetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1965) 58. Allen, however, does not identify the meaning of the three petitions; he emphasizes that the first three petitions are eschatological in scope.

<sup>32</sup> Matt. 6:7 contains two words indicating that: the verb *battalogein* 'to babble' or 'to speak without thinking,' and *polulogia* 'wordiness'.

<sup>33</sup> "Door een dergelijke telling wordt het voorbeeld tot een bundel van gebeds-onderwerpen, terwijl het meer gaat om de kwaliteit van het bidden," Van

The intention of this prayer is not to teach what to pray for but how to pray.

It is true that the context emphasizes the manner of prayer. The emphasis on the manner of praying, however, does not imply that Jesus Christ cannot teach at the same time what Christians should pray for. Rather, the Lord Jesus mentions important prayer topics, and through these he demonstrates how to pray.

To give an example, in the Bible God's name is very important: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" (Ps. 8:1). In connection with this name, we pray that it may be hallowed.<sup>34</sup> We can, of course, be more specific and say what this sanctification of God's name would mean in different circumstances. The manner of these more specific and elaborate prayers, however, should be in line with this petition. The petitioner should not try to wheedle God into something; his prayer concerning God's name should be confident, trusting that God will answer and do what is good for the sanctification of his name.

The same applies to the other petitions. All petitions indicate a specific area. Each petition indicates a general area, and Christ shows by example how to pray for things belonging to this particular area. The emphasis on the manner of prayer does not exclude that Jesus Christ in Matthew 6:9–13 mentions different topics for prayer. He demonstrates the correct manner of prayer for distinct areas.

We can, therefore, maintain the conclusion concerning the content of the Lord's Prayer, that the catechisms of the Reformation are justified in following the tradition of dealing with the petitions separately.

### The Limited Explanation of the First Three Petitions

Returning to the Catechisms of the Reformation, I want to pay attention to a difference in the explanation of the petitions. Luther wrote the following explanation of the first petition in his Smaller Catechism:

The first petition: Hallowed be thy name.

What does this mean?

Answer: The name of God is indeed holy in itself; but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us, too.<sup>35</sup>

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Bruggen, *Matteüs*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> In the following section we will deal with the meaning of this petition.

<sup>35</sup> The translation of the answer is different from the translation given in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.81. "The name of God is indeed in itself holy; but we pray in this petition that it *may be hallowed* also by us." The German, however,

How does this happen?

Answer: When the Word of God is taught honestly and purely, and we, as the children of God, live holy lives according to it. Help us in this, dear Father in heaven! But he who teaches and lives otherwise than as God's Word teaches, profanes the name of God among us. Keep us from this, heavenly Father!<sup>36</sup>

In this explanation, the first petition has a rather limited meaning. There is first the limitation in content: the holiness of God's name is reduced to the pure teaching of the gospel and a pure life. The second limitation is the reduction to the believers: the explanation speaks only about things the believers should do. The reason for this double limitation can be seen in the first answer. Luther is faced with the problem that God's name is holy in itself. His solution is obviously that the meaning of this petition must be limited to the faith and life of the believers.<sup>37</sup>

The same limitation can be found in the discussion of the second petition: "Your kingdom come." According to Luther's Shorter Catechism, God's kingdom comes anyway and does not need our prayer. What we pray for is that it comes to us, too. God's kingdom comes to us when God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we believe God's Word and live a holy life.<sup>38</sup> Ac-

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uses *heilig* 'holy' twice: "Gottes Name ist zwar an ihm selbst heilig; aber wir bitten in diesem Gebet, das er auch bei uns heilig werde."

<sup>36</sup> The translation given in the text differs slightly from that given by Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.81; and in *Book of Concord*, 346. In our discussion a more literal translation was needed. The German text of the second answer is: "Wo das Wort Gottes lauter und rein gelehret wird, und wir auch heilig, als die Kinder Gottes, darnach leben: des hilf uns, lieber Vater im Himmel! Wer aber anders lehret und lebet, denn das Wort Gottes lehret, der entheiliget unter uns den Namen Gottes. Davor behüte uns, himmlischer Vater!"

<sup>37</sup> See also the explanation in the Larger Catechism: "But what is it to pray that his name may become holy? Is it not already holy? Answer: Yes, in itself it is holy, but not in our use of it." The Larger Catechism also has the same double meaning of this petition: "How does it become holy among us? The plainest answer is: When both our teaching and our life are godly and Christian." Luther also explains the meaning by stating the opposite, how God's name is profaned by us. God's name is profaned: 1) when men preach and speak anything in God's name that is false and deceptive; 2) when men misuse the name of God by swearing, cursing, conjuring; 3) when those who are called Christians are adulterers, drunkards, gluttons, etc. Positively it means that: 1) we cry out against all who preach and believe falsely; 2) we pray for ourselves that we may live according to the gospel; see *Book of Concord*, 425–426.

<sup>38</sup> See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.81. We quote the second answer:

tually, this is in content close to the meaning of the first petition.

The meaning of the third petition is again limited to something we have to do. God's will is done anyway, without us praying for it. We only ask that God's will be done by us. Luther explains what this means in reality:

When God breaks and brings to naught every evil counsel and will which would hinder us from hallowing the name of God, and prevent his kingdom from coming to us (such as the will of the devil, of the world, and of our own flesh); but makes us strong and steadfast in his Word and faith even unto our end: this is his gracious, good will.<sup>39</sup>

In this answer, it is striking that both the hallowing of God's name and the coming of God's kingdom are mentioned again. Luther, obviously, saw the third petition in close connection with the first and the second. But we saw already that the explanation of the second petition is close to that of the first.

Luther's explanation of the first petitions of the Lord's prayer shows two characteristics. First, they are not taken generally but limited to things the believers ask for themselves. Just as they in the last three petitions ask something for themselves (e.g. "forgive us...") the first three are explained as asking something for those who pray. Second, there is not much difference in meaning between the first three petitions.

Turning now to Calvin's catechisms, we will not pay attention to the first catechism, that of 1537,<sup>40</sup> but concentrate on the more influential catechism Calvin wrote right after his return from exile in 1542. Calvin makes a clear distinction between the two sets of three petitions. "The first three refer to God's glory as their end without respect to ourselves; the remaining parts refer to ourselves and consider our interest."<sup>41</sup> Actually, ac-

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"When our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word, and live a godly life here in time, and hereafter in eternity."

<sup>39</sup> The translation is taken from Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3.82.

<sup>40</sup> This catechism is not consistent in its approach. Calvin says that the first petition means that God's majesty is truly recognized and magnified by all. In the second petition, we pray that the Lord daily increase the number of the believers, and in the third, that God govern and conduct everything to his good pleasure. In other words, the first petition concentrates on what men have to do, the second and the third on what God does. The text of this catechism can be found in *Calvini Opera Selecta*, 1.406–408.

<sup>41</sup> See Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 123. See also the discussion of the Lord's Prayer in Calvin's *Institutes*, 4.20.34–49. For the division into twice three petitions, par. 35.

ording to Calvin, the first three petitions are directed to the glory of God, even though they are salutary for us, while the second three petitions are directed to our concern and salvation, but in connection with God's glory.

Calvin's explanation of the first three petitions is consistent with this emphasis on God's glory. Concerning the first petition he says that we pray that God's glory be displayed among men. The second petition means three things: 1. that God may daily increase the number of the faithful; 2. that God may make his truth visible; 3. that God may abolish all iniquity. And the third means that "all creatures may be subdued to his obedience, and so dependent on his nod that nothing be done but by his will."<sup>42</sup>

There is a decided difference between the approaches of Luther and of Calvin. Luther concentrates on our activity; in the Lord's prayer we ask God's assistance to do what God wants. Calvin, on the other hand, concentrates on God's activity; we ask God to do his great works.

When we next turn to the Heidelberg Catechism we see that it follows neither Luther nor Calvin. In the first petition, the main emphasis is on the activity of the people of God:

Grant us first of all that *we* may rightly know thee...

Grant us also that *we* may so direct our whole life...

In the explanation of the second petition, however, the focus is on what God does in this world:

So rule us by thy Word and Spirit...

Preserve and increase thy church...

Destroy the works of the devil...

Do all this...

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<sup>42</sup> See *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 125. When Calvin further explains the third petition he adds: "We pray not only that what he has in his own counsel decreed come to pass, but also that, all contumacy being overcome and subdued, he may subject the wills of all to his own and direct them to his obedience." In this explanation, Calvin uses the word "will" in two meanings: God's counsel and God's commandment. They are, however, two distinct meanings, as can be seen when we consider whether God's will is obeyed. God's will in the sense of God's counsel is always realized, but God's will in the sense of God's commandment is quite often not obeyed. It is, therefore, not correct to combine the two in the explanation of the third petition. This means that we have to answer the question in which sense the word "your will" is used in the third petition. The first sense, counsel, fits only with the first half of the third petition: "your counsel be done." The second sense, commandment, fits with the whole of the third petition: "your commandment be done on earth as it is in heaven." The word "will" should be taken in the sense of "commandment."

The explanation of the third petition asks God's activity to bring about obedience, not only among believers but among all men:

Grant that we and all men may deny our own will...

Grant also that everyone may carry out his duty...

Which interpretation is correct? Should the first three petitions be limited to the believers (Luther) or taken generally (Calvin)? Or is there, perhaps, a middle road that the first petition should be explained in a more limited sense, while the second and the third can be taken in a general sense (Heidelberg Catechism)?

To begin our evaluation with Luther's general limitation of the three petitions, what is Luther's reason for limiting the meaning of the petitions to the activity of the believers? He begins his answers by stating that God's name is holy anyway, God's kingdom will come anyway, and God's will is fulfilled anyway. Since God does what he wants, no matter what, the only problem is whether we are obedient. That is the reason why God is only asked to bring about that God's people sanctify God's name, that God's kingdom come to God's people, that God's will be obeyed among God's people.

This is not a scriptural reasoning, however. God has given many promises to his people, but that never meant that they need no longer pray for those things. To give a few examples: Psalm 12:5 contains a promise of God: "I will now arise," says the LORD. "I will protect them from those who malign them." The poet trusts in this promise: "and the words of the LORD are flawless" (v. 6). In the next verse, however, he adds a prayer asking God to fulfill this promise: "Do thou, O LORD, protect us..." (v. 7 RSV). Another example can be found in Psalm 89. God's promise to David's house is mentioned in verses 29–37. At the time this Psalm was made, however, nothing could be seen of it (cf. v. 44). The poet does not just say that we can sit back for everything will be alright in the end. Rather, he prays to God to fulfill his promise (v. 49). A third Old Testament example is Daniel, who prays for the fulfilment of God's promise given through Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2–19).

The same applies to the New Testament. The souls under the altar pray for God's wrath to come (Rev. 6:10), even though God's wrath has been announced before. Another example can be found in Revelation 22. The Lord Jesus promises that he will come soon (v. 12). This does not prevent the Spirit and the bride from praying, "Come." Other people are even urged to join in this prayer (v. 17).

Luther's reasoning seems to be rather fatalistic: we need not pray for it; it will happen anyway. The saints in the Bible, however, pray that God may fulfill his promises. There is no reason to limit the meaning of the first

three petitions to what God's people has to do.

That leaves us with the question of why the Heidelberg Catechism applies the first petitions only to what believers do. This is not caused by a general idea about prayer, as in the case of Luther. The reason for this limitation can be found in Ursinus' explanation of this petition. Ursinus distinguishes three meanings of the verb "to sanctify":

1. to acknowledge, revere, and praise as holy that which is holy of itself
2. to make holy that which is of itself not holy but unclean, and make it holy
3. to destine for a holy purpose

The last meaning, says Ursinus, is used when it says that the Father sanctified the Son, and that God sanctified the sabbath. This meaning does not apply to the first petition, but the first and the second do. Ursinus concludes that we pray in this petition for two things: first, that God enlighten us with the knowledge of his most holy name; and second, that God regenerate us and make us more and more holy.<sup>43</sup> Since these two meanings, the knowledge of God and holy life, can only apply to Christians, the Heidelberg Catechism limits the meaning of the first petition to believers.<sup>44</sup>

The Lord's Prayer itself, however, does not express a limitation in the first petition. And since the second and third are more general, it seems more likely to take the first petition, too, in a general sense. Can the first petition have a general meaning? Let us look at some examples where the holiness of God's name is mentioned.

Psalm 30:4 – "Praise [God's] holy name." How did the holiness of God's name come out? Verses 1 and 2 point to God's activity. He has rescued David and did not allow the enemies to rejoice over David's downfall.

Psalm 111:9 – "Holy and awesome is his name." This can be connected with the fact that God has sent redemption to his people.

Isaiah 5:16 – "And the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness." In this verse, God's holiness is connected with his justice as God brought punishment over his own people who had sinned against him

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<sup>43</sup> See Williard, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 631. N.B. "regeneration" is here what we would call "sanctification."

<sup>44</sup> L. Doekes has shown that there was considerable divergency among Reformed theologians of the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries concerning the meaning of "holiness"; see his *Der Heilige: Qados und Hagios in der reformierten Theologie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Franeker: Wever, 1960).

(see vv. 14–15).

Isaiah 41:14 – “‘I myself will help you,’ declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” Here the “Holy One” is not the one who brings punishment over his people, but the one who rescues them.

Ezekiel 36:22 – “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name” (see also v. 23). God will vindicate his holiness by gathering Israel and bringing them back from exile (v. 24).

Ezekiel 39:7 – “I will make known my holy name among my people Israel.” This is connected with God’s judgment over Gog and Magog (vv. 1–6).

We can see in this brief survey that the holiness of God’s name shows in God’s activity.

Seen against this background, the petition “Hallowed be your name” must be taken in a general sense. The Lord’s Prayer first of all asks God to be active in world history, in saving his name from dishonour. It can result in many things: punishment of the enemies of God’s people, but also punishment of Israel’s sins. Quite often it is connected, however, with the salvation of God’s people.

The Catechism correctly connects the holiness of God’s name with the glorification of God. The petition certainly includes that we uphold God’s glory, but its meaning is not limited to that. We pray God that he uphold his own name in his governing of the world. As it is expressed in Ezekiel 36:23,

I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.

### **The Preaching on the Petitions in the Catechism Sermon**

Finally I would like to draw attention to the way in which the petitions are explained in the Heidelberg Catechism. Let us again use the first petition as an example:

Q. What is the first petition?

A. *Hallowed be thy Name.* That is: Grant us first of all that we may rightly know thee... (Q&A 122).

God is addressed in the explanation. The catechism does not teach us how to speak about God, but how to pray to God. The answers of the Heidelberg Catechism are in the form of prayers.

This is exceptional within the Heidelberg Catechism itself. Usually God is referred to in the third person. That happens in the explanation of the Creed:

Q. Since there is only one God, why do you speak of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

A. Because God has so revealed himself in his Word that these three distinct persons are the one, true, eternal God (Q&A 25).

That happens in the explanation of the Ten Commandments, too:

Q. What does God require in the second commandment?

A. We are not to make an image of God in any way nor to worship him in any other manner than he has commanded in his Word (Q&A 96).

In the explanation of the petitions, however, the second person is used for God: you, your work, your name.

This way of explaining is remarkable even in comparison to the catechisms of Luther and Calvin. Luther mixes explanation and writes:

Q. How does this happen?

A. When the Word of God is taught honestly and purely and we, as the children of God, live holy lives according to it. Help us in this, dear Father in heaven! But he who teaches and lives otherwise, than as God's Word teaches, profanes the name of God among us. Keep us from this, heavenly Father!<sup>45</sup>

In the explanation of the other petitions, however, God is not addressed.

Calvin's explanation is all in the third person. His first question and answer on the first petition is:

*Teacher:* Repeat to me the substance of the first petition.

*Student:* By the name of God, Scripture understands the acknowledgment and fame with which he is honoured among men. We ask therefore that his glory may be promoted everywhere and in all things.<sup>46</sup>

Neither is the second person used for the explanation of the Lord's Prayer in the catechisms that are traditionally seen as the background of the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>47</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism, on the other hand, is so consistent in its addressing God that we must assume that this was done on purpose.

This approach is not consistently followed in explanations on the Heidelberg Catechism, however. To give some examples:

<sup>45</sup> The German text was given in footnote 36.

<sup>46</sup> See Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 124. Calvin's method is first to give a theological explanation of the subject matter of the petition, followed by an explanation of what to pray for.

<sup>47</sup> See Gooszen, *De Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 226–232.

1. J. Van Bruggen writes as his final remark on the first petition: “Finally, we ourselves must live in such a manner, that is, we must so order our lives (all our thoughts, words, and actions must be so directed) that God’s name is not blasphemed because of us, but is honoured and praised instead.”<sup>48</sup>

We notice some subtle changes. Instead of “your name” he uses “the name of God,” and instead of “Grant that we...” he uses “We ourselves must...” These are slight changes, but they indicate that the character of this sentence has changes from petition to command.

2. O. Thelemann writes that God’s name must be hallowed, first, by us, and second, through us. Thelemann in the first part speaks particularly about the knowledge of God’s name. In the second part, he explains that “all our thoughts, words, and works are to be an act of praise to God, that through us his name may be hallowed.” This means that

We must, therefore, “so order and direct our lives”:

a) That the name of God may never be blasphemed on our account, which would happen if we confess the name of the Lord and do not live according to his Word...

b) That through our conversation and life others also may be incited to turn to God, and thereby to honour and to praise him.<sup>49</sup>

Striking is that the words “so order and direct our lives” are given as a quotation, but the preceding words are not. This is a giveaway for the change from petition to command: “Grant us” of the Heidelberg Catechism has been changed to “We must.”

Thelemann makes the same transition in the explanation of the third petition. The third section speaks about the fulfilment of our calling. He says here, among other things:

We are not to think that we are to do God’s will only in particular acts.... Every one is to be contented in his station and calling.... He is to perform willingly, cheerfully, faithfully and carefully.<sup>50</sup>

The Catechism, however, speaks in a different manner: “Grant that everyone may carry out his duties as willingly...”

3. This was an example from the last century. A recent example can be

<sup>48</sup> J. Van Bruggen, *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism* (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1991) 279. It should be added that we do not find a similar transition from prayer to command in the explanation of the second and third petition.

<sup>49</sup> O. Thelemann, *An Aid to the Heidelberg Catechism* (trans. M. Peters; Grand Rapids: Douma Publications, 1959) 422.

<sup>50</sup> Thelemann, *An Aid to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 429.

found in the explanation of Dr. Klooster on the Heidelberg Catechism, in his book *A Mighty Comfort*. He notices a striking relation between the catechism's explanation of the Ten Commandments and of the requests of the Lord's Prayer. He makes a correct observation when he adds: "What God commands for our life of gratitude should be echoed in our prayers so that he may equip us for the obedience of thanks."<sup>51</sup>

In his explanation of the second petition, however, Klooster speaks sometimes differently:

Any "good" that we do must conform to God's law.... Not only ministers and missionaries and Christian school teachers but all of us are called to do Christ's work.... Praying for the kingdom means that we must labour in the kingdom—every one of us.<sup>52</sup>

We see, then, that the petitions of the Lord's Prayer are often explained as if they are commands. This explanation of the petitions will lead to a similar preaching on the prayer. The explanation of the meaning of a petition will be followed by an exhortation to obey the petition. To give an example, after an explanation of the meaning of the petition: Hallowed be thy name, the congregation is exhorted to hallow God's name. The transition can be made in this manner: If you pray for the sanctification of God's name, make sure that you sanctify God's name in your own life. Therefore do....

One of the main things that the so-called "redemptive-historical" method of preaching taught us, however, is that we should not paint all of biblical revelation with the same moralistic brush. The Bible contains different types of texts which require a different application. Texts on events should not be treated as if they contain commandments. It was called exemplaric use of Scripture to say, "You must do as Abraham did here," and "You should not do as Isaac did there." Historic material should be treated as a category in its own right. When the text shows what God is doing and how he moves history forward, that should be central in the preaching.

I would like to see the same principle applied to prayer. A petition is not a commandment. A petition should not be preached as if it is a commandment. The Heidelberg Catechism, in its very form, shows how to preach on this. It deals with the Lord's Prayer, together with the Ten Commandments, in the section on our thankfulness. Within that section, however, it distinguishes prayer from the commandments. It underlines the

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<sup>51</sup> F. H. Klooster, *A Mighty Comfort: The Christian Faith According to the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1990) 109.

<sup>52</sup> Klooster, *A Mighty Comfort*, 110.

special character of this part of Scripture by teaching the content in prayer form. That is what the catechism preaching on the Lord's Prayer should do, too. It should teach the people how to pray.

This does not mean that prayer and law are unrelated. There is an obvious relationship between the two. It is true that we have to sanctify God's name and do God's will. This does not mean, however, that the preaching on a petition should be rounded off by a commandment to the congregation to do what we pray for. This would not only mean a limitation of the petition to ourselves, but also a transition in category from prayer to commandment. The relationship should be the reverse. The commandment should bring us on our knees to pray. Since we, in and of ourselves, do not want to sanctify God's name, we pray for it.

There is good reason to teach the people to pray. Thankfulness does not come automatically to us sinners. We do not pray correctly if left on our own. God has not only included many prayers in Scripture, he has also given us a specific model for prayer in the Lord's Prayer. Through this prayer, we have to learn how to pray, how to address God, what to pray for, etc. To overcome our own limitations, our sloppiness, and our selfishness in praying, we need instruction in prayer.

The preaching on the Lord's Days 45–52 should be used to help the congregation to live closer to God in their daily prayers. The Heidelberg Catechism shows us the way by explaining the petitions as prayers to God.