

‘And lead us not into temptation’

By Larry Brigden, Senior Editorial Consultant (Linguistics)

In 2019, the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church altered the English translation of the Lord’s Prayer from ‘and lead us not into temptation’ to ‘and do not let us fall into temptation’. The reason given for the change is that the traditional translation ‘is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation’ whereas ‘it’s Satan who leads us into temptation—that’s his department’.¹

But the original Greek of this verse, as found in Matthew 6.13 and Luke 11.4, reads as follows:

καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκης ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν

and lead us not into temptation

This is quite clearly an accurate English translation of these Greek words. The verb εἰσενέγκης is the second person aorist subjunctive form² of εἰσφέρω which means to ‘bring in’ or ‘lead in’, and when coupled with the negative particle μὴ the meaning is ‘and lead us not into ...’.

The same verb occurs elsewhere in the New Testament with exactly this meaning of ‘bring in’ or ‘lead in’. Thus, in Luke 5.18–19 the men ‘brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy’. In Acts 17.20 the Athenian philosophers say to Paul ‘thou bringest certain strange things to our ears’. In 1 Timothy 6.7 Paul says that ‘we brought nothing into this world’. In Hebrews 13.11 the blood of the beasts ‘is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest’. In all these instances the verb clearly has an active meaning and cannot reasonably be taken in any other sense. Could the men in Luke 5.18–19, for example, be understood as somehow allowing the man taken with palsy to find his own way in?

Thus the Pope’s alteration of the translation of the Lord’s Prayer is linguistically indefensible. In making the alteration the Pope has evidently not had any regard to what the Word of God actually says, but instead only to his own notions of God. And when the literal meaning of the text does not agree with those notions, the latter prevails over the former and the Word of God is effectively set aside.

But such a setting aside of the Word of God ought not to surprise any, for thus has the Roman Catholic Church done for many centuries now, and especially since the Reformation. She has established her own notions of God in opposition to the truths which God Himself infallibly reveals in His Word. This setting aside of the Word of God is, of course, a departure from God Himself, and in just recompense the Roman Catholic Church has been given up to walk in a darkness of her own choosing. This altering of a verse in the Lord’s Prayer is only a further evidence of that darkness. It is as Isaiah said: ‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’ (Isaiah 8.20).

The true meaning of the petition

But if the Pope has stumbled at the words ‘and lead us not into temptation’ and not correctly understood them, it may be profitable to inquire concerning their true meaning. Given that the Scriptures elsewhere declare that ‘God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man’ (James 1.13), how is it that we are to pray against His leading us into temptation?

The misunderstanding arises from supposing that an active leading on the part of God is meant by the words of the petition. But James 1.13 expressly declares that this is not so, while the very next verse declares from whence the temptation actually arises: 'but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed' (v. 14).

But if temptation arises from the corrupt heart of man, why do we petition God not to lead us into temptation?

To answer this question we must bear in mind the true state of man since the Fall. When man fell by sinning against God in the garden of Eden, his heart became corrupt and prone to sin, so that 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Genesis 6.5). Satan, as the constant adversary of man, continually tempts man to sin, intending his ruin thereby. Thus many things which befall a man, in God's providence become occasions for sin.

The phrase in the Lord's Prayer is then a petition for the preservation of the saints, that God by his providence would so order and dispose all the occurrences of our lives, so as not to lay before us those objects, nor proffer those occasions, which might either excite or draw forth our inbred corruptions.³

It should be remembered that there is no outward act of sin committed in the world but the sinner took occasion from some providence of God to perpetrate it. A thief steals not anything but what God's providence brings in his way; the murderer slays not any man but whom Providence offers to his sword and violence.⁴

Of course, if in the wise providence of God we should yet encounter such temptations, our prayer will be that the Lord would sustain and deliver us from them, and hence the words of the very next part of the petition: 'but deliver us from evil'.

The petition 'and lead us not into temptation' is succinctly expressed and this doubtless contributes to its being misunderstood. But examples may be found elsewhere in Scripture where the petition for a saint's preservation is more fully expressed, such as in Proverbs 30.7–9:

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

Agur, knowing the corruption of his own heart, entreats the Lord to so dispose His providence toward him that he might not be exposed to a temptation that could lead to his spiritual ruin. The temptation may come upon him through either poverty or riches. Not that poverty is itself a sinful condition, though it may expose a man to sin through the greater temptation of breaking God's eighth commandment. Nor are riches in themselves wrong, though a corrupt heart in resting upon them may make them so.

It is sobering to reflect that those abandoned by God are often judged by Him by being given up to their own corruptions to be seduced and entangled by them, so that they become more and more enslaved to sin. And this process of hardening in sin is a judicial one. Thus, the true saint will entreat the Lord that he be not given up to his own corruptions by being led into temptation, but that he may be delivered from them.

We may conclude with Question and Answer 195 of the Larger Catechism which gives the Westminster Assembly's explanation of the meaning of this petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Q. 195. What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

A. In the sixth petition, (which is, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,) acknowledging, that the most wise, righteous, and gracious God, for divers holy and just ends, may so order things, that we may be assaulted, foiled, and for a time led captive by temptations; that Satan, the world, and the flesh, are ready powerfully to draw us aside, and ensnare us; and that we, even after the pardon of our sins, by reason of our corruption, weakness, and want of watchfulness, are not only subject to be tempted, and forward to expose ourselves unto temptations, but also of ourselves unable and unwilling to resist them, to recover out of them, and to improve them; and worthy to be left under the power of them: we pray, that God would so overrule the world and all in it, subdue the flesh, and restrain Satan, order all things, bestow and bless all means of grace, and quicken us to watchfulness in the use of them, that we and all his people may by his providence be kept from being tempted to sin; or, if tempted, that by his Spirit we may be powerfully supported and enabled to stand in the hour of temptation; or when fallen, raised again and recovered out of it, and have a sanctified use and improvement thereof: that our sanctification and salvation may be perfected, Satan trodden under our feet, and we fully freed from sin, temptation, and all evil, forever.

This explanation by the Westminster Assembly is the fruit of their adhering to the principle of Sola Scriptura, so that they explain the more obscure parts of the Word of God by other clearer parts. Their reward for thus holding to this important principle is a clear understanding of the meaning of this sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, by her rejection of Sola Scriptura receives as her reward a further plunging into darkness away from the light of God's Word, obscuring that Word in this case by her own faulty translation.

First published in Quarterly Record 630. Online edition last updated 12 October 2026.

Endnotes

1 Harriet Sherwood, 'Led not into temptation: pope approves change to Lord's Prayer', The Guardian 6 June 2019, www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/06/led-not-into-temptation-pope-approves-change-to-lords-prayer, accessed 12 October 2026.

2 'Second person' means 'you', and here it is singular. The aorist tense is often translated as past action. However, it is not primarily concerned with time, but with 'aspect' or 'kind' of action and is used to express an action as a whole. The aorist looks at the action from the outside, as it were, as an overall, completed event. (On the other hand, the present or the imperfect tenses look at the action from the inside, as an ongoing event.) The Greek subjunctive is generally used for hypothetical statements (as in English), but it may also be used to express a prohibition when coupled with the aorist tense and the negative particle $\mu\eta$, in which case it has the meaning, 'do not at all do this', or 'do not begin to do this'.

3 Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Lord's Prayer, And, the Doctrine of the Two Covenants* (London, England: Religious Tract Society, 1799), p. 148.

4 Ibid.