

A Venerable Witness of the Gospels According to Luke and According to John: Bodmer Papyrus 14-15 (P⁷⁵)

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Introduction

The *Bodmer Papyrus 14-15* (P⁷⁵) arrived at the Vatican Apostolic Library on November 22nd, 2006, the day after its acquisition. It was officially presented and donated to the Holy Father Benedict XVI by Mr. Frank J. Hanna III, during a private Papal Audience on January 22nd, 2007. With this acquisition, the Vatican Apostolic Library has added a new jewel to its most precious treasures.

On the occasion of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the Vatican Library is very pleased to present to the Synod Fathers facsimiles of two significant pages of this precious manuscript. One contains the *Lord's Prayer* from the Gospel of Luke (11:1-4), and the other contains the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18).

The Lukan Version of the *Lord's Prayer* (Lk 11:1-4)

First, I would like to present the transcription of the *Lord's Prayer* as it is found in P⁷⁵. It should be noted that it does not differ substantially from the text established by modern critical editions.

Text

11¹ Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐν τόπῳ τινὶ προσευχόμενον, ὡς ἐπαύσατο, εἶπέν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν, Κύριε, δίδαξον ἡμᾶς προσεύχεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ Ἰωάννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ. ² Εἶπεν δὲ αὐτούς, "Ὅταν προσεύχησθε, λέγετε, Πάτερ, ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου· ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου· ³ τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν· ⁴ καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν· καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν.

Translation

11¹ One day Jesus was praying in a place and when he finished one of his disciples said to him: "Lord, teach us how to pray, just as John has taught his disciples." ² And he said to them: "When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come; ³ give us every day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, as we also forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation."

The context in which this pericope appears is typically Lukan. More than any other writer of the New Testament, Luke likes to portray Jesus while he is praying, often in solitude (see *Lk* 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,28; etc.).

His disciples felt that they were being somehow excluded and so they reminded the Lord that John the Baptist had taught his own disciples how to pray. Thus, Jesus recited the *Lord's Prayer*.¹ The version handed down in the Gospel of Luke is different from the longer version found in the Gospel of Matthew (*Mt* 6:9-13), which is substantially identical with the version used in all Christian liturgies.

Matthew and the liturgical tradition also specify that the Father, to whom the prayer is addressed,

¹ It stands to reason that the Lord did this on more than one occasion, using different formulas. However, the New Testament tradition only records the redactions transmitted by Matthew and Luke, which have been received by the Church. Apart from the text form found in the *Didache*, which testifies the early inclusion of the *Lord's Prayer* in the eucharistic Liturgy, there are no other known alternative versions of this prayer.

is in heaven; they add the petition that “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,”² and, at the end of the prayer, protection is sought against the evil one.

The most notable difference is that while the Lukan text presents a prayer which is somewhat informal, the Matthean text is decisively oriented toward a collective recitation of the prayer. One can deduce from this fact that Luke’s formulation is more primitive. On the other hand, the parallel Matthean text, in harmony with the ecclesial concerns of the first Gospel,³ seems to have adopted a formula which was already in use by the Apostolic community during liturgical celebrations.⁴

In regard to the *Lord’s Prayer*, the testimony of P⁷⁵ is extremely important from a critical point of view. The daily recitation of the Matthean version of the prayer had very frequently prompted copyists to correct the Lukan text so as to harmonize it with the liturgical formula of the prayer.

The Johannine Prologue (Jn 1:1-18)

This is one of the most renowned texts in the New Testament, and was already much appreciated in the early Church for its literary form.⁵ Just like the so-called “Infancy Narratives” in the Gospels of Matthew (*Mt* 1-2) and Luke (*Lk* 1-2), the Prologue in the Gospel of John moves away from the most ancient evangelical tradition represented by the Gospel of Mark, which begins with the testimony of John the Baptist that introduces the public ministry of Jesus.

Among the reasons for these initial additions is the fact that very soon it became obvious that the Markan presentation gave rise to ambiguity about the nature, and hence about the mission of Jesus. But while Matthew and Luke are content with emphasizing the exceptional nature of the birth of Jesus, as fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, John goes a step further and explicitly states that Jesus has a unique relationship with God, namely, that he has a divine nature.

Text

1 ¹ Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. ² Οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. ³ Πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. Ὁ γέγονεν ⁴ ἐν αὐτῷ ζῶν ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ⁵ καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. ⁶ Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης. ⁷ οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι’ αὐτοῦ. ⁸ Οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ’ ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. ⁹ Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. ¹⁰ Ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. ¹¹ Εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. ¹² Ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, ¹³ οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν. ¹⁴ Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. ¹⁵ Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων, Οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον, Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. ¹⁶ Ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν,

²The petition that the Father’s will be done seems to point to Jesus’ very personal prayer during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (see *Mt* 26:42; *Lk* 22:42).

³Among the characteristic passages which indicate the concerns of the Gospel of Matthew with regard to the “organizational” aspects of communitarian life, one can single out the following (apart from the very fact that Matthew alone of the four Gospels uses the word ἐκκλησία): the attribution of the baptismal Trinitarian formula to Jesus himself together with the explicit mandate to preach the Gospel to the entire world (*Mt* 28:19); the insistence on the power to forgive or not to forgive sins which is entrusted to the Apostles (*Mt* 18:18); and the solemn formulation of the primacy of Peter (*Mt* 16:18-19).

⁴This fact is practically certain in that some of the sources (and perhaps even the original redaction) of the *Didache* go back to the first century A.D. and present the *Lord’s Prayer* in a liturgical context and in a form very close to that of Matthew’s Gospel. See Giuseppe Visonà, *Didachè. Insegnamento degli Apostoli*. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e note (Lecture cristiane del primo millennio 30), Milano: Paoline, 2000, especially p. 319, n. 5 and n. 6.

⁵A detailed analysis of the rhythmic structure of the Prologue is presented by Jean Irigoien’s “La composition rythmique du Prologue de Jean (I, 1-18),” *Revue Biblique* 78 (1971), pp. 501-514.

καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος· ¹⁷ ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο. ¹⁸ Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἐώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

Translation

1 ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God; ³ all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. ¹¹ He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. ¹⁵ (John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. (RSV)

This page is probably the most important one in the papyrus, not because of the text it transmits, but rather because it serves as the first manuscript evidence of the existence of the canon of the four Gospels.

From a textual point of view, P⁷⁵ reproduces almost exactly the text that has been reconstructed in the critical editions, except for a few minor orthographical variants. Furthermore, despite the fact that its punctuation is irregular, its critical contribution is important in confirming the antiquity of the reading – which is probably original – that syntactically connects verses 3b and 4. This variant was known to the patristic tradition, but evidently was later lost, when the subdivision of the text into verses was introduced.

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These two pericopes are only an example of the quality of the text handed down by P⁷⁵ and verify again the care with which the Church has preserved the original content of the Sacred Scriptures.

Vatican Council II affirms in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerated the Body of Christ, since especially in the sacred liturgy she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of the Word of God and of the Body of Christ” (DV 21). This interaction between the Word of God and the Body of Christ as daily nourishment and food for the disciple of Christ is a recurrent theme in the Church’s tradition. It is also hinted at in the selection of these two pages of the papyrus which are being presented for consideration by our readers, as well as in the history of our precious manuscript and in its liturgical use during the first centuries of its history.

From among the most important texts of the patristic tradition regarding the Word of God as nourishment for the soul, I have chosen the following passage from St. Ambrose of Milan: “Nothing else makes the rational soul live but the word that turns it to God. As the language of God concretely grows within our soul when He is welcomed, understood, and held, life within the soul grows in the same manner. And, to the contrary, when the word of God is present less in our soul, similarly life in our soul is less present. Thus, as this union of our soul and body is enlivened, nurtured and maintained by the life giving spirit, so, too, our soul is vivified by the word of God and by spiritual grace. For this reason, we must search by every means – as a primary cause in regard to all others – to gather within us the words of God, to accrue them at the center of our being, in our

thoughts, in our concerns, and in our acts, to the point that our actions correspond to the words of the Scriptures and our behavior does not seem out of step with all the heavenly precepts. Thus, we too, can also say: ‘Your word gives me life’” (*Ps* 118:50).⁶

Thus, the assimilation of and *protracted meditation*⁷ upon the Word of God leads to a suitable way of living. Significant in this connection is the reference to the Eucharist and to the *Lord’s Prayer* in Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*: “The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God’s gift. The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in the developing countries.”⁸

The selection of these two texts, whose splendid reproduction from the papyrus is due to the publisher Testimonio Editorial, Madrid, is not coincidental. On the contrary, it is a significant and felicitous choice which was made by the donor of the Papyrus himself. When the publication of the *Lineamenta* of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was announced on January 25th, 2007, he had immediately thought of presenting a special gift to the Holy Father in view of the Synod of Bishops.

In this regard and in conclusion to my reflections, I wish to recall an event – among the many which accompanied the arrival of the *Pap. Bodmer 14-15* at the Vatican Apostolic Library – which made the year 2006-2007 an historic year for our Institution. The private Papal Audience of January 22nd, 2007, during which the presentation took place, and the offering of the papyrus to the Holy Father, occurred within a particularly striking and moving atmosphere. The Holy Father himself, who was visibly eager to see the precious “relic” and to hold it in his hands, conveyed to us a sense both of euphoria and of deep emotion. He spent a long time examining the two leaves which were presented to him, asking questions of Dr. Sever J. Voicu.⁹ During the Audience, Mr. Frank Hanna introduced his wife Sally and their daughter Elizabeth to the Holy Father who, in turn, spoke with them for a long time about their well-being and their involvement in the local Catholic community back at their home in the United States.

The Papal Audience was immediately followed by a meeting between the Secretary of State, myself and some collaborators of the Library. At this time, the donor, accompanied by his wife and daughter, all of whom were still very moved by the words that the Holy Father had spoken to them, wanted to thank us with a simple and very moving gesture that I will never forget: Mr. Hanna invited his seventeen-year-old daughter to recite with him, alternatively, all of the verses of the Prologue of the Gospel of John. In response to our amazement, he informed us that from the time he accompanied his daughter to school, the two of them recited the entire Prologue of the Gospel of John.

In their name, in the name of the Prefect, Msgr. Cesare Pasini, the Vice-Prefect, Dr. Ambrogio M. Piazzoni, and the entire staff of the Vatican Library, I greet the participants of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and wish for all of you the assistance of the Holy Spirit for the success of this Assembly and the efficacy of the work of all its participants.

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Archivist and Librarian of the Holy Roman Church

(excerpt from: *A Venerable Witness to the Gospels According to Luke and According to John: Bodmer Papyrus 14-15* (*P*⁷³), Vatican City, 2008)

⁶ St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on Psalm CXVIII*, VII, 7.

⁷ *Idem*, *Cain and Abel*, II, 6, 22

⁸ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacrosanctum Caritatis*, no. 91.

⁹ Later, on June 25th, 2007, he saw the entire papyrus during his visit to the Vatican Apostolic Library.