Professional Development Report  
Telford Work  
September 15, 2004

I am grateful to have received a summer stipend from the professional development committee, and pleased to offer this report of its outcomes. I will speak to the (italicized) precise language of my original proposal, submitted in 2003 for summer 2004.

Specific objectives to be met:

1. Perform requisite research to continue a theology structured according to the Lord’s Prayer, currently in progress.

2. Write at least two chapters (out of ten), one on each petition/theological locus.

Two chapters and one transitional section were in fact completed. In addition, two already written chapters were revised. Finally, two future chapters were conceived and research on them began.

The chapters newly written are “The Second Petition” (18,500 words on “Thy Kingdom come”) and “The Third Petition” (19,800 words on “Thy will be done”). The former chapter explores the Kingdom of God, especially in relationship to American political structures. It continues work on Christian faithfulness and American patriotism begun shortly after September 11, 2001. The latter chapter explores the Holy Spirit’s indwelling as the realization of the Father’s will on earth, in partial contrast to our own structural ideologies of self-determination. The beginning of this chapter will also become an article for consideration by Books & Culture, and includes a sermon written and preached over the summer.

Another newly written part of the book is an interlude between the first half of the prayer and the second half (1,000 words).

The chapters revised are “The Audience” (13,400 words on “Our Father in heaven”) and “The First Petition” (19,500 words on “Hallowed be thy name”). These were already drafted.

The chapters conceived but not yet written are “The Fourth Petition” (“Give us this day our daily bread”) and “The Warrant” (“For thine is the kingdom … forever and ever”).

With the introductory chapter already written (“The Project,” 4,000 words), the book is about half drafted.

Summary description of grant project:

The volume presents practical trials, successes, tasks, and unresolved questions in order to show and explain Christian theology and life as an unfolding but certain
adventure rather than a finished and static system. It shows the author, a Christian theologian, living and thinking according to his tradition. The format follows the Lord’s prayer, which is treated as a liturgical text, an occasion for disciplined theological reflection, and Christian life in textual form.

Every chapter has an analytical “middle,” preceded and followed by occasional popular essays. Each analytical middle concentrates on one of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. Each petition is thus a kind of ‘collect’ (that is, a brief prayer collecting the various liturgical moments that precede it and leading to the next part of a liturgy).

Projected benefits to the institution:

Development of a resource for intersecting and mutually informing theology and liturgy/spirituality. Specifically, theology abstracted by the life-sustaining practices of the Church grows speculative and disconnected from its home, while spiritual disciplines and liturgical practices that fail to be informed theologically deteriorate into unreflective or pragmatistic actions that become vulnerable to marginalization or abuse. This project introduces readers – and one of its implied audiences is undergraduate theology students such as Westmont students enrolled in the doctrine course – to an ancient theological axiom, “the law of prayer is the law of belief,” in the context of current issues and questions in theology.

Projected benefits to the individual: Growth in theological and practical maturity; experience in an unusual approach to answering theological questions and addressing problems in the discipline; creation of a resource for use in teaching contexts both in college courses and at churches.

Wrestling with the social and personal implications of the Lord’s Prayer as part of a scholarly project has been rewarding in a host of ways.

Most tangibly, it has resulted in text! There is nothing like the sound of a laser printer spitting out page after page of one’s own stuff. I love the smell of ozone in the morning! There are more pages and fewer chapters than I would have liked, but my efforts met the stated goals of the proposal, and I am satisfied so far with this project’s progress.

Much more importantly, the exercise has served the goal of the project to respect the unity of theology and spirituality. This is a need I feel in my own life as well as in the lives of my guild and my students. Treating each petition of the Lord’s Prayer as an occasion to search the theological tradition, the Scriptures, my world, and my own life for connections has been a repeated challenge. How is God posing and answering each? This is not an easy question, nor one which lends itself to a formulaic methodology for answering. Rather, it is a classic “problem” requiring what Michael Polanyi characterized as “tacit knowledge.” Wrestling with it in this way has turned the Lord’s Prayer from what had been a fairly lifeless text for me to something alive and mysterious, and
deepened my appreciation of theology’s character. I hope readers will react in similar ways.

Finally, my efforts have already found audiences. My student readers have been appreciative, inquisitive, and constructive in their criticism. I used the already-written chapters in classes last year and will be able to use the new ones in this year’s classes. I deliberately wrote the last section of this summer’s second new chapter as a sermon I delivered at two churches, and the first section as both an article and a presentation to a local group of Christians at UCSB.

In the terms of the field of theology, the “payoff” of these chapters has been a strengthened doctrine of the Trinity in its unfolding in the kenotic mission of Jesus (“The Audience”), sanctification as the goal of creation (“The First Petition”), eschatology as cosmic, social, and personal (“The Second Petition”), pneumatology as a firmly Trinitarian and ecclesial category (“The Third Petition”), and soteriology as the interaction of divine and human economies (“Interlude”). All of these are gains for my own doctrinal theology, if not for my broader field.

Sincere thanks to both the administrators and funders of this program. Research like this is keeping me theologically invigorated, academically productive, and spiritually alive. I am deeply grateful for both your dedication and your trust.

Grace and peace,

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