

“And do not lead us into temptation” (Matthew 6:13a, NKJV)

“And lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13, RSV, Catholic Edition)

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Recently, Pope Francis, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, suggested changing this verse to be read in public assemblies, “Do not let us fall into temptation.” Why did he do this, and is he correct in doing it?

First, we look at the original language text. The Greek literally reads, “And not lead us into temptation.” So, we have a literal transliteration of what Jesus actually said. The Latin Vulgate has “et ne inducas nos in temptationem,” an identical reading to the Greek. Someone may object that Jesus was speaking Hebrew or Aramaic. That may be, but the Hebrew language allows for an identical rendering. “Temptation” (Strong’s #4531) would be “Maccah” or “Massah” in Hebrew. The word has secondary meanings of despair and trial. To be led into temptation is to be led into the “hands of Massah,” a figure of speech rooted in the events of Exodus 17:7. So we conclude that the best way to translate this is just as the NKJV and RSV translators did.

The Pope appeals to theological clarity, inasmuch as the Scripture says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (James 1:13). The theological point he makes is correct. Namely, God does not tempt anyone to sin, nor does God “allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able” (1 Corinthians 10:13). However, in doing so, the Pope actually brings us a step back from Jesus’ words and original intent of the prayer. The re-translation tends to take some of the responsibility away from the sinner. It diminishes the aspect of the request for God to guide us in our hearts and steps in His ways, in contrast to the next petition of the prayer, “But deliver us from the evil one.”

Any Christian of any denomination runs on dangerous ground when he starts questioning what the Bible should say when Jesus’ words are plainly known. It is a challenge to the inerrancy (lack of error) in the original autographs (writings). Where does this procedure start and stop? Revelation 22:18-19 is one of many warnings in the Bible against tampering with it. Why go down the slippery slope? There are, in fact, many translations that are not word for word, but thought for thought, that better give the sense that the Pope wishes to convey. Let them suffice in this case. At Firm Foundation, I would simply explain everything I just explained here to the faithful. The Pope has a mechanism to do that, which would not call into question the translation of the Scriptures (approval for which ultimately falls under the Apostolic See). He could issue a Papal Bull (official decree) explaining the meaning of this petition of the Lord’s Prayer, as well as the rest of the prayer, to be used in catechism.