

instant in prayer." [Romans 12:12]

And He Himself too, by that example of the widow, who prevailed with the pitiless and cruel ruler, by the continuance of her intercession; and by that of the friend, who came late at night time, and roused the sleeper from his bed, not for his friendship's, but for his importunity's sake; what did He, but lay down a law, that all should continually make supplication unto Him? He doth not however bid us compose a prayer of ten thousand clauses, and so come to Him and merely repeat it. For this He obscurely signified when He said, "They think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." [Mathew. 6:7]

"For He knoweth," saith He, "what things ye have need of." And if He know, one may say, what we have need of, wherefore must we pray? Not to instruct Him, but to prevail with Him; to be made intimate with Him, by continuance in supplication; to be humbled; to be reminded of thy sins.

So, is it "repetitions" that are bad or was Our Lord speaking of "vain repetitions," vainglory, and frivolousness? Was Our Lord wrong for praying the same prayer more than once, using the same words, in the Garden of Gethsemani? Are the angels in Heaven wrong for singing the Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy") all day and night, without ceasing? Was God making a big mistake when He told Israel to pray the sh'ma all throughout

the day? Are reading the Psalms a waste of time? Have Israelite, early Christian (Catholic), and modern Jewish, Catholic and Orthodox liturgists been praying "vainly" for all these millennia, only to be set straight in the past hundred or so years by sola scriptura Protestants? Is it wrong to sing hymns that have been sung, verbatim, before?

Formal prayers can be thought of, too, as the "phonics" of prayer life. Just as one learns to read by memorizing the sounds of letters, diphthongs, and digraphs, one learns to pray by learning the great prayers of those who've gone before us. They are templates, which also act to catechize; the child who learns the Glory Be learns something about the nature of the Trinity. The child whose parents teach him the Prayer to Guardian Angel not only learns of God's protecting angelic emissaries, but of God's goodness itself -- and he falls asleep safe in that knowledge.

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Pamphlet 098

Do Catholics Pray in Vain Repetitions?

Because Catholicism includes a rich tradition of formal prayer, many accuse Catholics of praying "in vain repetitions" in spite of the admonitions against them in Matthew 6:7. In doing so, they intimate that repeated prayers, because of repetition itself, are "vain" in the sense of being worthless or ineffectual. First, let it be understood from the get-go: That Catholics pray in their own words in addition to formal prayers.

Catholics are taught in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§2688) that "the memorization of basic prayers offers an essential support to the life of prayer, but it is important to help learners savor their meaning." In other words, formal prayer isn't (or at least shouldn't be) mindless lip-moving but instead a formal expression of clearly understood and heartfelt sentiments.

Now, the people who make these accusations against Catholics apparently don't understand that the verse in question reads, in the King James Version, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: *for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*" The operative Greek word here for "vain repetitions" is *battalogo*, or babbling. That is, the heathens had a magical perception of prayer and thought the more they babbled to their gods, the more that that god would respond: I Kings 18:26: "And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O

Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered."

That, two verses after the warning in Matthew against "vain repetitions," Jesus gave us the "Our Father" prayer, which most Protestant Christians pray with no qualms about praying "in vain." The same command in Luke 11:2 reads: "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father..." -- "when you pray, say..."

That Christ Himself prayed in repetitions. Matthew 26:44: "And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, *saying the same words*". Mark 14:39 reads: "*And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.*"

That the angels pray repetitiously. Revelation 4:8: "...and *they rest not day and night*, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

That God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: *And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*" (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

That the Psalms are nothing but a collection of prayers and litanies which were prayed formally in the pre-Christian synagogues and early Christian churches, are still prayed in synagogues and Catholic

churches today -- and were even prayed by *Christ from the Cross*.

That the liturgy of the synagogue was (and is) filled with repetition and formalized prayer. Christ said, "Use not vain repetitions, *as the heathens do*". Were the Jews heathens? They prayed (and still pray) the sh'ma twice a day and, in their liturgy, the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the *Kaddish*, the morning blessings, the *Aleinu*, etc. Check out a Jewish siddur (missal) sometime; does it look more typically Protestant or Catholic?

That hymns are prayers. Is it "vain" to sing "Amazing Grace" or "The Old Rugged Cross" more than once?

In addition, the earliest Christians (being Catholics) understood Christ's words, as do modern Catholics. The 1st century *Didache* (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) says:

Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, like this:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for Thine is the power and the glory forever.

Pray this three times each day.

St. John Chrysostom (A.D. 347 A.D.-407) writes in his Homily 19 on St. Matthew:

You see that when He was discoursing of almsgiving, He removed only that mischief which comes of vainglory, and added nothing more; neither did He say whence one should give alms; as from honest labor, and not from rapine nor covetousness: this being abundantly acknowledged among all. And also before that, He had thoroughly cleared up this point, when He blessed them "that hunger after righteousness."

But touching prayer, He adds somewhat over and above; "not to use vain repetitions." And as there He derides the hypocrites, so here the heathen; shaming the hearer everywhere most of all by the vileness of the persons. For since this, in most cases, is especially biting and stinging, I mean our appearing to be likened to outcast persons; by this topic He dissuades them; calling frivolousness, here, by the name of "vain repetition:" as when we ask of God things unsuitable, kingdoms, and glory, and to get the better of enemies, and abundance of wealth, and in general what does not at all concern us.

"For He knoweth," saith He, "what things ye have need of." [Matthew 6:8]

And herewith He seems to me to command in this place, that neither should we make our prayers long; long, I mean, not in time, but in the number and length of the things mentioned. For perseverance indeed in the same requests is our duty: His word being, "continuing