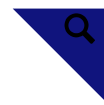




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Pages 51-56 | Published online: 25 Feb 2011

🗨️ [Download citation](#)   <https://doi.org/10.1080/4108556445>

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## SCHOOL PRAYERS IN WAR-TIME

By LIONEL JAMES, M.A.

Some time Headmaster of Monmouth Grammar School.

ONE aspect of the prayer which the request of an unnamed disciple drew from our Lord, known to Christendom as "the Lord's Prayer," has been perhaps insufficiently considered—its astonishing brevity. This is even more apparent in Luke's<sup>1</sup> version than in Matthew's<sup>2</sup> (the two gospels which record it), if we accept the evidence of scholars as to the original text. Note the absence of complimentary opening (simply "Father"), and of "doxology" at the end: there are five petitions, two for God's purposes, three for man's needs; in the Greek (very possibly the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord) 37 words, in English 34, in the Latin of the Vulgate 31. It takes fifteen seconds to say.

1. The brevity which our Lord commended so signally by example, he further stressed by the introductory warning<sup>3</sup> to his followers not to be like the Gentiles, who "think they shall be heard for their much speaking." Brevity is specially desirable in prayers for young people, who tire quickly, and in schools, where time is strictly rationed. During war the need for brevity is doubly increased:

(i) war, the arch-waster, is very wasteful of time; gas-mask drill, air-raid warnings, news bulletins—all these eat up time.

(ii) war brings many more needs to remember in our prayers.

2. At schools in war-time, then, prayers should be very short. This need for brevity, however, must on no account cut out the hymn. A school service should always include, and, whenever possible, open with, a hymn. This is specially so in war-time, with its need for the heartening which a good hymn gives. We are all soldiers on the march, and need our marching tunes. Now comes in the question of hymnbook. May I say at once that I hold special "School Hymnbooks" to be a mistake? Hymns written directly for boys have rarely been successful;<sup>4</sup> we have the rather melancholy example of the customary "Hymn for Beginning and End of Term";<sup>5</sup> and the admirable hymnbooks of to-day offer ample choice of good hymns that appeal to the young. These boys and girls are citizens in the making—citizens of the City of God as well as of their own country. It is, I am convinced, a great pity to focus their loyalty

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi., 2.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew vi, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew vi, 7. Dr. Moffatt renders: "Do not pray by idle rote like pagans, for they suppose they will be heard the more they say."

<sup>4</sup> It is a pleasure to call attention to one notable exception, Mr. Frank Fletcher's *O son of man, our hero strong and tender*, Songs of Praise 611; for though it comes in that hymn-book under the heading *General*, I think the writer would admit that in writing it boys were in his mind.

<sup>5</sup> A. & M. 576 and 577; E.H. 523. The English Hymnal wisely jettisons half of each hymn, so getting rid of the "sloppy" parts about "selfish lures," and "sloth and sensual snare," but leaving very little to bite on. Can't some of our poet schoolmasters do better?