

Backlash Over Lord's Prayer Causing Archbishop to 'Clarify'

In a recent statement, the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, sought to clarify his position on the use of the phrase "Our Father" in Christian prayer.

The archbishop emphasized that Christians should continue using the term but also expressed the need for sensitivity toward individuals who have suffered abuse at the hands of fathers or male clergy.

The controversy stemmed from Cottrell's initial comments during his presidential address to the General Synod, the legislative body of the Church of England. He suggested that referring to God as "Our Father" might pose challenges for those who have experienced abuse or neglect from their fathers.

While his views found support among liberal and feminist clergy members, conservative Christians criticized him for deviating from Scriptural tradition and appeasing modern cultural sensitivities.

In an article penned for The Telegraph, Cottrell clarified his stance, stating, "A few weeks ago, I found myself a little misunderstood when I pointed out that some people who have never known a father present in their life, or worse, been abused or neglected by their father, may find this word challenging. But what I wasn't saying is that we should stop using the word—simply that we need to be sensitive as we lead people in prayer."

The archbishop reinforced the importance of praying to God as

“Our Father” while acknowledging the potential impact of such language on abuse survivors or those with difficult relationships with their earthly fathers. He also stressed the church’s role in facilitating healing among victims of abuse, helping them discover the loving nature of God the Father through Christ.

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The discussion surrounding the use of “Our Father” in prayer gained momentum when the Church of England announced a project on “gendered language” with respect to God. This initiative sparked debates about replacing gender-specific pronouns with gender-neutral or female alternatives, drawing sharp criticism.

Here are just a few Bible verses on God the Father and male gender pronouns from the Modern English Version (MEV):

- **Matthew 6:9-10:** “Therefore pray in this manner: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
- **John 1:12:** “Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed in His name.”
- **Romans 8:15:** “For you have not received the spirit of slavery again to fear. But you have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”
- **Ephesians 3:14-15:** “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

In response to the archbishop’s stance, opinion pieces by Edward Dowler in Church Times and Daniel French in The Spectator presented similar viewpoints. Dowler defended the

unique standing of “Father” in Christian prayer, while French criticized the notion of replacing the term with alternatives as theologically dubious and culturally driven.

Some individuals, including Canon Dr. Chris Sugden and Dr. Ian Paul, expressed contrasting opinions. Sugden questioned the implications of questioning the term “Father” as given by Jesus, urging a rediscovery of fatherhood through Christ. Paul supported the archbishop’s views, emphasizing the need for awareness of pastoral issues while continuing to use the language of “father.”

The ongoing trend of aligning Scripture with worldly perspectives contradicts the essence of believers’ calling. Romans 12:2 urges Christians to resist conformity to the world and instead be transformed through the renewal of their minds, allowing them to discern God’s will and perfect ways.

Regrettably, many are adapting the Bible to fit the world’s standards, deviating from its intended purpose. As this practice persists, the apostate church’s growth aligns with prophesied events in 1 Timothy 4:1. However, this situation provides a significant focus for Spirit-empowered prayer. Christians can fervently implore God to remove the veil from people’s eyes, enabling them to perceive the truth of God’s Word as it is, not as the world desires it to be.

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