

Item #87 (Review of *Mysteries of the Lord's Prayer*)

The author of the book under review is Fr. John Gavin, S.J., a personal friend of mine. He is associate professor of religious studies at The College of The Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. The book (*Mysteries of the Lord's Prayer. Wisdom from the Early Church*) has xxii-168 pages and costs \$24.95. It is published by The Catholic University Press and may be ordered through cuapress.org. A special feature of the book is the foreword by George Weigel.

The purpose of the book is to record comments of a group of early Christian theologians ("Fathers of the Church") on the "Our Father", perhaps the best known prayer of Christendom. Weigel's foreword shows how Gavin's book fits into the present trend of Catholic theologians to return to the sources of Catholic theological thought. Which he does with his accustomed clarity.

Gavin divides the Lord's Prayer into eight "Aporiae" and explores them with the aid of the above-mentioned Fathers. The "Aporiae" are as follows:

First Aporia: How Can Human Beings Call God "Father"?

Second Aporia: Where Is God the Father?

Third Aporia: How Can God Grow in Holiness?

Fourth Aporia: Was There Ever a Time When God Did Not Rule?

Fifth Aporia: Are There Limitations to God's Rule?

Sixth Aporia: Why Should We Seek Bread?

Seventh Aporia: Can We Make a Deal with God?

Eighth Aporia: Does God Tempt Us?

In commenting on the text of the "Our Father" (found at Matthew 6,9-13 / Luke 11,2-4 / the *Didache*), Gavin makes his own observations and quotes the Fathers where he thinks their comments are relevant. The Fathers whom Gavin cites where he thinks relevant are fifteen in number, and he lists them along with brief biographical notes in a special section on pages 141-147 ("Brief Portraits of the Fathers"). He supplements this presentation of the portraits with a very helpful listing of their published works (pages 151-157) supplemented by a list of secondary sources (pp. 157-162).

As an introduction to this carefully researched study Gavin uses the ROTAS-SATOR Square and ROTAS-SATOR Anagram found in the ruins of Pompeii, The supposition operative is that these diagrams (illustrations are furnished on pages 2 and 3) indicate that there was a unifying interpretation at work for the Lord's Prayer among the first Christians.

To comb the texts of the Fathers with possible relevant comments as regards the Our Father must have taken my friend Gavin an immense amount of time. His comments, when put together with comments of the Fathers, make for profitable reading. I can appreciate Gavin's reliance on the ROTAS diagrams as the source for what one instinctively senses is the necessary underlying principle of unity in the prayer. This source of unity may well be the SATOR formulae as Gavin maintains. In any case, Gavin's book is an excellent introduction into the thinking of the early "Fathers" of the Church and provides a useful textbook for introducing students into this impressive group.

But I would like to mention another possibility: the seven sacraments. In a source

that has now slipped my mind the present writer read just such a suggestion. And as a result he has attempted to work out a presentation of the prayer based on this presupposition. The resulting understanding of the "Our Father" or the "Lord's Prayer" would be as follows:

"Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name": Baptism.

"Thy Kingdom come": Confirmation.

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven": Matrimony, Holy Orders.

"Give us this day our Daily Bread": Eucharist.

"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us": Reconciliation.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from he Evil One": Extreme Unction.

An explanation for this interpretation is contained on this website in Item #21 above, (Some Wild Surmises on the "Our Father"). As is the case elsewhere on my website, all I assert is that the interpretation is "plausible". (**James Swetnam, S.J., February 5, 2022**)