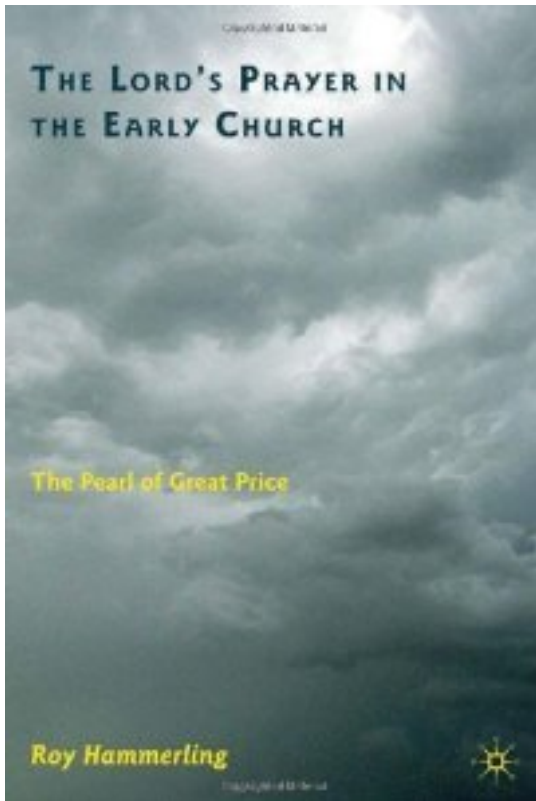


Roy Hammerling, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church: The Pearl of Great Price*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 191 pp.
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by Fr. Anthony Estabrooks

Roy Hammerling is Chair of the Religion Department at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota where he teaches Church History and Religion in Film. He is the editor of *a history of Prayer: the First to the Fifth Century* (2008).

In this recent work, Professor Hammerling concentrates on the use of the Lord's Prayer during this same period of the early church. The book examines all the major sources on the Lord's prayer in the

Church, east and west, including a few sources from heterodox.

This little hardcover book is a rich source and reference work for anyone wanting to explore this topic further. The extensive notes and references make up a quarter of the book.

Hammerling presents his findings with great clarity of expression and organizes the content extremely well, so that much painstaking and

thorough gathering of detail is presented in a very readable, but condensed way.

In the first of three sections to the book, Hammerling presents the t high reverence for the Lord's prayer universally held in the early centuries as a condensation of Christian faith and life presented in words embued with power, holiness, spiritual profundity and mystery.

The second section of the book explores how the commentaries and references to the Lord's prayer illumine the place which the Prayer held in the liturgical life of the Church and the history of the Church and its development.

In the third section Hammerling concentrates on the fourth and fifth centuries, emphasizing the full flowering of the theological understanding of the Lord's Prayer, and its interpretation. Its connection with the Holy Mysteries such as baptism and Eucharist sheds light on the theology of the Church as that theology developed. During this later period of the early Church, major commentaries manifest how the theology of the Church was understood to be embodied in the Lord's Prayer.

Hammerling says in his introduction:

This book examines all the major sources of the LP in the early church through the fifth century from two central points of view, namely, historical and theological. It does so, however, by applying these scholarly disciplines in a variety of ways. First of all, it reads theological texts – biblical commentaries and the like – with historical eyes in order to discover the development of early church attitudes and practices regarding the LP; at the same time it also closely examines these texts in a more straightforward, traditional way, that is, by carefully analyzing the religious and intellectual implications of these early works. It also carefully sifts through the

historical contexts of the early sources in order to discover theological insights. By considering the theological texts historically and the historical events theologically, an interesting picture of the first five centuries of Christianity emerges.

In quotations from major figures during these early centuries, one gains a sense of the depth of spiritual reflection and life out of which these people wrote. The words of the Lord's Prayer were deeply meditated upon realities in which people lived.

The book's purpose, which it fulfills wonderfully, is to provide an accessible and clear and very full resource for understanding the place of the Lord's prayer in the early church. But for this reviewer, whose interest is primarily theological and pastoral, it is a frustration not to have the full texts of the church fathers on the Lord's Prayer, nor to explore fully the spiritual depths out of which they lived the reality of the Prayer.

Hammerling's research and relatively brief indications of why the Lord's Prayer was so closely related to the rites of baptism and the Eucharist, and to the unique message of Christianity concerning our adoption as sons and heirs of God in Christ, is a topic which has relevance for inter-religious dialogue and for discussion of gender concerns in addressing and knowing God as Father, in Christ. These kinds of concerns are not within the scope of his research, but his research provides resources for listening to what the early church knew and experienced intuitively on these matters.

About the author: Father Anthony (Spencer) Estabrooks, MA, MDiv, is Director of St. Arseny Orthodox Christian Theological Institute, and the pastor of the Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring Parish in Winnipeg, Manitoba.