



Prayer

Hans Urs von Balthasar , Graham Harrison (Translator)

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This is perhaps the best and most comprehensive book on prayer ever written. From the persons of the Trinity through the Incarnation to the Church and the very structure of the human person, this book is a powerful synthesis of what prayer is and how to pray. The testament of a great theologian on something which is most personal and interior, contemplative prayer.

Prayer Details

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From Reader Review Prayer for online ebook

Conor says

This book is so profound that I will need to reread it several times to let its insights sink in. This is one of the more accessible books by Balthasar I have read. The most striking part of the book is when he talks about our being brought to heaven by Christ in things like the sacraments. His focus on contemplation, the tensions inherent in it, and the proper focus on it is deeply theological and practical. I highly recommend this book. This actually might be the best book of Balthasar's to begin with.

Monica says

Excellent book.

It is dense and took me almost a year to get through, but it was certainly worth it.

While there were spells of dryness, I also found sections drenched in consolation.

Not for light reading, but well worth the effort and time.

Daniel says

Brilliant!

Dan Glover says

This is the best thing I have ever read on prayer and stands as a truly great work of integrated theology and spirituality. This is dense, deep and so very good. It deserves a better review than I have time to give it.

Erik says

Recommended by James Schall in Another Sort of Learning, Chapter 16, as one of Eleven Books on Prayer, Belief, and Reflection.

Barry says

An incredible read! The richness of its theology and the depth of its devotional quality is unparalleled! My favorite book on prayer!!!

John says

Von Balthasar's book is incredibly rich and needs to be waded through slowly. The book is thoroughly Christological and that thick foundation makes the book and prayer come alive. The book is organized around three sections: 1) The Act of Contemplation; 2) The Object of Contemplation; 3) The Tensions of Contemplation. It is the second section that (rightly) grounds the book.

Here is a taste of the rich language of von Balthasar:

"Existence itself was only given to us for the sake of an even earlier and even more inconceivable purpose of God "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:3, ff); indeed, our existence as a whole is immersed in a far deeper sea, the bottomless ocean of the love of the Father who creates natures and laws as a foil for his miracles. This is something we must be vividly aware of as we pray, contemplating the word of God: that the whole compact solidity of our creaturely being and essence, and of the everyday world in which we find ourselves and find our bearings, is afloat like a ship above the immense depths of an entirely different element (which alone is absolute and decisive), namely, the unfathomable love of the Father."

My only critiques of von Balthasar would be rooted in our theological differences (he, a Roman Catholic, myself a Protestant).

Chris says

What the purpose of prayer is!

Josh says

OK...but obviously a theologian writing about mysticism.

Ron Downing says

I love this book!

David Miller says

It's hard to explain why von Balthasar is so inspiring and so fun to read. This book has some insights that with God's help, will change my life:

"Penitence as the painful weaning from dependence on our faculties of sense and of the mind: they too must feel the polarizing effect of Christian life. *The same senses and powers cannot delight simultaneously or alternately in the divine and what is inimicable to the divine; they cannot aspire to become detached from what is ungodly simply through delight in what is godly.*"

Thoughts like these are sprinkled every few pages in every single one of this author's books. This book goes some way to explaining the source of these insights; anybody that prays this way can't help but be

transformed... somewhere in this book he mentions "the first 15 minutes, the second 15 minutes, the third 15 minutes".

Sskous says

I read and re-read this little volume. von B is dense and deep in his theological work, but here he's very moving.

Tom says

Profound. One of my favorite Christian authors.

Kim Padan says

I read this book as part of my Lay Dominican studies. It is the first von Balthasar book I have read, and it was truly remarkable. Initially, because it was for study, I took notes about particularly beautiful passages. But after a while, I stopped with the notes and just treasured to the beautiful writing. One of my new favorites!

booklady says

Excellent book on prayer and one worth having on kindle for easy access. It didn't really clarify contemplative prayer for me, however ... well at least not very much. All the books I've read on the subject say pretty much the same things, none of which has been very helpful. Contemplative prayer is hard to describe because it is beyond words. Even attempting to journal an experience doesn't begin to capture the essence of the encounter. Yet it is important to try.



Such things* cannot be proclaimed and propagated, however intense this “action” may be, unless they have been known in experience. Unless a person has gone through these things in contemplation, he will be hampered by a kind of embarrassment, a kind of bad conscience, in speaking about them or even in trying to act accordingly. Sometimes even his bad conscience will have been stifled by a naive busy-ness which, mistakenly thought to be spiritual, is in fact worldly.’

For me this brings to mind The Problem of Pain and makes me want to re-read it. How can we grow in our prayer life and really become contemplatives in the deepest and fullest sense of the word without pain and yes sin, for is there greater pain than the realization that at bottom one is a sinner?

*Of the ineffable peace of eternity above all earthly struggles, but also of the unutterable weakness and

powerlessness of crucified Love, so “emptied” that it becomes “nothing”, becomes “sin” and “a curse”, and yet, in this “emptying” becomes the source of all power and salvation for the Church and for mankind?
