



Arriving at Amen

Leah Libresco , Mark P. Shea (Introduction)

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As a Yale graduate, Leah Libresco launched her writing career by blogging about science, literature, mathematics, and morality from a distinctively secular perspective. Over time, encounters with friends and associates caused her to concede the reasonableness of belief in God in theory, though not yet in practice.

Arriving at Amen Details

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From Reader Review Arriving at Amen for online ebook

The American Conservative says

"When religious converts write books soon after their conversions, they often write apologetics or narrative spiritual autobiography—giving their reasons, intellectual or personal. But in *Arriving at Amen: Seven Catholic Prayers That Even I Can Offer*, Leah Libresco has produced a very different kind of book: an account of seven prayers that structure her prayer life, and a portrait of someone diving headfirst into the pursuit of holiness.

"...'In a higher world it is otherwise,' wrote Cardinal Newman, 'but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.' Libresco illustrates the role failure, in faith, plays in that process. Her book has its faults—some of the examples she uses to unpack the prayers are more illuminating than others—but *Arriving at Amen* does the service of showing us what it means to fumble and flail and fail into a closer friendship with God."

<http://www.theamericanconservative.co...>

Mike Moody says

Full Disclosure: I do not know the author and I paid for this book with my own hard-earned* money. I am familiar with Ms. Libresco and her writing style, having been a fairly regular reader of her blog since before her conversion, so I had some idea what to expect before reading. This is not a conversion story per se, although that subject is covered, but more of an examination of Catholic prayer practices from the perspective of a new convert with no religious experience and an extremely analytical mind.

Each chapter contains an exploration of various prayers and uses helpful, interesting, and somewhat geeky analogies (such as computer programming, musical theater, and Japanese pottery) to illuminate them in unexpected and fascinating ways. You'll probably also come away with a new appreciation for St. Peter, one of the best and most interesting parts of the book.

If you are afraid you aren't nerdy/geeky enough to enjoy the book, don't be. You'll learn something new as the author makes her points clearly and concisely and then moves on. If I can power through the parts on *Les Misérables*, you can do the same for Cartesian coordinates. There is also a thought provoking study guide at the end, which was a nice bonus.

For all the excellent nerdy meditation, what I loved most about the book is that it contains practical, useful suggestions for better and deeper prayer. This is what ultimately got it a 5-star rating.

*Fuller Disclosure: The money wasn't really that hard-earned.

Jeff Miller says

One book I have been meaning to get to is *Arriving at Amen: Seven Catholic Prayers That Even I Can Offer*

by Leah Libresco since I was sure it would be interesting. So finally got around to buying it and totally enjoyed the whole book. Just stunningly good.

For those unaware of Leah Libresco, she was previously an atheist blogger at Patheos. Her blog “Unequally Yoked” originally had the tagline “a geeky atheist picks fights with her Catholic boyfriend.” In June of 2012 she posted about her decision to become Catholic.

The title of her book, which came from her publisher, in part describes this book. When you come to the Catholic faith from an atheist background and never having believed in the existence of God, there is a big “what next”. This was certainly my experience where there was some intellectual understanding of the faith and a submission of intellect and will, but actually praying was totally alien to my experience.

This has to be one of the most unique books regarding prayer I have read. She takes to prayer methodologically as she works to integrate prayer in her life. What I really enjoyed is how she describes these struggles and the methods she used to start to overcome problems. This is not really a “how to” book on prayer with suggestions that will work for everybody. More of an approach to praying and being attentive to your own difficulties and seeking solutions that will work for you personally. Just like “Life hacking” has become a term used, I think “Prayer hacking” kind of fits in describing this approach. There is a wealth of devotional practices within the Church along with guidance in prayer and contemplation. Yet each individual must also discover what suits them best.

The most wonderful aspect of this book is the analogies as they are so rich and explanatory. She takes examples from across the spectrum of culture, science, fiction, math, etc. One thing I always appreciated about Catholic apologist Jimmy Akin is his geeky analogies from multiple fields of discipline. Leah Libresco has that same ability to help you understand something more deeply using these analogies. While some of her analogies are quite obscure, she explains them well. So you get the double-advantage of learning something new while also coming to understand something more. Her chapter on confession was phenomenal with her relating of the “folk ballad of “Tam Lin” in regards to holding on to sin and how it shifts as you examine your conscience. This example is something I doubt I will ever forget. It explained my own experience succinctly and helped me to understand it better with a helpful visualization. This book is just chock-full of insights.

I also really enjoyed her clarity of thought and the natural way she teaches. She is obviously brilliant, but you never feel talked-down-to. More like you are joining her on a journey in discovering and integrating prayer.

I immensely enjoyed every moment I was reading this book and the fresh way it opens up avenues to pursue in my own prayer life.

I really hope we will be seeing more books from Leah Libresco in the future. I would certainly purchase anything she wrote on any topic and so look forward to her next book. There is a well-known (but totally false) story about how Queen Victoria, charmed by Alice in Wonderland, wanted to receive the author’s next work and received an inscribed copy of *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants*. Well if her next book was on math, I would read that.

antony says

Arriving at Amen

If I should overthink everything like the Author I believe I should go crazy.

The first chapter of the book is filled with way too much complication for me. It is as if each new paragraph sped off in a different direction.

As soon as the book proper began things settled down to an acceptable roar and he insights into the authors prayer life come thick and fast.

This is not light reading by any means but it is filled with an honesty that I like.

I enjoyed hearing about the authors experiences with the various forms of prayer and me a better appreciation for them. I find it inspiring reading about someone else's prayer life it always gives a boost to my own.

This book is a no holds barred, tag team wrestling match within the authors own mind about how to approach the Lord through prayer.

Lindsay Wilcox says

I liked it. I would not describe this as a conversion story. That's selling it too short. Conversion stories are more like memoirs: chronological, systematic, almost novelistic in their foreshadowing and storytelling. This book is defined by its intellectual heft and raw honesty. I am a fairly intellectual person, but my tendency to understand by concrete analogy, find role models in literature, and meta-cognitively examine my spiritual life are child's play compared to Libresco's baby steps toward the faith. If you're looking for a storyline from atheism to Catholicism, you won't find it. If, however, you are facing similar hurdles wrapping your well-educated, mathematical mind around Catholic concepts like the Eucharist, the rosary, or the Mass, this is the perfect book for you. I found myself alternately identifying with Libresco's struggles and wondering how anyone could "math up" the faith so thoroughly. I'm excited to read more of her writing in the future.

Read my full review at Austin CNM.

Jennifer Palmer says

While I disagree with many of the doctrines discussed in this book (hence, why I am not Catholic), I found Libresco's insights on faith, and, in particular, prayer, to be helpful and refreshing. She gave me a good number of practical tools and ideas to incorporate into my own prayer life, and for that, I'm grateful.

Thomas says

Not really what I was expecting, but provided really good insight into how to think about religious practices. Quite easy to read but still some deeper theological questions were posed and answered.

Pedro says

This is a five star book. But I confess that I've struggled for some days to find the words to make a proper review, and even now I'm not sure if I got it.

I don't know personally Ms. Libresco and odds are I'll never will but I've been following her blog since 2012, when she announced her conversion. Three years later the book *Arriving at Amen: Seven Catholic Prayers That Even I Can Offer* is much better than I thought it would be. Ms. Libresco's blog is wonderful but the book shows us a spiritual maturity one would not expect in a three-year Catholic.

Ms. Libresco dropped Javert as a role model for Mary, Our Lady, and the reflections she share with the readers in the book are an important help for new Catholics as it is for people who are living their faith for many years. The chapter on confession is specially touching.

I've read many conversion stories, from Scott and Kimberly Hahn to Holly Ordway and Jennifer Fulwiler but Ms. Libresco's book is not just a conversion story but a great guide to improve our life of relationship with God.

Nancy says

Leah Libresco's first book, *Arriving at Amen: Seven Catholic Prayers That Even I Can Offer*, is a quirky and brainy mix of popular culture, literature, philosophy, and Church doctrine, that's both enjoyable to read and a challenge to live out one's Catholic faith more fully and intentionally.

Read more of my review here:

<http://readingcatholic.com/young-auth...>

Julia says

I was provided with an advance copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

I love conversion stories and Leah's is no exception. Her book explores her journey from Javert-inspired Stoicism to a grace-seeking Catholic through seven types of prayers. Her story and reflections are often accompanied by "This reminds me of..." and a creative example I have never heard deployed as a metaphor for prayer: Ballroom dancing! Mellified men! Pottery technique! I also personally liked the shout out to Catholic mommy bloggers, who played a major part in my own Tiber-swimming. It's a testimony to the clarity of her prose that her prodigious use of math was (mostly) intelligible to this reader who has avoided math since topping out at Calculus in high school. All of her examples demonstrate how universal prayer really is, even when it seems a foreign language, and set her book apart from a lot of other devotional literature with her unique perspective.

The highlight for me was the epilogue, which serves as a great bookend to the introduction about law-bound Javert. Leah's spin on Peter's "failing in fortissimo" is original and communicated what's so wonderful about God's grace. The epilogue also made me want to put into practice all the ways I was inspired in my prayer life by the rest of the book without falling prey to fear of failure that often holds me back from starting at all.

This book is useful for converts, cradle Catholics, and seekers wondering how one can become fluent in the language of prayer. I would absolutely recommend it.

Jeremy says

This book is brilliant. I first came across Leah Libresco years ago when she was a big Atheist blogger; she has since converted to Catholicism. This book isn't about her conversion per se though. It is about how, as a new Catholic, she found herself in a real way "in over her head" with all the prayer traditions - or rather, she would have been, if she hadn't had the foresight and maturity to really understand that, as St. Augustine once wrote, "Grace builds on nature."

Far from using what some might call "secular" loves to push down and make sense of her newfound faith, throughout the book, Libresco organically shows how nothing of what she loved and nothing of who she was, was lost when she converted. On the contrary, what made sense before, now made even more sense, and allowed her to "play" with her prayer, as she grew in a relationship with Christ and the Church. She organically shows how her thought processes and ideas about Shakespeare, computer programming, Lord of the Rings, Ballroom Dancing, and much more, all aided her in having authentic experiences of prayer. Her insights are amazing; they are at once simple, and yet profound.

Each chapter of the book focuses on one type of prayer, and Libresco writes on how she struggled with each one, and how she has since come to a greater appreciation of that prayer: The Rosary, The Liturgy of the Hours, Petitionary Prayer, The Mass, Confession, The Examen, and Lectio Divina are all given new depth and insight as Libresco shares her experiences (her relating the Rosary to Ballroom Dancing, and her using the Liturgy of the Hours as a 'framing' for her day, are a couple of my favourites).

Libresco is brilliant, you can tell she is well-read, but she does not make the reading lofty. It's practical and humorous, and this book helped me with prayer more than any other book has in a long time.

Catherine says

In the book, Leah mentions how acquired languages can shed light on shared meanings by forcing you to really think about the roots and shades of communication tied into words. Reading this book is also kind of like that.

Amanda (Orandi et Legendi) says

There are seven chapters in this book, each chapter dealing with a different type of prayer. As I was writing this review, I realized that it became a review and reflection all in one. I hope you all don't mind. :-)

Chapter 1 is "Petition." Leah Libresco begins this chapter noting that "petition may be the most common type of prayer." In prayers of petition we ask God for the things we need. Prayers of petition help us to pray for others which in turn brings our attention to God Himself.

On the topic of petitionary prayer, Leah brings up something that I think we all think of at some point. “Even if I conceded the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being, that second ‘omni’ seemed enough to guarantee that the whole project was futile.” In other words, if God knows everything, He would know what we need and want before we even ask. The thing is that God does know what we need and want. By offering petitionary prayer, we are letting God know what is bothering us and at the same time it reminds us that God is with us through everything.

The second chapter is called “Confession.” Confession is the beautiful sacrament where we tell Jesus (in the person of the priest) our sins and ask for His forgiveness. God is always ready to forgive us if only we ask. Leah shares her own thoughts on Confession saying, “Soon after my conversion, once Confession became something I did not just something I theorized about, I was surprised to find that it was my favorite sacrament.” Confession is one of those hard things to talk about. It is a very private sacrament happening between an individual and a priest acting in persona Christi. For me, the sacrament really helps me to be honest about my faults and helps give me a means to change.

Chapter 3 is entitled “Examen” wherein Leah talks about the five part Ignatian Examen. “The first step of the Examen is reviewing the past day, looking for moments of joy and expressing gratitude to God.” This part can be a bit difficult if we are not attuned to remembering the specifics of our day. “Next comes praying to God for light and clear vision to aid in reflection and judgment.” We ask God to help us see clearly the events of our day. “Only then does the Examen get to the review of errors and sins that looks more like a standard examination of conscience.” This practice helps us see a pattern in our faults and failings that are not always present when doing an examination of conscience before Confession. “The fourth step is asking for forgiveness, and the final step is asking for guidance and help in doing better the next day.” The whole point of the Examen as I see it is to cultivate a spirit of attentiveness to our actions as we try to do better every day.

The fourth chapter is titled “Rosary.” The Rosary is one of my favorite prayers ever. Leah says, “The Rosary is a storytelling prayer. It moves along the arc of Jesus and Mary’s experience and offers many points of access into their lives.” I think that may be why I like the Rosary so much. I feel it helps me grow closer to Jesus and Mary each time I meditate upon their lives.

Chapter 5 is “Divine Office.” The Divine Office is also known as the Liturgy of the Hours. “The Liturgy of the Hours, which predates many of the splits and schisms in the Body of Christ, is a cycle of psalms and prayers,” Leah explains. I love the Liturgy of the Hours for it speaks to me everyday. The psalms cover so much of human experience and the Liturgy of the Hours imitates that through the use of the psalms and prayers inspired by them.

The sixth chapter is “Lectio Divina.” Lectio divina is the prayerful reading of the Scriptures. “Classically, the four stages of lectio divina are lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio (read, meditate, pray, and contemplate).” My lectio divina typically involves my journal as I find my focus is better when I write.

Chapter 7 is “Mass.” I rather like Leah’s short description of the Mass: “The readings from the Old and New Testaments shows us how to live, and the crowning moment of the Mass, the Eucharist, is our lesson in why we want to live in union with God.”

Overall, I loved this book. It was a great reminder why I love being Catholic. I think this book could be for anyone, Catholics looking to grow in their faith and for those interesting in Catholicism.

I received this book for free from the publisher via NetGalley for review consideration. This in no way

affects my opinion of the title or the content of this review.

This review first appeared at Orandi et Legendi.

Melodie Roschman says

Methodical, rich with analogies and metaphors, but a little too distant and dry to me. I'm guessing, as someone from a more evangelical background, that high Catholicism is just not my thing. Writers like Rachel Held Evans and Nadia Bolz-Weber romanticize the sacraments; Libresco makes them feel more like processes, or tools, with steps and equations and variables. I was fond of a couple of her analogies - her discussion of apophatic theology was especially helpful - but I was never particularly engaged in the book, as evidenced by the fact that it took me more than three months to get through the slim volume.

Sarah Duggan says

A refreshingly realistic, smart, and funny take on how prayer can enhance your life. Rather than the usual conversion story, Leah Libresco tells the story of what happened after she decided to believe in God. She presents faith as a learning process without resorting to sappy aphorisms. I loved all the references to pop culture and science. Rather than pearl-clutching about The Culture, Libresco connects her wonder at and enjoyment of the world with its Creator.
