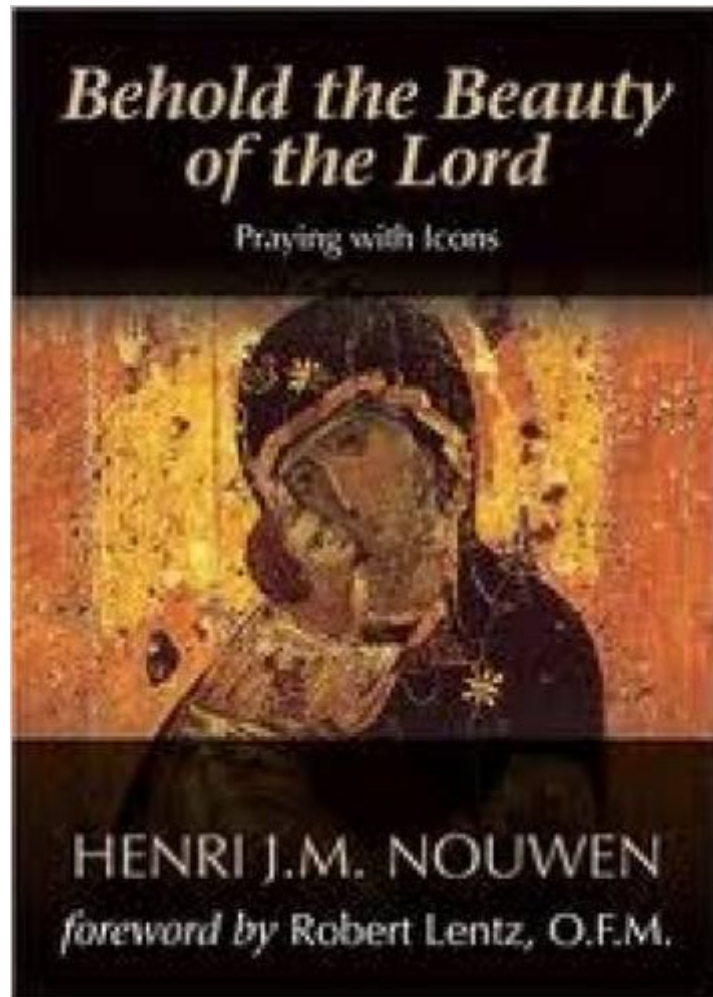


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Behold The Beauty Of The Lord: Praying With Icons



Synopsis

This is a book of meditations penned by famed Catholic writer Henri Nouwen, growing out of his contemplation of icons during sojourns at l'Arche, a community for people with mental handicaps in Trosly, France.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Henri Nouwen was one of the most trusted and respected spiritual writers and counselors when he was alive. His words have blessed many thousands of people in many traditions. I especially recommend this one. Although Nouwen was a Roman Catholic priest, in this book he explores Eastern Orthodox spirituality, teaching us how to pray with icons. His teaching, from an Orthodox perspective, is doctrinally sound and very insightful. The book has four sections, one for each of the icons: The Holy Trinity (a famous icon by St. Andrei Rublev--see the movie), the Virgin of Vladimir (a beautiful icon painted by St. Luke the Evangelist, according to legend), the Savior of Zvenigorod (also by Rublev), and Pentecost. The icons are reproduced beautifully on fold-out portions at each end of the book, so that you can read and ponder the icons simultaneously. If icons are to you just pictures or religious decorations, this book will teach how to look more deeply, to see the spiritual significance of their details, to see the Gospel in their art. You will, if you are willing, naturally be led to pray and to receive them as revelations of spiritual reality. But if you are skeptical, perhaps from an iconoclast tradition, at least you will begin to understand why icons are so precious in Orthodox tradition.

This book is very important for anyone who is being introduced to icons. Several important themes emerge. Icons are not just art; icons are a way into contemplative prayer, and are therefore one way to let God speak to you. This book is very practical as well as very spiritual. The author provides a series of meditations on four different icons. Through those meditations we discover new things about our own relationship with God while we get a glimpse into the author's relationship. He also shows us how we must become accustomed to using icons for prayer, a process that is not natural for many of us who grew up in the western Church. The book takes us away from the shallow view of icons as mere art, even primitive art, and shows us why icons are said to be written, not painted. The book shows how icons speak to us of the relationship we each have with God, and how that can be expressed through our use of icons for contemplative prayer. I highly recommend this book.

James H. Dobbins, Ph.D. jdobbins@nishanet.com

As a Protestant minister, I learned how to be a "wordsmith" and pray nice things. But in this book the author opened up a new--though ancient--dimension of prayer. This is prayer without words, prayer that focuses on being in God's presence rather than performing in God's presence. I found myself using the right side of my brain to touch and feel what was holy--a divine mystery. In the meditation on the icon of the Holy Trinity, we are invited to spend time "living in the house of love". This involves putting one's self into the picture, that is, sitting with the trinity and experiencing God as loving presence. Nouwen leads us through his experience, like a trusted guide showing the way, while encouraging us to walk the trail ourselves. With four beautiful colored illustrations, it's a gift you need to give yourself--but one that's hard to resist giving to others!

This isn't a dogmatic book that tells the reader what one must get out of praying with icons. Nouwen simply relates an experience he had over a course of several years while visiting l'Arche, a community for people with mental handicaps, in Trosly, France. Each year, when he visited, a different icon was placed on the table of the room where he stayed. Nouwen simply records the fruits of his meditations for us to read. In doing so, he aptly teaches the reader more about praying with icons than any "how to" book ever could. This book came at a perfect time for me in my spiritual journey. I was just beginning to open up to the world of praying with icons, when Nouwen lit a fire within my soul. I hope the book does the same for you.

NEGATIVE: I will offer only one negative point concerning this book. The glue on my copy was defective and the front portion of the cover pulled away from the book. It has been my experience that what happens with one book, may

happen with many. Still, I feel completely comfortable recommending it.

This book was loaned to me, I promptly bought it through .com because it is so helpful in focus. The explanations are easy to follow, depth of insight provides a delight in learning, and the four beautiful prints allow immediate reference and practical meditation. Highly recommended.

I first read this book in the late 80s, just before a period of return to the Catholic tradition of my youth, and I was reminded of it this past Sunday while gazing at stained glass windows in a local church. The book is a wonderful introduction to Christian iconography, from a spiritual master and healer. In addition, it is very effective as a first step toward sitting and gazing as a spiritual practice. Indeed, sitting, and seeing, becomes a profound experience of prayer in itself, and Nouwen's little book will be appreciated by those seeking a retreat from the agitation, clamor and distraction of daily life.

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