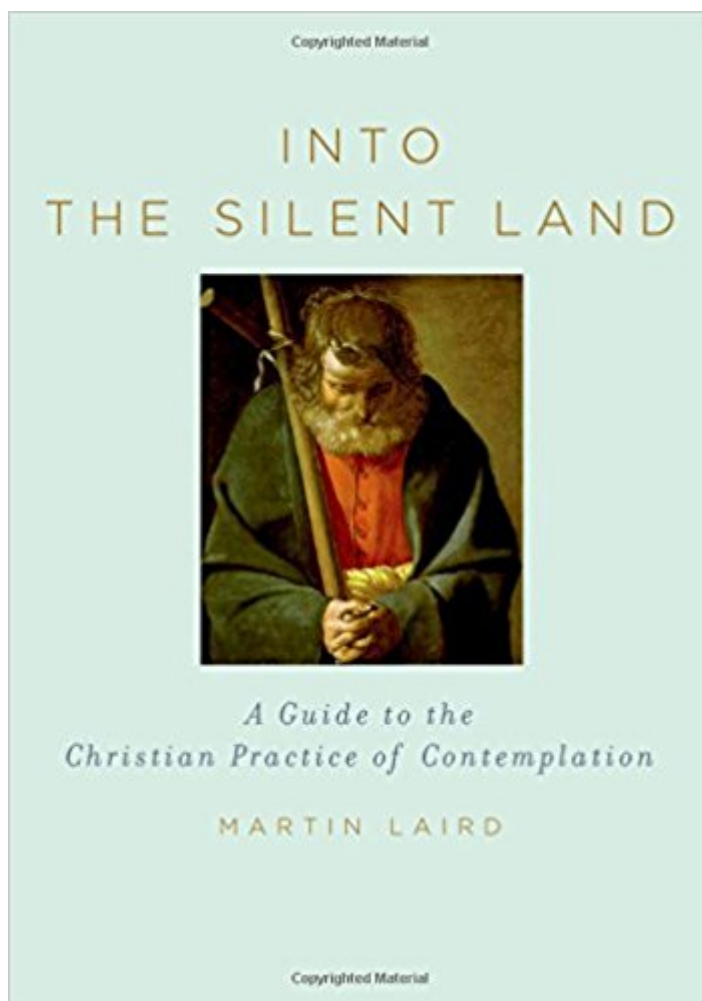


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Into The Silent Land: A Guide To The Christian Practice Of Contemplation



Synopsis

Sitting in stillness, the practice of meditation, and the cultivation of awareness are commonly thought to be the preserves of Hindus and Buddhists. Martin Laird shows that the Christian tradition of contemplation has its own refined teachings on using a prayer word to focus the mind, working with the breath to cultivate stillness, and the practice of inner vigilance or awareness. But this book is not a mere historical survey of these teachings. In *Into the Silent Land*, we see the ancient wisdom of both the Christian East and West brought sharply to bear on the modern-day longing for radical openness to God in the depths of the heart. Laird's book is not like the many presentations for beginners. While useful for those just starting out, this book serves especially as a guide for those who desire to journey yet deeper into the silence of God. The heart of the book focuses on negotiating key moments of struggle on the contemplative path, when the whirlwind of distractions or the brick wall of boredom makes it difficult to continue. Laird shows that these inner struggles, even wounds, that any person of prayer must face, are like riddles, trying to draw out of us our own inner silence. Ultimately Laird shows how the wounds we loathe become vehicles of the healing silence we seek, beyond technique and achievement. Throughout the language is fresh, direct, and focused on real-life examples of people whose lives are incomparably enriched by the practice of contemplation.

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Customer Reviews

"This is a beautifully written book. The language is profound, poetic, and free of worn cliches. It has obviously grown out of a life of study, erudition, and personal prayer." --Worship"*Into the Silent Land*

by Martin Laird is a wonderful introduction to the subject of contemplation. It has a vitality and relevance that are gripping. Contemplative books are often dry, but I found this a page-turner." --Church Times

"In a world hungering for practical spiritual direction on how to manage distractions, moods, bodily posture, breathing, suffering, illness, addiction, and dying, Laird's book stands out as a treasure to share with anyone who is seeking greater wisdom and peace. He provides us with an eminently accessible doorway into the land of God's loving silence." --Horizons

"Laird's book defines how to sink back in God's ground physically with breathing, mentally with "prayer words," and spiritually with interior surrender. Through anecdote, Scripture, and classic wisdom, Laird illuminates a Christian path into the silent land. An able guide, he makes the trip more than worth the journey." --Christianity Today

"This book is different. There are plenty of books on contemplation that feel rather tired--either wordy and labored or unhelpfully smooth and idealistic. But this is sharp, deep, with no clichés, no psychobabble and no short cuts. Its honesty is bracing, its vision utterly clear; it is a rare treasure."--Rowan Williams, The Archbishop of Canterbury

"Often they say 'you learn how to swim by swimming' but a good coach or swimming manual is essential. Equally, we could say 'you learn how to be contemplative by contemplating' and a good guide or mentor is necessary. Into the Silent Land is just that. I tried it and it works. Try it."--Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

"This is a beautifully written book. The language is profound, poetic, and free of worn clichés. It has obviously grown out of a life of study, erudition and personal prayer."--Worship

"Into the Silent Land is a beautiful and deeply consoling book, a reminder that prayer is both real and fundamentally simple. Not since Thomas Merton's *Contemplative Prayer* have I encountered a guide to contemplation this wise and compelling."--Douglas Burton-Christie, author of *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*

"With wisdom born of a life of prayer and study, Martin Laird invites us out of distraction and into the silent land where God is waiting. Taking the realities of affliction, fear and failure seriously, Laird offers an approach to contemplative life that is within reach of us all." --Stephanie Paulsell, author of *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*

"Martin Laird's book is a compelling introduction to contemplative prayer. He draws on insights from the Eastern Orthodox tradition of the Jesus Prayer, from the Western Carmelite tradition, from poets and novelists and from his own experience as retreat director and confessor. In the silent land, our wounds become radiant sources of compassion."--Andrew Louth, author of *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*

"Into the Silent Land reflects a happy combination of wide learning, authentic spiritual experience, and clear jargon-free prose. This work should be of inestimable value for anyone interested in the Christian contemplative tradition of prayer."--Lawrence S. Cunningham,

author of Thomas Merton and the Monastic Vision

Martin Laird, O.S.A., is Associate Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Villanova University. He has studied patristics in Rome, London, and Oxford, and has extensive training in contemplative disciplines and gives retreats throughout the United States and Great Britain. He is the translator or author of a host of books and articles, including Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge and Divine Presence (OUP, 2004).

I really enjoyed reading this. I originally bought the audible version, but after a few chapters I realized this content was better read--there were too many areas that I needed to reread to fully understand what the author was saying. I ended up not listening to the rest of the Audible version and simply buying the kindle version. Regardless, the content was great and I appreciate the historical references provided. This book just resonated with me. My reason for 4 stars is that I would think that if you bought the Audible version, that maybe a small discount to those also buying the Kindle version? Or better yet, get the kindle version for free! Now I'm dreaming. :)

Everyone is called to the contemplative life. There isn't a my daily 9 to 5 job and home with my wife and kids and then an "other" life. There is one life. The contemplative life is the "real" life. Marty Laird's book is a clear book that explain reality and gives much in the way of practical pointers on the contemplative life. This is not just for priests and religious. This is for everyone. I wish I had read the Epilogue first. Who Am I? A Tale of Monastic Failure on page 133. In this chapter a young seeker tries to find the REAL monastery. This chapter highlights the fact that we start with a bunch of preconceptions about what reality is. In this chapter, he goes to the first monastery looking for the REAL monastery. The monk at the gate tells him, We are NOT the REAL monastery, that is down the road. The seeker goes down the road and encounters the same monk, but now it is at the REAL monastery. How often we are looking for answers in the REAL contemplative prayer group when the answer is within us, all the time. The only thing that makes the second monastery the REAL monastery is a label which turns out to be false. You will get a tremendous amount of support from this book. If you read Keating and others, you will find their books are more of a compendium of talks on the contemplative life. This book develops the topic in a logical way. If you let it, this book will change your life. The follow-on book, A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness and Contemplation is another great book. The first chapter is a recap of Into the Silent Land. I think you will find it also attractive. But go for Into the Silent Land, first. Deacon Chris

Fr Laird in this book deepens all the instructions, outlines of progress in contemplation, all the perceived nonsense in the writings of certain teachers of prayer (the respected ones). He brings psychology both West and East to bear on the LANGUAGE so commonly used to instruct someone in contemplative prayer. In the process he makes glowing sense of the gospel and of how a person can discover, "...it is Christ who is living in me." The book is not perfect, but it is a significant addition to contemporary teaching of prayer.

This small book is a rare and excellent introduction into meditation or contemplative prayer for Christians. Contemplation offers a different way for Christians to experience God. Laird's writing is superb, and he carefully guides the novice through the meaning and how-to of contemplative prayer. Yet his approach is mature enough to engage those experienced in spiritual thought. I feel this is one of the very best "if not the best, and it might be" of all the books for Christians on this topic. The closest in superb quality is Richard Rohr's "Immortal Diamond." I wish every Christian could read this or Rohr's book because they offer a depth of spiritual growth that will change lives and could change the world.

Into The Silent Land, by Martin Laird, was a very complex book on praying and how to truly enter into contemplative prayer. Many parts of the book were beautifully written, inspirational, and helpful, but there were also parts of the book that were very abstract, repetitive, and could be considered frustrating for someone who is a novice in their prayer life. Prayer is a great mystery, and Laird suggests that silence before God (and immersion into the silence of God) represents the pinnacle of prayer life (this type of prayer is transformative). Obviously, for anyone who has tried contemplative prayer, this path/method is full of subtle challenges. Laird offers many suggestions designed to aid one in progressing deeper into contemplation and prayer life. I am sure that many of these suggestions would be considered useful to students willing to put in the practice, and Laird draws on the rich history of the Catholic tradition (especially focusing on the Wisdom of the Desert Fathers), but prayer is often so personal (intimate union between creator and created), that sometimes the best we can come away with from a book like this is that contemplative prayer is possible, yet still a mystery. For all that this book is (and it is very useful), I am still reminded of St. Paul's words to the Romans, "We do not know what [how] we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." (Rom 8:26) In the end, I believe that our entire life is a prayer to God, and when we engage in things like love, service, justice, and truth, we

are fully alive in prayer to God. When we look back on this kind of life however, we often come to realize that it is the Spirit at work in us helping us to truly live this life of prayer. Perhaps realizing this and taking some time to consider this in silence (immersing ourselves in the knowledge that the hand of God is at work in our lives)-perhaps this is truly the gateway into the silent land of contemplation with God. ~~Lawrence Weber

A tough read, but well worth it. Best advice for me, when I come to a part that I don't quite understand, keep reading and trust that the Holy Spirit will open my heart and mind to what He is trying to get across to me.

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