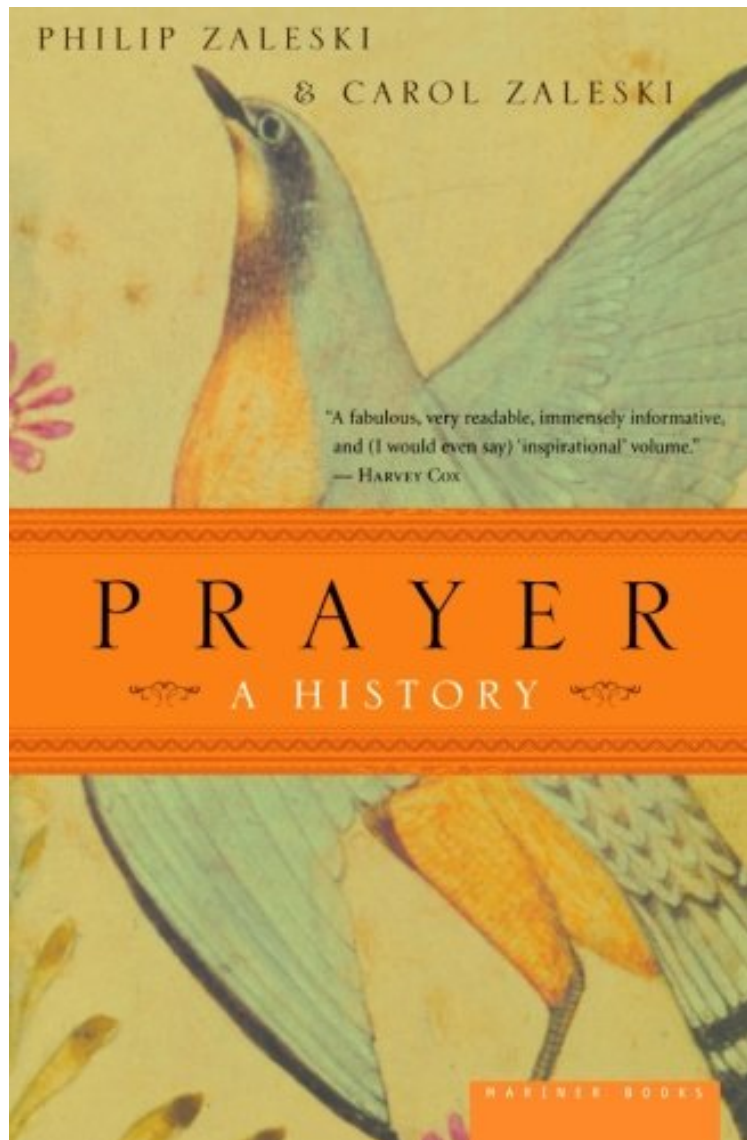


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Prayer: A History

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This landmark work presents prayer in all its richness and variety throughout history, across traditions, and around the globe. In a thorough and fascinating look at this spiritual practice, two of today's most versatile and admired authorities on religion probe the language and fruits of prayer, its controversies, and its prospects for the future. With a focus on extraordinary stories of lives changed by prayer and on great works of literature and art inspired by it, *Prayer: A History* promises to be the standard on the subject for readers of all faiths.

From Publishers Weekly Subtitle notwithstanding, this ambitious volume is not exactly a history of prayer. It is rather an examination of how certain people and certain communities have practiced prayer. In the most satisfying section, the Zaleskis (both teach at Smith College; Philip Zaleski is the editor of the popular Best Spiritual Writing series) sketch four archetypes of prayer. There is the refugee, who clings to God with prayers of petition (the first example given of this type of prayer is the recently popular Jabez); the devotee (such as the Sufi who strives for unceasing prayer); the ecstatic, like Sri Ramakrishna or Teresa of Avila; and the contemplative, who "tastes ultimate reality," like Threse of Lisieux. The discussion of prayer's intersection with culture the role of prayer in modern art, the place of prayer in civic spaces, and so forth is not wholly successful, but each of the individual musings is interesting enough; indeed, some of the vignettes, such as abstract sculptor Constantin Brancusi's reverence for the prayerful icon makers he watched as a child, are delightful. Although some chapters feel arbitrary and the book tends to meander, even the most astute student of prayer will be challenged, surprised or inspired by it. (Nov. 2) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist *Starred * In prayer, the poet George Herbert recognized the acme of civilization. Yet this religious practice has rarely received the sort of careful cultural analysis the Zaleskis here offer. From Ramses II's petitions invoking Amun's assistance in battle to Ansel Adams' photographs offered as an opus Dei, this sweeping cultural history illuminates the abiding influence of prayer in shaping human thought and behavior. Readers explore the way those who pray--whether in modern America or in ancient Babylon--hope for magic and submit to the divine will, seek for answers and contemplate mysteries. The Zaleskis limn traditional taxonomies of prayer that have long differentiated adoration from confession, thanksgiving from intercession, and they examine the forms of language, art, and music through which generations of believers have reached toward heaven. But many readers will particularly value the distinctively contemporary note in the survey of scientific studies of the efficacy of prayer and in the dissection of recent controversies over prayer in schools and other public forums. Surprisingly, investigation of modern prayer ends up teaching almost as much about skeptics (such as Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton) as about saints (such as Therese Martin). And in the American passions stirred by post-9/11 prayers, readers will discern a tangle of devotion and politics. A much-needed study of a neglected topic. Bryce Christensen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "A fabulous, very readable, immensely informative, and (I would even say) 'inspirational' volume." --Harvey Cox, author of *When Jesus Came to Harvard and The Secular City* "A lovely, interesting new book . . . Philip and Carol Zaleski explore this most personal of religious practices in an ecumenical spirit." *The New York Times Book* "Unusually probing and thoughtful." *Christian Science Monitor* "This is the most stunning book on prayer that I have ever read. It will become the benchmark for every other work on the subject, present or future." --Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Divine Hours* "An essential resource for living in our multifaith world." *Spirituality Health Magazine* "The Zaleskis are impressive in their knowledge, and they share what they know in an entertaining way." --National Catholic Reporter "A significant achievement. The authors' learning and generosity of spirit will lead their readers into unfamiliar territory and reveal new depths in the familiar." --*First Things* "A wonderful read . . . Any serious student of prayer will learn a good deal from this book." --*America* "This religious practice has rarely received the sort of careful cultural analysis the Zaleskis offer . . . This sweeping cultural history illuminates the abiding influence of prayer in shaping human thought and behavior." Booklist, ALA, Starred "Intelligent, informed, generous, ecumenical observations." *The New York Times Book* "A grand and human compendium, fascinating on every page. It's witty, moving, and full of interesting facts and funny stories." --Annie Dillard "Thought-provoking and soul-uplifting . . . There's an engaging ease to the Zaleskis' prose, and humor pops through regularly." *Los Angeles Times* "A wonderful book -- intelligent, beautifully written, important, inclusive, and completely useful." --Thomas Moore