



Water, Wind, Earth & Fire: The Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements

By Christine Valters Paintner

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Organized around "The Cantic of the Creatures" by St. Francis of Assisi, *Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire* is the first book to consider the ways in which praying with the natural elements can enliven Christian spiritual life. Teacher, artist, and Benedictine oblate Christine Valters Paintner offers concrete suggestions and guided contemplative exercises; for instance, she suggests that readers take time to "watch the sunrise or sunset and breathe in the beauty of the fiery sky. Contemplate what those beginnings and endings have to say in your own life." Readers benefit from Paintner's extensive training in theology and Benedictine spirituality, as well as her unique work in bringing the expressive arts to spiritual direction.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a warm, personable manner, Paintner, a Benedictine oblate and spiritual director, invites the reader to engage creation as a sacred text by prayerfully exploring theological dimensions of the elements. Drawing on Celtic tradition, Paintner explores religious and cultural symbolism; for example, water's associations with the direction west, the season autumn, and its physical forms and spiritual dimensions, such as tides, thirst, tears, baptism. Suggestions for reflection and action include the application of *lectio divina*, a practice of sacred reading typically used with scripture, to nature, encouraging the reader to listen deeply for the stirring of the holy in sacred texts around us. In each chapter, Paintner offers reflections on her prayer life during the book's composition, demonstrating how she applied the spiritual practices she suggests (such as lighting a candle when contemplating Fire). Quotes from scripture, poets, essayists, and Christian mystics encourage the reader to seek divine revelation and comprehension of God's love for all creation by cultivating a contemplative relationship to nature. Simple and powerful, this book will be a welcome new resource for individuals and groups seeking spiritual connection to creation. (*Mar.*)

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Review

"This well-done and quote-filled paperback forges deep and rich connections between the Christian faith and the natural world." --*Spirituality&Practice*

"For too many centuries, too many Christians have been taught that a deep reverence for the beauty of nature is incompatible with sincere faith. Christine Valters Paintner's *Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire* thus comes as both a blessing and a gift. Not only is her writing as beautiful as the symbolism she describes, but her wide knowledge of scripture, patristic writing, the mystical life of the saints, and contemporary spiritual poetry makes the reading of this book an inspiring and rejuvenating adventure." --**Paula Huston**, Author of *The Holy Way*

"Amid the current profusion of spirituality-and-nature books, *Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire* is a rare treasure: a deeply Christian book that also draws us more deeply into contemplation of and relationship with nature. This fine work of spiritual wisdom and guidance offers to both individuals and groups a companion for all seasons. It can soothe at night, enliven in the morning, kindle the human spirit during the day, and at all times serve as a reminder of the abiding presence of the Creator Spirit, which is the spirit of Christ on earth and among us." --**Jane Redmont**, Author of *When in Doubt, Sing*

About the Author

Christine Valters Paintner is the online abbess for Abbey of the Arts, a virtual monastery offering classes and resources on contemplative practice and creative expression. She earned a doctorate in Christian spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and achieved professional status as a registered expressive arts consultant and educator from the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association.

Paintner is the author of ten books on monasticism and creativity, including *The Eyes of the Heart*; *Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire*; *The Artist's Rule*; *The Soul of a Pilgrim*; and *Illuminating the Way*. She leads pilgrimages in Ireland, Austria, and Germany and online retreats at her website, *AbbeyoftheArts.com*, living out her commitment as a Benedictine Oblate in Galway, Ireland, with her husband, John.

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