

The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin

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Challenging the central place that "practices" have recently held in Christian theology, Lauren Winner explores the damages these practices have inflicted over the centuries

Sometimes, beloved and treasured Christian practices go horrifyingly wrong, extending violence rather than promoting its healing. In this bracing book, Lauren Winner provocatively challenges the assumption that the church possesses a set of immaculate practices that will definitionally train Christians in virtue and that can't be answerable to their histories. Is there, for instance, an account of prayer that has anything useful to say about a slave-owning woman's praying for her slaves' obedience? Is there a robustly theological account of the Eucharist that connects the Eucharist's goods to the sacrament's central role in medieval Christian murder of Jews?

Arguing that practices are deformed in ways that are characteristic of and intrinsic to the practices themselves, Winner proposes that the register in which Christians might best think about the Eucharist, prayer, and baptism is that of "damaged gift." Christians go on with these practices because, though blighted by sin, they remain gifts from God.

Lauren F. Winner is associate professor of Christian spirituality at Duke Divinity School and the author of *Wearing God: Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God*. She lives in Durham, NC. "Incisive"-James K. A. Smith, *Christian Century* "Winner offers a healthy reminder that Christian practices can be abused and misused."-Kyle David Bennett, *Christianity Today*

"This is a creative and intriguing work of historical, literary, and theological imagination."-P. W. Williams, emeritus, *Choice*

"Elegantly weaving together history and theology, Winner provides a needed constructive intervention that makes the turn to 'practice' in Christian thought more honest without leaving the reader in despair."-Eric Gregory, Princeton University

"Does the church ever hurt those it means to help? This book is for those who worry that it does-those who may cause, feel, see, or seek to mend the harm that even baptism and communion can inflict."-Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., University of North Carolina at Greensboro

"A fascinating analysis of how Christian practices can, and characteristically do, go bad 'under the pressure' of sin in this world. I highly recommend this to anyone who thinks that becoming a Christian is any kind of straightforward 'solution' to your problems, or to the problem that is you."-Charles Mathewes, University of Virginia

"Lauren Winner, one of our most insightful Christian intellectuals, understands the ways Christian practice has been deeply involved in white supremacy, capitalism, and oppression. For everyone concerned about the future of theological education and the survival of the theological academy, this ground-breaking book is required reading."-Willie James Jennings, Yale Divinity School

"A curious and remarkable book-a literary and historical meditation on damaged gifts that remain, nevertheless, gifts."-Alan Jacobs, Baylor University

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