



Strangest Way

Robert E. Barron

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Strangest Way Details

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From Reader Review Strangest Way for online ebook

Richard Grebenc says

I very much like Fr. Barron. He is a clear thinker who is very intelligent and has read widely. This comes out in his talks and in this book. One who has heard him speak can hear his voice distinctly in "The Strangest Way" where he tells us that the "odd particularity" of the Christian phenomenon is most known in its adherents worship of a God-Man nailed on an instrument of torture and death which means for Christian life "a conformity with a love unto death."

The bulk of the book is a final three chapters expounding upon his three paths of the Christian way: finding the center, knowing you are a sinner, and realizing your life is not about you. Throughout he is deft in weaving his knowledge of scripture, history, literature, culture, and languages to paint a vivid and poignant picture all the while providing much food for thought on how to practically live these paths. It is better read slowly and certainly would be even more appreciated the second time around.

Two things take away from the book, one specific, one general. The specific instance is a thirteen page summary of Flannery O'Connor's "The Violent Bear it Away" that really dragged along and failed to make any point I could relate to (even though the author attempts to weave it in to his writing afterward). I am barely familiar with O'Connor's work but this exercise seemed pointless and actually detracted from the book. More generally, it is unfortunate that the book is not accessible to a wider audience. There is much good that the average person in the pew could take away from it but I would not recommend it to any but the most engaged, interested, and educated church-goers. Had he brought it down a notch, or provided explanations for some of the more challenging theological concepts, it would be better suited for the masses.

Chris says

I find it is easy to explain why I disliked a book or movie. But when explaining why I liked something, I get somewhat incoherent.

Anywho, this is the only book I got for a college class that I still regularly read. Prior to reading this book I was Catholic but only because I'd been raised Catholic and had simply always been Catholic. But Father (now Bishop) Barron's book opened my eyes to just how strange Christianity is. It is, or at least it ought to be, more than just an hour Sunday morning. Christianity, when embraced, permeates the life and transforms you.

And now years later, I'm still not much of a Christian but can still see how I've grown and improved. And rereading Barron's book brings me back to the first steps of my journey and helps me see where I've been and where I still need to go.

Rereading that I realize it's not so much a review of the book as a confession or reflection on how it influenced me. *C'est la vie* I guess.

Emilia P says

Mindblowing, metaphysical, and somehow surprisingly down to earth.

Positing that Christianity is about God's search for us and not the other way around, using Brideshead, Dante, and Flannery to illustrate God as center, man as forgiven sinner, and life as not our own, respectively, and going into some really heady theological philosophical stuff from there. There was some philosophy-writing structure that lost it the fifth star, but the premise that Catholicism is built on the idea that we're part of some strange cosmic plan rather than self-contained internalized beings responsible for and to ourselves is one I would like to hear more often.

Also, that premise is one that Harry Angstrom should hear, and something I was glad to follow up on Rabbit Run with. There's no existing without being part of community, as hard and complicated as that is. Personal freedom and liberty at the expense of one's community is a false god, jerko.

Also, I should probably read Dante's Purgatorio.

James Millikan says

Robert Barron's Strangest Way: Walking the Christian Path distills the Christian journey towards the eternal *partria* into three roads: (1) Finding your center in Christ, (2) knowing that you are a sinner, and (3) realizing your life is not about you. In expounding on these three key elements of authentic discipleship, Barron weaves elements of philosophy, theology, and literature to illustrate what constitutes, and does not constitute, a life that adheres to the demands of Christian virtue.

There are many instances of fresh insight and novel angles on themes like faith and reason, the costs of discipleship, and overcoming vice, but the book at times suffers from a lack of cogency as the key themes are presented. References and citations of primary sources throughout the book, though interesting, sometimes detract from the overall narrative flow of the book; in my assessment, quotes and anecdotes appear to be chosen with a primary concern for augmenting the intellectual heft of the book, rather than to clarify a theological concept that Barron holds to be essential for understanding his core thesis.

Still, the book has many highlights. Here are some places where Barron is at his best:

Barron's analysis of Dante's Purgatorio is spot on. He highlights the seven deadly sins that Dante and Virgil encounter in their ascent of the seven story mountain of Purgatory, identifies the Marian scriptural response to weed out each sin, and presents a snapshot of the 14th Century's hierarchy of morality. Pride, the gravest of the seven deadly sins, must be addressed before the lighter vices--gluttony and lust being the least serious to the Medieval mind--can be overcome. The commentary on the Purgatorio culminates with a tidy aside on the interplay between philosophy and theology: "As [Dante] turns, at the summit of Purgatory, to consult with Virgil his loyal companion, he finds the Roman poet gone. Reason can take us only as far as honest introspection and purgation, but then it must give way to a surer guide."

The epigraphs at the start of each chapter draw upon scriptural, theological, and musical sources to suggest a theme for the ensuing pages. These wide ranging sources--Bob Dylan quotes are a favorite of Barron--show the breadth of the author's scholarship. One such quote by Thomas Aquinas leapt off the page upon reading: "All artists love what they give birth to--parents love their children; poets love their poems; craftsmen love their handiwork. How then could God hate a single thing since God is the artist of everything?" These sorts of theological adages and one-liners abound in the text and are among the most interesting elements of the text.

Insights into the purpose of life and principles for discernment are presented intermittently throughout the text. Robert Barron's treatment of these guidelines for human flourishing are quite good and reflect his years as a seminary professor charged with helping people uncover their vocation in life. One helpful commentary

that Barron offers is that people have unique temperaments. He summarizes the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar in this regard, recognizing that faithful Christians can follow one of three different models of holiness in ministry: (1) Petrine ministry, which seeks to "order, direct, guide, and coordinate" through leadership; (2) Johannine ministry, which emphasizes the "mystical, contemplative, [and] liturgical" elements of spirituality; and (3) Pauline ministry as "preacher, proclaimer, and... missionary... Restless, unsatisfied, feisty, intellectually curious... the prototype of all Christian philosophers, theologians, teachers, adventurers, and missionaries." In describing the varied charisms of Christian life, Barron hastens to add that "all of us are born with the seeds of who we are destined to become planted within us. The success or failure of one's life is measured according to the development or frustration of these seeds."

And that overriding message, that we are called to cultivate our gifts and talents so that we may close the gap between what we are and what we ought to be, is an elegant summary of what it means to be a Christian. In touching upon this and other key themes of the Christian path, Fr. Barron's book shines. These high notes of theological wisdom make Strangest Way: Walking the Christian Path a good book; if these notes were brought into harmony with the at times discordant theological opus, it would be excellent.

Recommended to individuals interested in an overview of Catholic thought from a philosophical, theological, and literary perspective.

Susan Dunn says

On further reflection, I'm changing my rating for this book up to 4 stars. I realize that I'm unfairly penalizing Bishop Barron because my expectations for his work are so much higher than for others.

The material in this book is profound and full of meaning, but the style was hard to read. I bought this book to add depth to Bishop Barron's Untold Blessings study. It succeeds in that, but it could definitely benefit from a re-layout. I particularly love the section on the Liturgy. That closed the book on a profoundly meaningful note.

Zak says

This book altered me. I learned to love Catholics because of this book. It taught me of the Center. It's accessible and it uses art to convey Truth.

Christopher says

This book is written in very challenging language with many exhortations. Fr. Barron certainly is well read but he is really not holding back. I agree with him that our society as a whole and even Catholics need to reform themselves according to the original teachings and beliefs and reforge a new zeal for prayer and neighbor through hard work.

The imagery he uses is out of Dante's Divine Comedy of which Dante has private revelations in the middle ages which gives him insight in how souls get to heaven, and the struggles we must go through.

The imagery is battle-field in nature and focus's on the spiritual battle we all face on a daily basis.

Topics include: How to discipline yourself. How to identify the seven deadly sins and how to exercise their anti-dotes. How to see spiritually as mystics do. How to win the spiritual battle.

Tania says

This book was really challenging for me to read, but it was very worth it! In fact, I'll probably need to add it to my "read every year or so" list of books. Why? Because it challenges the Sin in us that causes us to be self-focused. Self or God? What a question. It delves into the 7 manifestations of Sin in chapter 2 (the "seven deadly sins") and really adds light to what is happening in the soul to see those manifest (or not). It touches on disciplines of the Christian life that I tend to neglect. Primarily it instructs in the WAY of living that can actually become instinct when we are living out of Christ in our center. It also reveals the nature of our beautiful Trinitarian God and what that can stir in us. I'm not a writer, so don't judge my review. Just read this book...press through chapter one (it's got some good stuff, but is harder to read); chapter two is amazing; and chapter three brings it to action.

Maggie says

there are many brilliant ideas and passages in this book. however, i am reading this book in tandem with ronald rolheiser's prayer our deepest longing and the comparison isn't favorable for fr. barron. he's dogmatic whereas rolheiser takes the human condition as it is and infuses spiritual reality into our actual circumstances. in short, he meets us where we are and takes us higher while fr. barron, as obviously brilliant as he is, insists that we despise or lessen our human life and jump immediately into sainthood. that process may work for him. i am of a lesser quality. nonetheless it is a book well worth reading. you don't want to miss his pearls of wisdom, of which there are many.

his title is indeed perfect and his description of a three part approach to walking the strangest way is well thought out and spot-on. just be aware that you will have to cut through underbrush of smart thinking to reach the wisdom he has hidden within his writing. well worth the effort though. seriously.

Helen says

One definitely hears Fr. Barron's voice in this book, as he is a very familiar from his Word on Fire website and with well over 300 videos on YouTube. This is the first of his books that I've read. His writing style is very much like his speaking style, gentle and conversational. I particularly enjoyed his analysis of Brideshead Revisited and Dante's Inferno. In fact, Barron is all over the place with literary analysis, really boggling my mind. I think I have a whole new reading list!

As Fr. Barron says, our lives are really not so much about our quest for God, as God's relentless quest for us. He says if we wander, there is always that connecting thread ready to yank us back. Somehow, it's also about

the ritual and the full-body experience of worship that is our faith. Those days when we don't feel like praying or going to daily mass, but we "suit up and show up" anyway, we accept and submit. The more we do it, the stronger the bond, even if we aren't conscious of it. Fr. Barron points out that spending time with Jesus is the only way we can know him. It's a very thought-provoking book!

Charles Schoep says

Connectedness of the body of Christ

I love the way Fr Barron brings tradition, history, and faith together in all his work. This book emphasizes God's relentless chase of souls from sin and how the body of Christ fits into his plan for our salvation?

Deborah says

No book has given me such clear insight into the message of the Gospel or such succinct direction for walking the Way. Using a unique blend of theology and classic literature, Father Barron identifies three paths to holiness: finding the center, knowing you're a sinner, and realizing your life is not about you.

Julie Davis says

Been wanting to read this for a while so was glad when it was chosen for an upcoming Good Story podcast episode. This was written when Robert Barron was a priest, before he really came to wide-spread Catholic fame as an online presence. It is like Barron in a nutshell — engaging, conversational, explaining to believers how to live that "strangest way" of the cross in our everyday lives.

Barron takes three pieces of literature and uses them as guides to each of the three paths necessary for a fully engaged Christian life. *Brideshead Revisited* launches the discussion of Finding the Center, Dante's *Purgatorio* takes us through Knowing You're a Sinner, and Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away* engages us in Realizing Your Life is Not About You. Each path is woven through with a tapestry of philosophy, culture, and pop culture that deepen the conversation. Several practices for each path are recommended at the end of each section and these have their own rich discussions.

I found the book inspiring and enlightening. I have read and recommended several of Bishop Barron's books before but I'd say this is the key one of those I've read. Highly recommended.

Coleen says

Subtitled, *Walking the Christian Path*, this book covers Three Paths: Finding the Center; Knowing You're a Sinner; and Realizing Your Life is Not About You. The book is not lengthy but it requires concentration and focus.

Although difficult to read, Bishop Barron dissects among other writings, Evelyn Waugh's *"Brideshead Revisited"*, Dante's *"Purgatorio"*, and Flannery O'Connor's *"The Violent Bear It Away."* I had not read any of

these previously, but that was unnecessary in the understanding of Barron's discussions. And although I consider that I have an excellent vocabulary, there were more than a few words that I needed to write down and then determine what they meant - whether in the context of this book's meaning, or just ANY meaning at all.

A friend lent me this book and I am grateful, even if plowing through the book took me time, it also produced a lot of deep thoughts.

Christopher Kanas says

This book is not without some minor flaws, but overall, for the content it shares within its relatively few pages, it is a solid powerhouse of truth. I am not Catholic, nor ever really thinking of becoming one, but I'll be the first to say Father Robert Barron is one of, if the the most, premier thinker and writer in our modern Christian world.

This book is not however for the lighter fare. If you are looking for your easy-to-read, surface, inspirational, spirituality, then you may find this book a bit too much philosophizing and heavy. The audience this book is more written for is the Christian who is struggling to juggle the walk of their faith among the midst of several paths the world seems to offer. The book's purpose is one of both reflection and centeredness. Recognizing (or Re-cognize as it is pointed out) yourself, detaching yourself to the things within that make you stray from your goals of walking with God, how modernity today is destroying its own culture by giving us the illusion of strengthened independency, when connectedness to God and each other is so vital to our growth, and lastly, getting beyond our own personal desires and seeing how we our designed to accomplish God's will, that is how the kingdom of God survives and progresses.

This is a book I burned a few highlighters on and will forever be a staple in my library of spiritual books as it is soooo good for reference and reminders. The depth here is outstanding.
