

4-15-2018

A Lost Prayer

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Recommended Citation

Melin, Jaron (2018) "A Lost Prayer," *Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 9.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/grapho/vol1/iss1/9>

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A Lost Prayer

Jaron P. Melin

Author's Preface

In my senior year of high school, our class read *Night* by Elie Wiesel,¹ who gives his autobiographical account as a young Jew surviving the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. Our English teacher gave us the assignment to select various quotes as we read the book in order to make a poem which captures a certain theme in the book. The theme of prayer stood out prominently in my view. This was approximately eleven years ago, so my views on prayer and theology have vastly matured since then. Nevertheless, I did have deep convictions for the Christian religion at the time.

What can we learn about prayer from a Jew who survived the Holocaust? Even though we face horrors, tragedies, and trials, prayer is part of who we are even when we don't know why we do it. We also get an existential view of looking at the hidden God in the midst of atrocity. Finally, we see an example of a modern-day lament to God about cruel injustice. So then, we can bring our laments to God about injustice even today. As Christians, we can respond to this lament by saying, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

Endnotes

¹ Elie Wiesel, *Night: with Related Readings* (St. Paul, MN: EMC/Paradigm, 2003), 2, 3, 56–57, 61–62, 73, 82.

A Lost Prayer

Created by Quotes from Night by Elie Wiesel

“Why do you weep when you pray?”

Why did I pray? A strange question.

Why did I live? Why did I breathe?

I wept because—because of something inside me that felt the need for tears.

Every question possesses a power that does not lie in the answer.

“Man raises himself toward God by the questions he asks Him.

That is the true dialogue. Man questions God, and God answers.

But we don’t understand His answers.

You will find the true answers only within yourself.”

Question and answer would become one.

Where is God?

Where is He?

Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows.

What are You, my God,

Compared to this afflicted crowd,

Proclaiming to You

 Their Faith,

 Their anger,

 Their revolt?

What does Your greatness mean, Lord of the Universe,

In the face of all

 This weakness,

 This decomposition,

 And this decay?

Why do You still trouble their sick minds, their crippled bodies?

“Bless the Eternal!”

Why, but why should I bless Him?

Because He had had thousands of children burned in His pits?

Because He kept six crematories working night and day,

On Sundays and feast days?

Because in His great might He had created

 Auschwitz,

 Birkenau,

 Buna,

And so many factories of death?

How could I say to Him:

“Blessed art Thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe,
Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night,
To see

Our fathers,
Our mothers,
Our brothers,

End in the crematory?

Praised be Thy Holy Name,

Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on Thine altar?”

I've got eyes, too, and I can see what they did here.

Where is the divine Mercy?

Where is God?

How can I believe,

How could anyone believe,

In this merciful God?

I had more faith in Hitler than in anyone else.

He's the only one, who's kept his promises,

All his promises,

To the Jewish people.

And, in spite of myself,

A prayer rose in my heart,

To that God in whom I no longer believed.