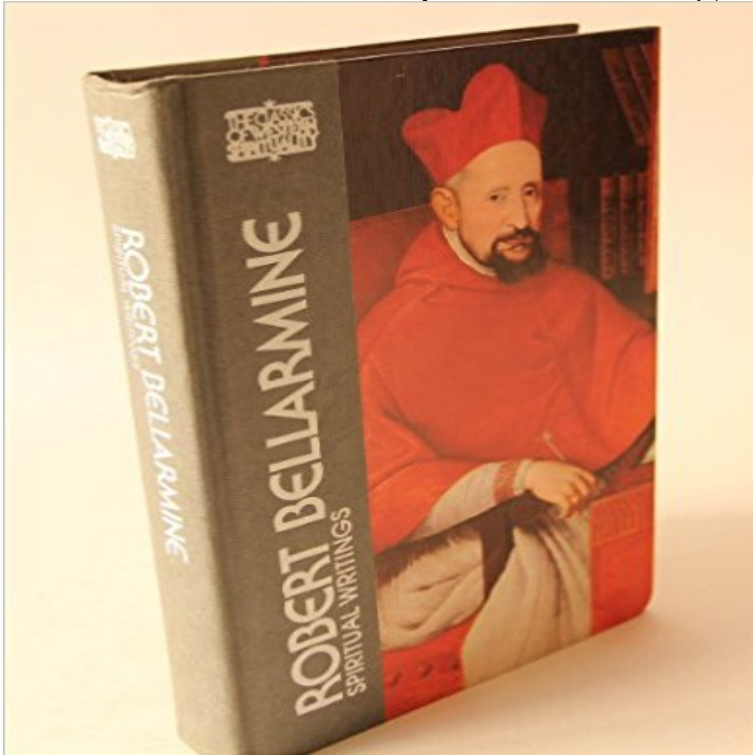


Robert Bellarmine: Spiritual Writings (Classics of Western Spirituality)



There are few figures in the history of the Church that have had such a wide-ranging effect on the religious life of their age as Robert Bellarmine. Born in Tuscany in 1542, he entered the Society of Jesus at the height of the Counter-Reformation. His first major work, *The Controversies*, was published in 1586 and became the standard apologetic used in disputes with the Protestants. His revision of the Latin Vulgate Bible that had been commissioned by the Council of Trent became the standard Catholic text for over three hundred years. In 1597 he published his most popular and memorable work, *Dottrina cristiana breve*. That short catechism was used by Jesuit missionaries in sixty-two languages for over three centuries. Scholar, bishop, and saint, Bellarmine was a true Renaissance figure whose diverse skills shaped the Church of his day. Perhaps less well known is his contribution to the spiritual tradition of post-Tridentine Catholic spirituality. In this volume, two of his most influential ascetical works have been produced for the first time in modern English translations. *The Minds Ascent to God* (1614) is a treatment of the steps involved in ascending to union with God, written in the tradition of Bonaventure and John Climacus. Characterized by Pierre Pourrat as a work of optimistic piety, overflowing with divine love, it became an almost instant success, with five Italian editions done in the first year of publication. By 1930 some sixty editions in over fourteen different languages had promulgated what is arguably Bellarmine's most beautiful and inspiring spiritual work. In 1619 he published his last ascetical piece, *The Art of Dying Well*, which is included here in its entirety. Drawing on the medieval genre of books on death, it blended a traditional approach with elements of new piety of the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation. Together these two works, introduced

masterfully by John Donnelly, provide a deep insight into the piety of a great figure.

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