When this magnificent volume first appeared in 1966, it was celebrated for its extraordinary beauty. Now, more than thirty years since its first publication, it is made available once again. Illustrating one of the great art treasures of the world, The Hours of Catherine of Cleves is a fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript containing a series of some of the most beautiful illustrations of the Bible ever made. Many of the great scenes from the Old Testament and many more from the New Testament are included, besides the Stations of the Cross and portraits of the saints. The work of an unidentified Dutch master painter, the manuscript was made for Catherine of Cleves on the occasion of her marriage to the Duke of Guelders. All the 157 surviving miniatures are reproduced to actual size and in exquisite color with gold, together with three samples of pages containing the Latin prayers. Page after page reveals the elaborate program and rich illumination of the original. The progression from beginning to end shows an artist increasing in skill, relying in his earlier work on tradition and later emerging as an independent artist of bold, clear colors, dynamic brushwork, and lively imagination. He stands as one of the supreme painters of fifteenth-century Northern Europe. Each page is accompanied by a descriptive and explanatory commentary by John Plummer. His introduction discusses the development of the Book of Hours as a liturgical form in general, and the history of the Cleves Hours specifically, and describes the place it holds in the history of Northern painting. 160 color illustrations with gold.

My Personal Review:
One doesn’t need to be Christian to fall in love with this book. Each tiny painting is rich in detail and imagination. There is not one careless or unnecessary brushstroke. The artists who produced this work did the very best in their power and each image glows with their intention. There is a wonderful awkwardness in many of the human figures, but the natural and imaginal worlds are depicted with loving fidelity. This is religious art that
stands with miniatures from India and Persia as some of the greatest art ever created for an intimate scale.

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