

EXCERPT



Our Church Speaks
An Illustrated Devotional of Saints from Every Era and Place

October 29, 2024 | \$24, 224 pages, casebound | 978-1-5140-0903-1

The stories of great men and women throughout the history of the church can help us form a bridge between the teaching of Scripture and our embodied lives. This illustrated devotional vividly depicts the lives and words of great women and men of faith. Artist Ben Lansing and Anglican priest D. J. Marotta offer fifty-two profound images and reflections on Christians, from Polycarp in the first century to the martyrs of Sudan in the twenty-first century.

Tune the Frequency of Our Souls to the Still-Broadcasting Songs of the Saints

We live in the age of the celebrity.

Not that there haven't always been famous men and women. Every age has its jealousy-inducing fashionistas, heroes, and royalty. Success + wealth + high cheekbones is a winning formula no matter where or when you live. But the uniqueness of our time is found both in the sheer number of celebrities (thank you, internet) and in the desire of nearly every young person to become a celebrity (again, thank you, internet). Study after wearying study reports that the number one goal of most people under the age of thirty is not to cure cancer or revitalize their hometown or marry their high school sweetheart, but rather to be famous, to be a celebrity. To be recognized and praised for doing something rather than simply to do the thing.

This shift does two abominable things to the human soul:

1. It transforms virtue into vanity with such subtlety that the doer does not realize the target has moved.
2. It generates anxiety ex nihilo.

Now the doer must fret and fluster their way through the day trying to seduce their neighbor into worshiping them and feel no small amount of stress when outperformed by thousands of someones they have never met. We are indeed stressed-out demigods.

The tonic for our vanity ulcers is not a new daily planner, cutting out kale from your diet (Have you heard the latest? Kale is now terrible for you . . . just kidding), or chucking your smartphone in the Hudson River (tempting). Rather, we need to tune the frequency of our souls to the still-broadcasting song of the gospel being sung by the lives of men and women throughout the history of the church.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" –(Hebrews 12:1-2).

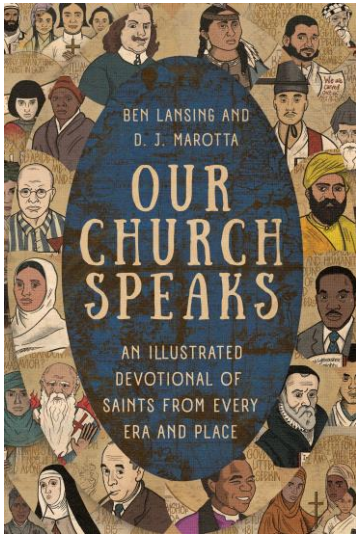


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Saint Valentine, Saint Patrick, and Santa Claus—for many modern Christians, these may be the only recognizable names outside of Bible characters from two thousand years of church history. We know these names because of the civil calendar, though the memory of these saints has been secularized into consumerist oblivion. Some of us may be well versed with Scripture but largely unacquainted with any Christians from the two millennia that separate us from the time of the apostles. Most of us are likely unaware of an ancient tool that Christians have used to rehearse this long history as a part of their daily lives, a tool called the Calendar of Saints.

THE CALENDAR OF SAINTS

Two thousand years ago, Christians were often hunted down and killed. Amidst this darkness, the church began a radical practice. When a brother or sister was martyred for faith in Jesus, the Christian community remembered their date of death as an occasion for celebration and thanksgiving to God. This was a new birthday, when the beloved's body entered the grave in anticipation of resurrection and victory in Christ. The saints were not cherished for inherent moral perfection or superhuman niceness. They were broken and flawed, just like anyone. But their memory was preserved because, in their struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, the glory of Christ was particularly evident.

After many centuries, the calendar was filled with thousands of commemorations of martyrs and other faithful Christians and became known as the Calendar of Saints. The Christian liturgical calendar—with its seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time—and the Calendar of Saints functioned as complementary, daily rehearsals of the life of Christ and Christ's bride, the church. These rehearsals grounded the believer in what it meant to be in Christ as a part of his people.

By the Reformation of the sixteenth century, many Christians were concerned that celebrating saints had become a distraction from God's glory. This concern was not without reason; some people became so enamored of the cloud of witnesses that they forgot that the cloud should point the believer to Jesus, "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Many Protestants abandoned the Calendar of Saints, and their church traditions lost a critical tool in rehearsing their history as part of the daily rhythms of life. The memory was lost. Today, many Christians feel rootless and deconstructed. We would benefit from reintroducing the Calendar of Saints, rightly contextualized around Christ.

The Calendar of Saints from which we draw in this book is populated by the broad scope of trinitarian Christianity, with representatives from various denominations and traditions. All are portrayed as equal members in the body of Christ, unified in his love and grace.

—adaptation from the introduction

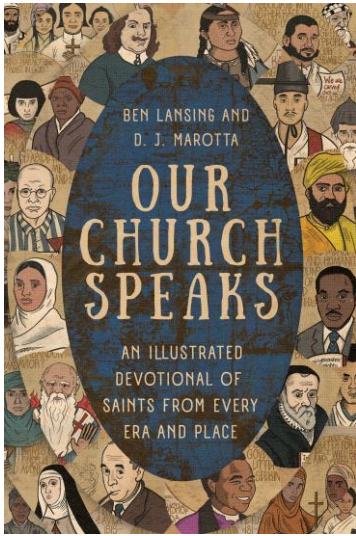


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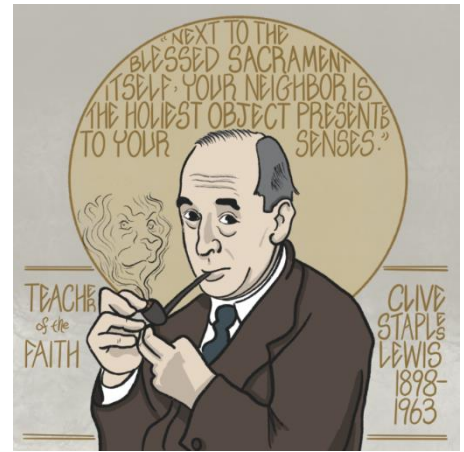
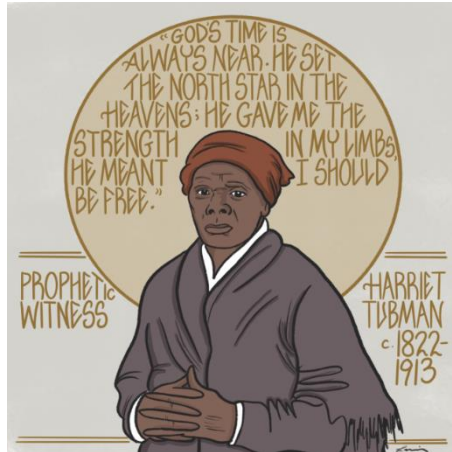
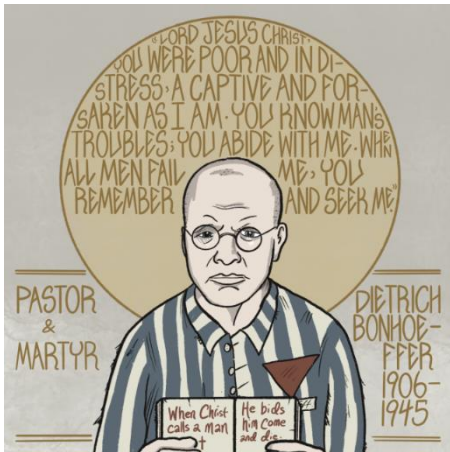
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Bringing History, Art, and Religion Together

Ben Lansing is an award-winning artist from Richmond, Virginia. He is an avid student of the history of both art and religion and uses his art to share this passion. Ben and his wife, Bethany, are members of Redeemer Anglican Church, where he teaches a multiweek church history course using art and storytelling to present more than twenty centuries of Christ’s inspiring work in his church.

D. J. Marotta is a priest in the Anglican Church in North America and the founding rector of Redeemer Anglican Church in Richmond, Virginia. He is the author of *Liturgy in the Wilderness: How the Lord’s Prayer Shapes the Imagination of the Church in a Secular Age*. His wife is gracious and his children are clever.



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