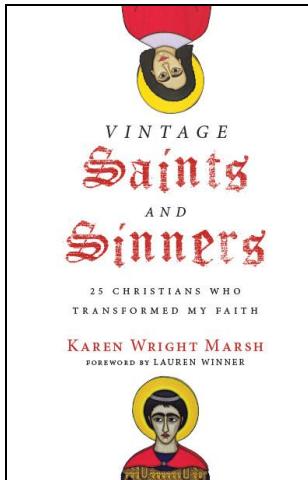




BOOK DETAILS



Vintage Saints and Sinners: 25 Christians Who Transformed My Faith

Available September 12, 2017

\$20, 224 pages, hardcover

978-0-8308-4513-2

Bringing Vintage History to Life

On the campus of the University of Virginia you'll find a building named the "Bonhoeffer House" owned by Karen and Charles Marsh. On any given day you'll find students and faculty seeking discipleship, fellowship, and mentoring in this welcoming space as a part of their university life.

One of the ongoing programs that Karen, director of Theological Horizons, and Charles, professor of religion at UVA, provide is a weekly gathering called "Vintage." In it, attendees meet the best writers of the Christian tradition, from their namesake Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Mother Teresa, Brother Lawrence, and Mary Paik Lee. These "vintages" provide a starting point to asking the deepest questions about faith and the life and work that comes out of it.

"*Vintage Saints and Sinners* comes out of more than thirteen years teaching university students each week," says Karen Marsh, who wrote this book as a result of the conversations at Bonhoeffer House. "Every Friday I host a Vintage lunch and introduce the story of an older brother or sister in the faith. Together, we read a primary text or their words on a theme. We always have incredible conversations together. This book is my attempt to bring those conversations to the world somehow and to illuminate the energy that students find in ancient saints, stories, and words."

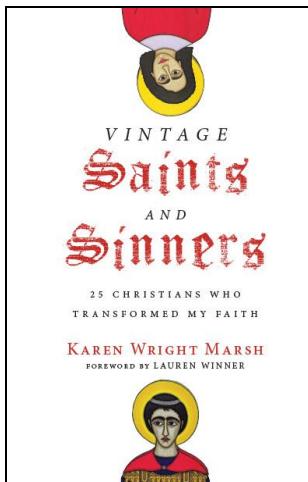
Narrating her own winding pilgrimage through faith, Marsh reveals surprising lessons in everyday spirituality from these "saints"—folks who lived and breathed and failed and followed God. Told with humor and vulnerability, *Vintage Saints and Sinners* introduces us afresh to twenty-five brothers and sisters who challenge and inspire us with their honest faith. Some of the saints explored include:

- Soeren Kierkegaard
- Flannery O'Connor
- Thomas Merton
- Fannie Lou Hamer
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Dorothy Day

"The winsome brilliance of Karen Wright Marsh's ability to encapsulate gorgeous little vignettes of history's greatest contemplative mystics and fierce justice advocates makes *Vintage Saints and Sinners* a timely work," says Christopher Heuertz, cofounder of Gravity. "From the most spectacular to the uttermost undramatic conversions, each hero and shero Karen introduces highlights an embodied example of vocational fidelity that is both inspiring and inviting."



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"This page-turning pilgrimage journal offers readers way-bread from – and for – the fallible and glorious communion of quotidian saints."

— Susan R. Holman, author of *Beholden*, winner of the 2016 Grawemeyer Award in Religion

Starting “Trouble” with Dorothy Day

He stood at the corner of Falls Road and Cold Spring Lane every morning, holding that same battered cardboard sign: “Will Work For Food.” With each passing day, my young sons became increasingly distressed; the man must be awfully hungry. Henry badgered, “Pick up that man! He can work with Daddy at the college!” “Yeah!” shouted Will, “That man can get paid to write his name—just like Daddy does!” Safely home, I packed up protein bars and water bottles and stashed them in the car, prepared to roll down my window and thrust a bag out to the man, just as the red light changed to green.

Publicly, I am reputed to be a caring person. I cook lunch for hordes of students, put on Bible studies and lectures, cheer on my husband and children. People unload their doubts, sorrows, and dreams because they find me unfailingly kind and sympathetic. But in reality, I’m shaky way up here on the superwoman pedestal. It’s as if I’m teetering toward the edge when I hear a low voice in my ear whisper, “Do good, stay busy, but keep a safe distance.” The sacrifices I make usually benefit people closest to me. Hardly heroic.

* * * *

Nobody triggers a guilt trip quite like Dorothy Day.

As a little girl, Dorothy was drawn to the saints of her Catholic tradition, those noble people who ministered to the sick and suffering. But something really bothered her. Why this determined energy toward softening the effects of evil? Why not change the social systems that caused the suffering? Some saints ministered to slaves, but why not do away with slavery itself? she asked.

Well, if gentle, pious Christians weren’t going to actually change the world, then Dorothy would do it without them. After college she threw herself into progressive politics, marched with pacifists, and was arrested with suffragettes. She wrote for socialist newspapers. Among Marxists, pacifists, anarchists, and atheists in bohemian Greenwich Village, the activist life energized her. But after some time had passed, worn out by an affair with a married man, an abortion, and a failed marriage, Dorothy ended up out on a Staten Island beach, living in an unheated fisherman’s shack with Forster Batterham, the man she loved. Forster was an honest, independent atheist who could never concede to the “empty form” of a legal marriage license. The couple wrote and worked and walked for miles each day, absorbing the brisk beauty of the world around them.

Dorothy felt the pull of the Spirit there; she wrote in her journal, “I am surprised that I am beginning to pray daily.” But Forster was incensed by the very notion of religion, so Dorothy kept her prayers to herself. Out on the beach, Dorothy sang the “Te Deum,” the ancient hymn of praise to God who fills the earth with glory. As she swept the cottage, she improvised devotions. She murmured the Lord’s Prayer as she walked to the post office.

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"Sit down and pour yourself a glass of Karen Wright Marsh's Vintage Saints and Sinners. At first sip, you are transported into delightful stories of Christians past. As you drink more deeply, Vintage Saints and Sinners engages difficult issues of faith, doubts and loves, wisdom, and the practice of justice in the world. This is a gracious book full of charming prose and profound truths with just the right complexity of spiritual insight for everyday life. Taste and see!"

— Diana Butler Bass, author of *Grounded: Finding God in the World – A Spiritual Revolution*

Marx's old phrase "Religion is the opiate of the people" interrupted Dorothy's thoughts, and yet praise of God came to her unbidden. She was praying out of simple, natural happiness. When she gave birth to a daughter she named Tamar, Dorothy's joy was complete. The final object of this love and gratitude, she knew, was God.

When I think of Dorothy Day the public crusader, I'm intimidated by her extreme acts of mercy. Here on the beach I meet a different woman, a young mother who walks along the water's edge, picking up shells to show her baby. This Dorothy is simply praying, praying with thanksgiving, praying with her eyes wide open to the sight of fishermen on the beach, to the sunset, the waves, the screaming, snowy gulls. I too have scooped up a child smelling of salt and felt pure gratitude. Perhaps I really have dismissed Dorothy too easily.

Dorothy knew that owning her spiritual transformation would cost her dearly, and indeed it did. When she had Tamar baptized and joined the church, the result was a searing split with her beloved partner. Dorothy agonized, worried that she'd become one of those Christian hypocrites. She wrote, "I felt I was betraying the class to which I belonged, the workers and the poor of the world, with whom Christ spent his life." Dorothy struggled to bring her newfound love for God together with her lifelong passion to transform society for the better. She longed for community. Then she encountered someone who would change her life.

Dorothy and Tamar had moved back to New York City, back to urban existence. There she met Peter Maurin, an older Frenchman in a tattered suit, pockets stuffed with books and papers. Peter was a vibrant Christian of an unfamiliar sort. He argued that the surest way to find God, to find the good, is through service to one's brothers and sisters. To love others is to love Christ, he said.

God brought Peter along to chart Dorothy's faith-filled purpose in the world. The city was crammed with desperate, unemployed people made homeless by the Great Depression. Where would they begin? Peter's plan was to start a newspaper and open up houses of hospitality and farming communes, relying on God to provide the funds. In their *Catholic Worker* penny newspapers, they wrote that Christ's self-sacrificing love made possible "a society where it is easier for people to be good."

Peter and Dorothy started the lay Catholic Worker Movement during a time of economic and human crisis, determined to live out Jesus' commandment to love their needy neighbors, quite literally, by sharing without imposing conditions or limits. Their gutsy personal charity was for real: they welcomed strangers, shared everything. The first Catholic Worker house of hospitality started a whole movement, sustained to this day, a Christian witness of nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer, and inclusion.

With her enduring passion for reform, Dorothy combined works of mercy and a daring brand of "political holiness." Direct action along the path of justice and peace was a way of

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serving Jesus, so she began each morning in church and then hit the streets. Dorothy's radical generosity blew people away; they just didn't know how to reconcile her piety and politics.

When I picture Dorothy, I envision her sitting at a typewriter in a hand-me-down dress. I've seen her in black and white photographs: Facing down a policeman, brandishing a sign of protest. Ladling soup into bowls as hungry men wait patiently. Coming out of jail, age seventy-five. Standing in front of a microphone addressing protesters. Serious, intent, determined. This is the Dorothy tracked by the FBI, condemned by President Herbert Hoover as a threat to national security. She's the public troublemaker who disturbs complacency.

The human, more colorful Dorothy comes through in her confessional writings. Yes, she admits, it really *is* raving lunacy to give up your own bed, food, and hospitality to any old stranger in need. But that needy person hasn't arrived to simply remind you of Christ. No, in "plain and simple and stupendous fact," your guest *is*, quite literally, Jesus. The Bible shows how ordinary people like Lazarus, Mary, and Martha welcomed Jesus and so can you; there's no excuse. Christ is all around you, meeting you in friends and outsiders. The glass of water you give to a beggar is given to him.

Dorothy insists that in the end we will be judged by our acts of mercy, so heaven hinges on the way we act toward Jesus in his frail, ordinary human form. So long as families still need bread, clothing, shelter, Dorothy says, "we must keep repeating these things. Eternal life begins now." So don't point to some distant dream of glowing redemption — let's make life *today* look more like heaven. Get out there and make a difference in Jesus' name.

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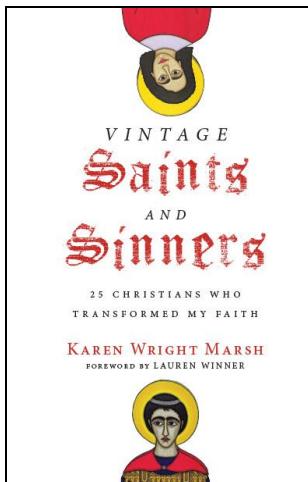
So what will I do? I can point toward the enormity of boundless human need. I may hide behind the excuse that my gestures are doomed to failure. I even complain about the ingratitude I receive in exchange for the good that I do. Dorothy doesn't let me off the hook. She declares that my actions are measured by love, not by success. She assures me that God will repay me — eventually. If you love Jesus, then choosing to serve is simple. "Don't call me a saint!" she remarks, "I don't want to be dismissed that easily." She is unflappable.

Jesus himself has told me that I can rely on God to provide for all of my needs. Dorothy constantly reminds me of this promise — and pushes me to act as if it's actually true. Dorothy both attracts and repels me, that loving, troublemaking follower of Jesus who lived what she believed. She's a saint who won't be easily dismissed.

—Adapted from "*Dorothy Day: Start Some Trouble*"



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Be the Beloved: Reflecting on Nouwen

No doubt about it: Thomas Jefferson was the kind of energetic, overachieving leader Americans love. I clamber through the brilliant late-autumn forest as if by command of the master of the mountain, hiking up what's been called the "steep, savage hill." At the summit, the shaded path opens onto a wide lawn and there, above the clouds, stands his neoclassical mansion, Monticello. As a man, Jefferson is an icon of upward mobility: the intelligent and ambitious patriot who transformed the young country and established the University of Virginia.

But given my choice of public intellectuals, I'll take Henri J. M. Nouwen over Thomas Jefferson any day. As a well-loved religion professor at Harvard and Yale, Henri packed out the university halls. On one occasion, so many people sat on the floor and crowded into the hallway that Henri promised an encore lecture to anyone who would give up their seat. The volunteers who left and returned the following night found the auditorium filled to capacity all over again. Clearly, this Henri guy was no ordinary highbrow.

The first time I read Henri, I felt the difference for myself. The subtitle of his book prompted me to pick it up: *A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*. There for all to read was the revered teacher's secret journal, a raw account of his depression, his questions, his disappointments. I could hardly believe how bravely Henri laid bare his life. Though the pain nearly destroyed him, Henri wrote later, all of his agony would become "like fertile ground for greater trust, stronger hope, and deeper love." I could learn something from this scholar.

* * * * *

As a little boy, Henri survived the trauma of Holland's Nazi occupation. Wartime privation and chronic anxiety left him with a spiritual craving too: a hunger for Jesus. He channeled his deep restiveness to pursue the priesthood, graduate studies in modern psychology, and an academic career. Even as he advanced through the ranks of elite academic institutions, Henri was never content to just *talk* about God. He warned that words, lectures, books, and programs about the spiritual life get in the way of the Spirit itself. Henri brought both his soul and his intellect into the classroom, longing to communicate the living presence of Christ to his students.

As erudite as he was, Henri wrote his many books in a simple, pastoral style. He is open about his struggles to answer the lifelong question, "Who am I?" Henri gets me. He knows that I buy into the inner voice of ambition that says, "I am what I accomplish," "I am what others think of me," and "I am what I have." So long as my sense of self depends on external things, my mental energy is spent just staying above the line, on keeping it together. I'm at the mercy of others who tell me how I'm doing, but this is not a safe place to be.

Jefferson was the poster child for overachievers: architect, philosopher, scholar, lawyer,

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Karen Wright Marsh is executive director and cofounder of Theological Horizons, a student-centered ministry that advances theological scholarship at the intersection of faith, thought, and life. She holds degrees in philosophy and linguistics from Wheaton College and the University of Virginia. Since its founding in 1991, Karen has served Theological Horizons by leading the staff, directing daily programs, writing resources and curriculum, teaching weekly classes, speaking at retreats and campus ministries, and mentoring students in the Horizons Fellows Program. She lives at the Bonhoeffer House in Charlottesville, Virginia, with her husband, Charles Marsh, and their three children.

author of the Declaration of Independence, and, oh yeah, president. He bragged that over the course of fifty years the sun had never caught him in bed; he rose as soon as he could see the hands of the mantel clock mounted at the foot of his bed. After all, he's the man who said, "Determine never to be idle. It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing." I'd wager that Jefferson's "pursuit of happiness" was not for slackers.

Henri was a doer too. He was adored by readers all over the world and revered by his Ivy League students. He published a book every year and was in constant demand to lecture, counsel, travel, pastor, and visit friends. Henri received quite a bit of affirmation. Yet there was another side to him—an anxious man with a "habitual, almost neurotic need to be needed." Private grief over his homosexuality and the loneliness of a celibate life troubled him deeply.

Throughout his life, Henri was caught up in a cycle of long, hectic days of teaching and service, followed by periods of nervous exhaustion, depression, and insomnia. He knew what it meant to wonder, "If the people who so admire me could know me in my innermost self, would they still love me?" Henri's pursuit of significance nearly killed him.

Into our universal struggle for success, love, and security, Henri inserts one central, countercultural Christian declaration: "At the core of my faith belongs the conviction that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God." He takes this startling truth from Jesus, that same Jesus who heard God's words spoken over him at his Jordan River baptism: *You are my beloved Child and my favor rests on you.*

Henri struggled to follow his own advice: stay home and pray. Settle in to your own belovedness. The central spiritual task, for Henri and you and me, is to grasp the truth of our belovedness and then live a life grounded in that deep realization. "That's not very easy," Henri admits. "In fact, most of us fail constantly to claim the truth of who we are." I agree with Henri on this one. I'm distracted by the painful awareness of my faults, my weaknesses, my inadequacies; all the things I'm not. I've heard about God's unconditional love for me but still I contradict the sacred voice that calls me by name: the beloved.

Henri changed his life. He chose to follow a radically different path: the way of downward mobility. The brilliant professor left Harvard at the peak of his academic career. He walked away from professional security and moved to L'Arche ("the Ark"), an organization founded by the Catholic philosopher Jean Vanier. At L'Arche, people living with intellectual disabilities and those who come to help them share daily life together as equal members.

Newly arrived, Henri took on the job of direct-care assistant to Adam Arnett, a young member who could not move by himself or even speak. Scholarly credentials surely meant nothing to Adam, who would never read a word of Nouwen's books. Henri had stepped into a wholly different world. Far from the elite university, with its academic intensity and

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intellectual rivalry, L'Arche was a place of "quiet village living, community celebration, the sharing of human vulnerabilities, and an always new invitation to let Jesus be the center of everything."

Caring for Adam taught Henri to focus on *being* rather than *doing*. He knew at last what it meant to be human, Beloved of God, a realization that brought him the hope of God's healing and peace. Henri writes, "I am a very weak, broken, fragile, and short-living person—but I rejoice in it. I can stand under the cross of my own suffering—or of God's suffering—but I can stand. I don't have to fall apart. I stand with my head erect. I can do that."

* * * * *

I don't plan to make any big life transformations just now, not like Henri did. Come back here in a year and you'll likely find me with my family, still doing my job, hustling to answer email, grab coffee with students, respond to the next thing. Chances are I'll look the same, only a little older.

But what if I could truly live into my belovedness? Could I let go of the *doing* to turn toward the *being*? By God's compelling grace I am learning to listen through the noise of accusation and the undercurrent of anxiety. God tells me over and over: you are the beloved in whom I am well pleased. When I am paying attention, I unclench. I'm not being judged. I've got nothing to prove. I'm doing enough. I have enough. I am enough.

Ambition urges me onward and up the mountain. But Henri invites me to look down. He gently asks me to take a closer look at the source of my own value. Henri asks, "Aren't you, like me, hoping that some person, thing, or event will come along to give you that final feeling of inner well-being you desire?" My sense of self is so very fragile. He knows that. So again and again Henri boldly tells me who I truly am. I really don't have to locate my worth in outward success, by way of a blazing career path, or in another's changeable love. I'm not about any of that. At the core of my existence, I am God's beloved. My life is about discovering that I am already, even now, fully loved in Christ. My belovedness in God is the truest thing about me.

When I'm utterly convinced that I am what I can accomplish or possess, Jesus says, "That is a lie." If I'm paying attention, I may hear Jesus whisper, "Repeat after me: 'I am the beloved. God is well pleased with me. Not because people say I'm great, but because God named me the beloved even before I was born.'" The world may reject me, praise, laugh at, or even spit on me, but no matter what comes, I am the beloved of God. I can live on. Beloved. Beloved. That's who I am. That's who you are.

— Adapted from "Henri Nouwen: Be the Beloved"