



The History of the Church through 100 Masterpieces

By Jacques Duquesne, François Lebrette

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The rich history of the Christian church — with its centuries of dramas, splendors, achievements, and controversies — has long provided a deep source of inspiration for artists. Our own cultural familiarity with the historical aspects of this tradition, however, has waned in recent years. Thus, there exists an odd paradox: works of art have never been more carefully preserved and enhanced; museum exhibitions and visits to view artwork in churches and cathedrals have never been more popular. Yet the historical events and theological ideals depicted in such artistic masterpieces are quite often unknown or misunderstood.

The History of the Church through 100 Masterpieces has been designed to give that deeper meaning back to our experience of these paintings by providing insightful descriptions of the stories they purport to tell. Jacques Duquesne and François Lebrette choose a beautiful array of works — some already well known to us as visual images — to discuss, recounting both the historical events and the religious and cultural background surrounding them.

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Bibliography

- Rank: #2307741 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Duquesne Univ Pr
- Published on: 2011-06-28
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x 6.50" w x .75" l, 1.16 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 234 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Two newly released art books from Duquesne University Press. . . , *The History of the Church Through 100 Masterpieces* and *The Lives of the Saints Through 100 Masterpieces* are companion volumes written by Jacques Duquesne and François Lebrette and translated from the French original by M. Cristina Borges.

The 225-page trade paperback volumes are dominated by handsome full-color plates of impressive artworks from across the centuries. . . . The church history volume covers centuries of dramas, splendors, achievements and controversies that have long inspired artists. The history book opens with the 16th-century Sermon of St. Paul by Il Bassano. Caravaggio's masterpiece, "The Crucifixion of St. Peter," is included, as is the dark and surprising 19th-century Russian classic "The Baptism by Konstantin Korovin," now housed in a Moscow gallery. Goya is here, as is Hieronymus Bosch's "The Seven Capital Sins" and Albrecht Durer's "The Martyrdom of 10,000 Christians."

Hermits, monasteries, persecutions, church councils, fathers and doctors, the conversion of the Slavic world, the Borgias, Martin Luther, all process through the pages, in dramatic oil paintings and frescoes from German, French, Italian and Russian masters. . . . [H]andsome in the ways we have come to expect of books produced by Duquesne University Press" and . . . impressive [in] content and intelligent design. --Patricia Bartos, The Pittsburgh Catholic Newspaper, January 23, 2012

"Duquesne University Press has done something noteworthy by publishing two new full-color books which present masterpieces of art with accompanying text to illustrate key moments in the history of the Church, and also the lives of the saints. The books, originally published in French and authored by journalist Jacques Duquesne and art editor François Lebrette, are entitled *The History of the Church through 100 Masterpieces* and *The Lives of the Saints through 100 Masterpieces*.

The format of the books is simple. In each case, an introduction summarizes the overall subject matter in just a few pages, either the history of the veneration and selection of saints or the history of the Church. Then there is a series of 100 facing pages, with a magnificent painting reproduced on the right-hand page and the left-hand page given to the text which explains the scene. . . . in the portrayal of the late 15th century defeat of the Moors by Ferdinand and Isabella in the *History* book, we learn that this was not only the culmination of seven centuries of Catholic defensive efforts against the Islamic conquest of southern Europe but also the beginning of a questionable struggle to establish lasting control by chasing both Muslims and Jews out of Spain altogether. There is also a nod to the earlier victories of Rodrigo Díaz de Bivar the legendary hero El Cid in 1085. The painting here is Jusepe Ribera's 17th century portrayal of The Capture of Granada from the Cathedral of Burgos. Both books are nicely printed on glossy paper with heavy glossy covers and glued bindings, in a size of 8.5 (h) by 6.5 (w). So these are in effect light versions of coffee-table books but happily they are priced accordingly." --Dr. Jeff Mirus | January 25, 2012

Art Illustrates Church History

Add these new books to your Lenten reading list

With the beginning of Lent looming in four weeks, the search for spiritual reading is under way. Two newly released art books from Duquesne University Press can fill the vacuum. *The History of the Church Through 100 Masterpieces* and *The Lives of the Saints Through 100 Masterpieces* are companion volumes written by Jacques Duquesne and François Lebrette and translated from the French original by M. Cristina Borges.

The 225-page trade paperback volumes are dominated by handsome full-color plates of impressive artworks from across the centuries....The church history volume covers centuries of dramas, splendors, achievements and controversies that have long inspired artists. *The History of the Church Through 100 Masterpieces* offers brief insights into the meaning of significant paintings, both famous and those not well known. It also provides the current location for each of the artworks.

The history book opens with the 16th-century Sermon of St. Paul by Il Bassano. In their commentary, "Invention of the Universal," Duquesne and Lebrette write that the indefatigable Paul, as both Jew and Roman citizen, made the apostles realize his universal vision of the teachings of Christ. Paul, they recall, was the first to seek to convert the wider community. He won the point, for in a few years the mass of converted pagans surpassed the original community of Palestine and the center of gravity of the new faith shifted from Jerusalem to Rome. Caravaggio's masterpiece, "The Crucifixion of St. Peter," is included, as is the dark and surprising 19th-century Russian classic "The Baptism by Konstantin Korovin," now housed in a Moscow gallery. Goya is here, as is Hieronymus Bosch's "The Seven Capital Sins" and Albrecht Durer's "The Martyrdom of 10,000 Christians."

Hermits, monasteries, persecutions, church councils, fathers and doctors, the conversion of the Slavic world, the Borgias, Martin Luther, all process through the pages, in dramatic oil paintings and frescoes from German, French, Italian and Russian masters.

Throughout history, artists have often taken their inspiration from religious stories and imagery and the authors wanted to deepen the understanding of modern readers: In our present age, works of art have never been more carefully preserved and enhanced; museum exhibitions and visits to view artwork in churches and cathedrals have never been more popular. Yet the meanings behind these masterpieces and their tremendous artistic heritage, in contrast, have never been so neglected.

In their *Lives of the Saints*, the authors proceed alphabetically, offering up images and stories on noted and obscure saints Bernadette, Bruno, Felicity, Martha and Mary, Thomas Aquinas.

The fifth-century French queen Clotilde, who convinced her husband to adopt the faith, is depicted in Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's striking "St. Clotilde Overseeing the Education of Her Sons." St. Joseph and the Holy Family are seen in Quentin Massy's "15th-century Repose During the Flight to Egypt." St. Bernadette is seen via a black-and-white photograph.

Duquesne University Press dates to 1927 and focuses on publishing books on art history, literary studies, philosophy, psychology and religious studies. It has won awards and high praise from observers, who note that its titles are "handsome in the ways we have come to expect of books produced by Duquesne University Press" and citing the books' "impressive content and intelligent design." --Patricia Bartos, The Pittsburgh Catholic Newspaper, January 23, 2012

About the Author

Jacques Duquesne is a journalist and author. He is the cofounder and director of *Le Point*, a French magazine, and he contributes to *La Croix* and other publications. He is the author of numerous pieces on the themes of Jesus and Mary, including *Jesus: An Unconventional Biography* and *Salve Regina: The Story of Mary*, both originally published in French.

Francois Lebrette is the editorial director of the collection *Art et connaissances* and the coauthor, together with Jacques Duquesne, of *The Lives of the Saints through 100 Masterpieces*.

M. Cristina Borges (translator) is a member of the American Translators Association who works with French, Portuguese, and Spanish texts. She has contributed to *Catholic New World*, *The Wanderer*, and *La Nef* in France.

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