

Book Reviews

Ordinary saints: Lessons in the art of giving away your life

Devenish SC 2017.

Eugene, Or: Cascade Books. xvii + 185 pages. ISBN 978-1-62564-747-7. No price quoted.

This book is clearly the result of many years of experience and reflection on the general topic of spirituality. That it appears on the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in Germany is significant as Luther promoted the concept of the priesthood of all believers, probably one of the most misunderstood reformation ideas. However, Devenish appears to have assessed the matter correctly. This book is about 'ordinary' saints, those who by baptism have been incorporated into the priesthood of God.

The main focus on living a saintly life is on love which is described in the subtitle as 'the art of giving away your life'. It is about self-sacrifice or in biblical terms *kenosis*, emptying oneself in imitation of Christ (Phil 2:5-11). This is not an activity for exceptional Christians but for all Christians. We can all do it. There is no concept of a special Christians here; we are all members of the laity, the whole, entire people of God. This book is replete with powerful examples of the work and witness of ordinary Christians who, although they achieved great things for the kingdom, did not consider themselves exceptional in any way. Their life and work was there personal response to the love of God and was demonstrated in their care and concern for others.

The book is divided into a number of sections on after church, the imperfections of saints, the perfections of saints, the qualities embedded in saintly lives, saints as persons, bodies of evidence, holy wounds, extraordinary saints on parade, the laughter of saints and the evocation of saints.

It is interesting to note how Nietzsche is used to define a saint as someone who has power or 'superior force which wished to test itself by such a subjugation; the strength of will in which they recognized their own strength and love of power' (p45). Of course, this is a perversion of the true nature of the saint as defined by the author and the church. However, it does reflect the human tendency to elevate ourselves by focussing on ourselves and what we do and need rather than focussing on others and their needs. A minor point of addition occurs when the author refers to the process of developing saints; it is important in the church context that this is

viewed as art of the discipline of the church (to nurture saints) to equip them and empower them as a primary task.

The only disappointing and sad thing about this book is that, emanating from the Australasian context it takes no account of aboriginal spirituality, leaving it, as one of my elders would say, 'too white'. How much more rich might the tapestry that Devenish weaves had it been open to insights from its own total context?

The process of forming saints can contribute substantially to the mission of the church in preparing people for outreach by giving away our lives. History is full of examples of such people who have left home and security to give their lives for the sake of others in the service of the kingdom. This book helps us to understand and enact that process beginning in a localised context.

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Holistic mission: God's plan for God's people

Woolnough BC & Ma W (ed.) 2010.

Oxford: Regnum xvi + 268 pages. ISBN 978-1-870345-85-9. No price quoted.

One of the most recent developments in mission theology is the recognition of holistic or integral mission. This is not a new concept but a recognition of what has always been good in the mission enterprise; that God is good and has always been concerned for the growth and development of the whole person. In community – body, mind and spirit. From creation God has provided everything need for our full development through providing others and an environment in which this may happen through mutually enriching interdependent relationships. Jesus followed in this pattern and it is appropriate that the church follows suit. Here, the church is constituted by the local church, denominations, church groups, mission organisations and Christian non-governmental institutions ad theological education institutions. The papers here are eclectic and global in orientation and are presented by an extensive group of church leaders, academics and practitioners. All contributions emanate from an unavowedly evangelical perspective and focus on the fourfold mission strategy which includes evangelism, education, health and industrial mission.

Following an introduction, the book has four parts; what is holistic mission? holistic mission from 1910-2010; underlying issues in implementing holistic mission; and the way ahead with holistic mission. Much of what we find here is an answer to the oft repeated trite maxim 'What would Jesus do?' In part one, a formative article

by Ronald Sider offers a fresh approach to the gospel as Jesus defined it based on the kingdom motif. Sugden's paper reflects on the developments which have taken place since 1974 with a growing awareness of contexts of poverty and injustice. He emphasises the need for a deeper evaluation of mission as transformation based in the very nature of the kingdom of God – a neglected theme among evangelicals – in favour of the church's participation in the redeeming and reconciling nature of transformative mission to include all aspects of God's creation; hence it is *missio Dei*. While looking at the change of approach in 1974, this volume also suggests agenda for the future based in engagement with the world rather than retreat from it. Fundamental to this process is cultural transformation in tension with 'Holy Distinctiveness'. In a dynamic context of cultural transformation. I am at one with Vinay Samuel in his comment 'we need to move from the ideological cage of received social analysis and examine our societies and cultures afresh' (p.135), but I also think it is necessary to be able to look afresh at our approaches to scripture, for all are changing rapidly. There are many other contributions here that provide stimulus for reflection and subsequent action if we have the discernment and courage to challenge our long-established preconceptions regarding mission. Examples of transformative mission are offered in the Mission as Transformation Movement (MTM) and the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission – both of which are appropriately focussed on the restoration of broken relationships.

This is a volume of papers which bring the gospel and grace and the gospel of justice into a *milieu* of engagement which has been growing since the Lausanne Covenant became a guiding light for evangelicals through reflection on practice in 1974. It is to be commended for its shared insights as examples of innovative reflection and practice from which others might benefit.

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