

Book Review by Jonny Whitmore

Sunberg, Carla. *Why Holiness? The Transformational Message That Unites Us.* Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing 2019

‘Everyday, organizations spend time and energy on doing their business.

Much of the time the emphasis is on the *what* (what it is that they do) and the *how* (how it is that the work gets done)’ (Sunberg 2019:9)

Sunberg’s premiss for *Why Holiness?* is that “every great organisation starts with why” (Sunberg 2019:9). And, in a similar way, maybe every helpful book review doesn’t focus on *what* is in the book, or *how* you should read it (my recommendation would be in a coffee shop with a flat white), but rather *why* you should or shouldn’t read it. Sunberg is clear: *Why Holiness?* is not focussed on “what is holiness” or “how to be holy” – although inevitably these themes come up – but rather each chapter starts with a “why” question which is explored by different Church of the Nazarene theologians from around the world. These chapters are held together around the central theme of holiness being the uniting factor of diverse Christian thinking, being and doing today.

The question of *Why holiness?* will be answered simply by some in The Salvation Army. From birth, we have always been a holiness movement. Booth said, “From the beginning, one of the most important features of the work has been the teaching of holiness...which can be attained by anybody” (Booth, *Twenty-one Years Salvation Army in Satterlee* 1985:93). Holiness might be in our DNA, but the challenge I took from Sunberg’s book is to ask whether holiness is still the why in our day-to-day.

This book does track some historical development of holiness teaching, in chapters exploring “Why Revival?” and “Why Dialogue with the past?”. The natural reference point seems to be Wesley’s understanding of holiness as the hope and promise of transformation by engaging in the very present kingdom of God today. It could be argued that a biblical understanding of holiness would have been a more appropriate starting point, but it is not trying to be a systematic theology of holiness. It is a short, easy-to-read yet deeply impactful book which naturally refers to biblical texts throughout. Despite its mere 125 pages, the book is packed with thought-provoking

analogies which inspire the reader to think and re-think. It manages to take the subject of holiness from a doctrinal, theological and theoretical exercise into something much more holistic which influences practice. It's a book that could be read to inspire, challenge and deepen the individual or equally shared as part of a book club or small group series, or even as inspiration to the preacher.

For me, growing up in The Salvation Army, "holiness" was the name of a quiet and reflective Sunday morning meeting and a personal inward matter - the inner workings of heart and mind. However, as I have discovered in recent years, the challenge is to ensure our inner experience becomes "intensely practical - sleeves rolled up holiness" (Burns 2012:60).

'God sanctifies his people not only in order that they will be marked by his character, but also in order that the world will be marked by that character...Holiness leads to mission' (Handbook of Doctrine 2013:198).

Why holiness? expands on this theme throughout, suggesting that holiness and mission are inseparable, and arguing that it is holiness that will both transform and unite the church – the *why* transforming the *what* and the *how*.

I will leave it to Sunberg to summarise:

'*Why Holiness?* Because a world filled with God's children reflecting the image of Jesus and singing the beautiful music of the holy life becomes a vision of the already present Kingdom of God' (Sunberg 2019:125).

Bibliography

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