

*Under the Mantle: Marian Thoughts from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Priest*, by Donald H Calloway MIC

***Due to pandemic restrictions, the Book + Circle readers again shared their thoughts via email.***

### **Book description**

Fr Calloway shares his thoughts on the centrality of Mary in the faith of the Catholic Church, and in his own personal conversion and approach to being a priest, in several contexts: Divine Mercy, the Eucharist, the papacy, the Church, Reconciliation, prayer, the Cross, masculinity and femininity. He includes hundreds of quotes from saints, theologians and senior Church figures throughout the ages in support of his propositions. Fr Calloway positions the book as part of his mission, since he was ordained, to go out to the world and tell everyone what God, in his mercy, has done for all of us.

### **How did the book make us feel?**

This book generated quite diverse responses from readers. Some found Fr Calloway's devotion to Our Lady inspiring and contagious, and felt encouraged to become closer to her, e.g. by praying the Rosary more often. Others found his tone condescending and overly dogmatic in several places, and were disappointed by his lack of content on a direct personal relationship between each human being, sinners though we are, and God.

### **What were the book's strengths and weaknesses?**

Some readers liked Fr Calloway's evident joy and love for Mary, and his love of Christ through her. The level of detail and number of quotes about Our Lady are impressive. The book is easy to read through, and a good reminder of the importance of Mary in our Catholic faith. The author's accounts of travelling the world to spread his message includes some amusing anecdotes.

However, some readers struggled with what they saw as an insistence that we can only communicate with Christ through Mary, and only receive His graces through her, on the grounds that this is not in keeping with the invitation from Christ himself to be personally close to Him, as evidenced in the Gospels and exhorted by Scripture and saints throughout the Church's history.

The book covers a lot of ground in terms of areas of teaching, and some readers found its presentation though-provoking. Others found it sometimes off-putting and old-fashioned (e.g. describing Reconciliation as a "spiritual diaper change", where God (the father) "supplies the diapers" while Mary (the mother) "does the cleaning") and perhaps theologically questionable (there is nothing in the Gospels about Mary in the account of the institution of the sacrament of Reconciliation).

Fr Calloway's writing style is lively, enthusiastic and conversational. At times it comes across as possibly more suited to a speech or rally-style event than a book, more inclined towards proclamation with little nuance or empathy. Fr Calloway's views on male and female roles and responsibilities, in particular, came across to several readers as simplistic and out-dated, and his description of being drawn to conversion to the Catholic Church because Mary is "the most beautiful woman in the world" was surprising. The widespread use of italics and explanations in parentheses became a bit wearing after a while.

The fact that Fr Calloway is a convert to Catholicism from his Evangelical upbringing may partially explain his style of communication and his fervour in support of the Catholic Church. This sometimes

leads to questionable assertions, e.g. when he states “God used the Catholic Church to determine which books” to include in the Bible, bearing mind that (a) there was only one main Christian church at the time, and (b) since the Reformation other Christian traditions have adopted a shortened version of the Bible which they profess to be the true Bible coming from God. The Evangelical roots of the author may also explain his emphasis on sin rather than God’s healing and compassion in his discussion of what is wrong with rehabilitation centres.

Fr Calloway makes some other assertions for which it would have been interesting to see the sources: e.g. Mary endured no pain giving birth to Jesus; Mary is a necessary part of the sacrament of Baptism; Matthew and Luke learned about the birth of Jesus from Mary. The lack of mention of Confirmation as one of the sacraments through which we are incorporated into the mystical Body of Christ is surprising.

The “Marian gems” (quotes about Mary) included at the end of the chapter were welcome. However, there were so many that some readers found it was often hard to give them enough time to do them justice. The quotes discussed in the text also include some that would be interesting to debate in the Book + Circle’s normal meeting format: e.g. the account of Mary as the neck of the Church, closest to Christ its head and the conduit between Christ and us in his Body, and St Laurence of Brindisi’s assertion that: “The neck causes the head to bend. Through Mary God bends down to us in mercy.” Could this imply that God needs Mary to show us mercy, or even that Mary makes God show us mercy?

#### **Would we recommend this book to anyone else?**

Some readers felt this would be a good book for non-Catholics to learn about Mary in a down-to-earth way, and also good for Catholics as it adheres to a Christocentric approach to teaching about Mary.

Others felt they were more likely to recommend the book about Mary that the Book + Circle read in May 2019 (*Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, by Brant James Pitre).

#### **Would we read another book by the same author?**

Probably not.

#### **Next book:**

*In This House of Brede*, by Rumer Godden.

#### **Next meeting dates:**

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020, 10.30 am, at or outside the Retreat Café, PNL Centre at St Joseph’s, Ladbroke Road, Redhill – To be confirmed

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020, 8 pm – To be confirmed