

Review: *God at Work – live each day with a purpose*, by Ken Costa, 2016, W Publishing (Thos Nelson), 168 pp plus 21pp appendix

There are many books around these days on Christians in the workplace and the need for integrating Sunday with the rest of the week, but this one is notable for its comprehensiveness and the depth of experience and wisdom expressed. It is particularly suitable for graduates becoming established in a range of vocations.

Ken Costa is a leading layman at Holy Trinity Brompton in London, Chairman of Alpha International, and over 40 years rose to become one of the UK's leading investment bankers. In the words of Lord Griffiths: "he is known for the passion, creativity, leadership and strategic thinking that he brings to his professional life." It shows in this book, which ranges from the broad moral perspective on work in God's creation, with 'the economy' no longer enjoying widespread trust, to practical matters. Anecdotally he makes clear the vital importance of basic bible study and close Christian relationships in the church context.

"Perhaps the ultimate overarching purpose of work is to worship God in and through our work." It is not fundamentally for pay or profit, nor is it for self-fulfilment. Understanding the purpose of work needs to be "in the context of the needs of the wider human community that God created, loves, and intended for banks, supermarkets, hospitals, information technology, and other businesses to serve."

In answering the broad question of how we show Christ's love at work, especially following the global financial crisis of 2008-09, he suggests that "the creation of wealth is a moral imperative of our time, but it cannot be an absolute. It needs to be seen in the context of the re-humanizing of our financial and business community." We need to help young people entering the workforce "to enable them to refashion the market economy into a more responsible, values-driven community."

Chapters on Ambition and Life Choices, Tough Decisions, Work-Life Balance and Stress bring to bear a wealth of practical advice. "For me, Christian ambition is the passionate and contented pursuit of challenging, yet attainable, God-given objectives." That is expounded helpfully, especially the aspect of guidance. "Priorities are essential if we are to achieve our ambitions and at the same time hold on to our values. I believe that the right order of priorities is that God should come first, our core relationships second, and the work that God has called us to third." Freedom must be balanced with discipline, and we periodically need "to take seriously a comprehensive review of our lifestyle" under God. New ways of working include what he calls 'portfolio working', with one or two part-time jobs plus study or other roles such as ministry. He sets out strategies to keep stress in check.

Another practical chapter is on Failure, Disappointment and Hope. "Living each day at work with hope and purpose is essential for our well-being," so recovering hope after failure and disappointment is necessary and he proffers pointers to this, culminating in "Christian hope expresses abundance, abandonment, creativity and an openness to renewal" by God's grace. "But we have trivialized hope to the point of whimsy," rather than being empowered in Christ to tackle apparently impossible situations with confidence.

Two final chapters on Money & Giving and Spiritual Renewal round out the book. "Our attitude to finances is determined by a fundamental choice between God and money, not by our income bracket." Both greed and insecurity (fear) can deflect us. "Generous regular giving is one of the ways in which we underline to the spiritual powers that attempt to draw us away from God that we trust in him and in his control of all our resources." Giving of skills, time, energy, money and possessions should represent a joyful overflowing with spiritual significance, and needs to start at once in discipleship.

While God is at work in the world, shaking and shaping its future, spirituality “has a clear mission: to bring healing and restoration to a fragmented society.” We need to get on board with this and look to the enormous power of the Holy Spirit to bring “newness, creativity and adventure” so that we see “our communities throbbing with life and our society healed. Herein lies true prosperity.”

The book concludes: “The missionary effect of Christians at work living authentic lives, weak yet empowered by the Holy Spirit, vulnerable yet strengthened by God, anxious yet filled with peace, could, through a new outpouring of God’s Spirit, become the greatest evangelistic movement of our age.” The author’s own reputation makes this a credible vision.

Ian Hore-Lacy, 7/11/17.

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