

Life's twists explored in footsteps of St Cuthbert

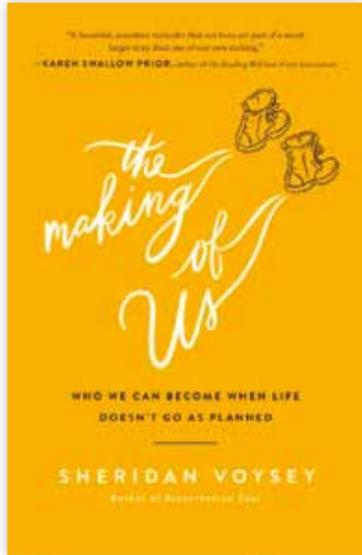
The Making of Us: Who We Can Become When Life Doesn't Go As Planned, by Sheridan Voysey
(Thomas Nelson, 2019)

reviewed by Cath Connelly

IF AN AUTHOR IS TO SELECT A background setting for a rich conversation on vocation and giftedness, then the decision to undertake a pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Cuthbert whilst exploring stories of the author's life is a winning combination. As Sheridan Voysey walks with his friend DJ from the Holy Island of Lindisfarne to Durham, they engage in gentle dialogue about the twists and turns of a life seen through the lens of discerning God's presence.

The core message of this delightful book is that those life events that might appear as failures or distractions are actually the opportunities that God uses: "Paul the apostle stumbled onto this dynamic. Chased, flogged, imprisoned, abandoned – from the moment he fell from his horse into a life of service, safety, or status, he found a gap open through which God's power could flow. He came to see weakness as integral to his mission. When trouble came to Paul, life flowed to others ... What if our empty spaces became channels for God's power, our lack birthing new life in others?"

As Voysey and DJ reflect on their



childhoods, they see that the difficulties of this time became the fodder for God to be revealed. "Those hard times shaped my passions," DJ says. "It's a marvel when you think about it: all the taunts and trials of our childhood years becoming the soil from which our best selves can grow."

Frederick Buechner has the famous quote "vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need", with both elements of this equation needing to be balanced. Voysey explores this concept of our deepest gladness. He points out that there is not some big book in which is scribed each of our names with the intended

vocation that we must discover – a supernatural guessing game with the implied assumption that if we do not find this specific vocation that we have failed our mission.

Rather, Voysey explores a life where every turn becomes the place where God meets us. From this perspective, every stepping forward is part of the living out of an aspect of feeding of the world's

movements started, or any grand plan achieved. His one big thing was the entirety of his life. The great and the small of it given as an offering." The book invites us to reflect that we are revealing something of God's character through what we say and do and that as such "when we can't become who we want to be, we can still become who we're meant to be".

"Voysey explores a life where every turn becomes the place where God meets us."

greatest hunger. It is from within our particular skills and giftedness that we are thus called to live our life, not endlessly searching for the one vocation that may indeed be the calling of another.

Using St Cuthbert as his example, Voysey insists that "it's not that our work won't matter in the end. It just won't matter the most." What does matter is who we are in God. He writes of Cuthbert: "Books in his honour. Churches in his name. A city built on his shrine. But perhaps eternity will record Cuthbert's legacy more like this: A mother noticed. A body held. A forehead kissed ... Cuthbert's one big thing wasn't seeing monasteries built,

This is a gentle book, meandering across the English countryside, meandering across two lives thus far led. As a spiritual director who is often sitting in discernment with my directees, this book becomes a resource to see how God has so far been present in the directee's life, from which to ask the question "how then might God be calling you forward into this next challenge?" If we could see the movement towards life in all its complicated turns, then we might indeed see, as Voysey does, "It makes you wonder if... all the dead ends, wrong turns, scars, scratches, and blisters were somehow integral to the making of us. Woven together under the gaze

of Providence, crafting something good", that if we were to reach in from the future to speak to our 17-year-old self, we might want to tell that self that "he's searching for God without realising it, and God will soon make the first move; that his life will take an unforeseen turn because of this, and this turn will be for his good. And I want to tell him that the fear he felt and the step he took in spite of it is a pattern he can expect for anything in life worth having. Face the fear. Take the risk. Don't run away. Good things can come when we step into uncertainty."

Made in God's image, who we are is our very giftedness. As such, "we can face reality as it is – its weeds, rust, and flaking paint included; its failures, miscarriages, and identity crises; reality in all its ordinariness. And by facing that reality for as long as it takes – submitting to its questions, learning its lessons, taking it on, staring it down, punctuating it with rest and what laughter we can muster – we may stumble on to find new wisdom and purpose, maybe also a tribe that needs us, and be surprised by the gifts we now have to offer."

Sounds good to me.

Cath Connelly is co-director of the Living Well Centre, a spiritual director and retreat facilitator. She is currently studying for her Doctor of Ministry in Spirituality. Cath is also a professional Celtic harpist.

Economics matters, but it doesn't have all the answers

Confessions of a Meddlesome Economist, by Ian Harper
(Acorn Press, 2018)

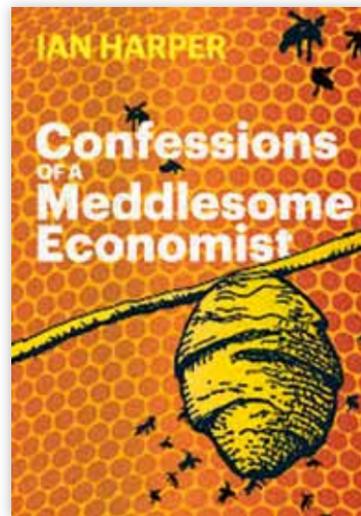
reviewed by Phil Dolan

IAN HARPER'S *Confessions of a Meddlesome Economist* is, in his own words, intended to be the outworking of his struggle to reconcile his profession and his faith over the past 30 years, and it succeeds admirably in achieving that aim.

The book also provides a good overview of the economics profession as it applies both in academia and more widely, from the perspective of a respected practitioner who has been, and remains, a major contributor to some of the most important policy decisions in Australia's recent history. Indeed, the book's brief but illuminating summary of Australia's economic history since 1788 is one of its many highlights, as is the author's readable but rigorous definition of some of the key terms used by professional economists. Those wanting to know exactly what is involved in considering the trade-off between equity and efficiency, what moral hazard and opportu-

nity cost are, and how normative and positive economics differ, will find their answers here.

Reading the views of the former Chair of the Australian Fair Pay Commission on the pros and cons of a minimum wage, and the extent to which such a policy might help or hinder those it is intended to benefit, provides an informed, and informative, insight into one of the key debates of our time. Similar comments apply for those curious about, and impacted by, the role and decisions of bodies such as the Reserve Bank – in other words, anyone who has ever borrowed or loaned money. The author's



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reflections on what has, and hasn't, changed about the Bank from his time there as a junior economist

in the early 1980s to his current position as a Board member will resonate with anyone who has

spent time at significantly different levels in a long-lived institution.

The book ranges widely over the role that solid economic thinking can play in the betterment of society, and covers topics such as the outlook for rural and regional Australia, the need to look beyond our current sources of prosperity and the imperative for a move to a "knowledge economy", and technological innovations and new business models such as Uber.

Harper makes a good case that economics matters, and it matters a lot, noting that market-based economic policy has lifted billions worldwide out of poverty in the last fifty years. He is also candid about the discipline's limitations, and, in particular, the ways in which some of its fundamental underlying assumptions, for example that individuals are driven by self-interest, are in conflict with the values and tenets of the Christian faith. As he notes, "economics makes various claims about what motivates people and makes them happy that jar with a Christian understanding of God's will for humankind". He also discusses the ways in which market failures can contribute to serious

global issues such as climate change. His views on the role that Christian economists can play in addressing some of these issues will be of real interest to those contemplating a career in the area, or even for those wanting to know what might be possible.

The book's final chapter, in which he warns against allowing one's profession to become too great a source of meaning in one's life, is sound advice, and applies to people of any faith, or indeed none at all. He is likewise critical of those aspects of society that encourage materialism, and an indifference towards the disadvantaged. While economics has much to offer and can, and does, play a role in improving the earthly lives of many, Ian Harper's book is a well written and useful reminder that it does not, and will never have, all the answers.

Phil Dolan is a private equity investor, and adjunct professor at La Trobe University. He was previously Dean of the Business School at the University of Western Australian, and worked in the financial services industry. He is on the Board of the Australia College of Theology.

St George's Church, Malvern
296 Glenferrie Road, Malvern Vic 3144
Tel: 9822 3030 Email: office@stgeorgesmalvern.org

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