



Book Review

Bill Robinson. *Incarnate Leadership: Five Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus*.

Zondervan, 122pp, hb, \$14.99, ISBN 978-0-310-29113-8.

Reviewed by Tim Harle

This is a gem of a book. Its cover features a sturdy bicycle with a briefcase on its handlebars, suggesting an academic setting. The bicycle is secured by a strong lock and chain, suggesting worldly wisdom. The author, who is President of a US liberal arts university affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, combines both perspectives.

In the short canvas of 122 pages, Robinson reflects on a verse whose very familiarity at Christmas can dull its impact. 'And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1.14). He draws out five themes:

- avoiding the gap that can occur in leadership, especially when leaders create, or are placed on, pedestals,
- leading openly: the need for transparency and openness, especially sharing information,
- reflecting the light: being a mirror with humility,
- living in grace and truth, contrasting a climate of fear and grace,
- the privilege of being a sacrificial leader.

Despite his fear that 'those of us who lead Christian organizations have drawn more from the texts of the *Harvard Business Review* than from the leadership texts of Christ's life' (p18), Robinson is happy to draw on the work of such HBR stalwarts as Warren Bennis and Jim Collins. 'Leading from the middle' is a favourite phrase, leading to the powerful observation that 'The consummation of Christ "leading from the middle of his people" was his dying in the middle of two thieves' (p101).

Less satisfying is Robinson's repeated anecdotes from family life. Some may find his examples too specific to the culture of the USA, though even those not versed in the NFL should appreciate his alternative description of the much vaunted accolade of MVP as Most *Vulnerable* Player (p107; the traditional ascription is Valuable).

This book deserves to take its place alongside such leadership nuggets as Stephen Cottrell's *Hit the Ground Kneeling* (CHP 2008) and Peter Shaw's *Mirroring Jesus as Leader* (Grove 2004). It also provides a good springboard from a Christian perspective into the growing interest in worldly leadership. This alternative to globalized leadership originates with Jonathan Gosling & Henry Mintzberg's 2003 Harvard Business Review article *The Five Minds of a Manager*, and is currently the subject of a research project at the Leadership Trust (www.leadership.org.uk).

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