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Me and We: God's New Social Gospel

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Sweet, L. (2014). *Post Christian: Me and We: God's New Social Gospel*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 173 pp. \$17.99. ISBN 978-1-4267-5776-1 (pbk).

Reviewed by Craighton Hippenhammer, Associate Professor, Digital Initiatives Department, Benner Library & Resource Center, Olivet Nazarene University, Bourbonnais, IL.

In this oddly titled book, Sweet attempts to redefine the old social gospel into something he calls "God's new social gospel," which is the subtitle of the book. The old social gospel was an early-twentieth-century movement that concentrated on transforming social structures – rather than changing hearts which would change the world, it attempted to change the world which it thought would then change the world. Sweet says, "The first social gospel movement was more about institutionalizing social Christianity than about incarnating a Jesus faith. Its naïve view of sin and optimistic outlook on the betterment of human nature failed to look up close and see that evil is real and personal. Evil is not just impersonal systemic forces but hurting people hurting people." (3). The problem is, according to Sweet, the latest incarnation of the social gospel in the last 25 years is a "social justice" movement being pushed by Evangelicals. "It's as if evangelicals showed up a hundred years late to the social gospel party, and they are making many of the same mistakes that the first social gospelers made." (4). The problem with advocating for Jesus' justice in the world "rather than Jesus's life, death, and resurrection as the framing story, what you end up with is everything 'social' and nothing 'gospel.'" (5). This book is designed to be a corrective to that approach.

The Me/We combo is necessary because an emphasis on the self is empty. Discipleship is a "We Garden... a story lived together." (11). For Jesus, salvation was not "transformation of social structures but healing of mind, body, and spirit; reclamation of relationships and restoration to community. Social systems, institutions, and structures are human-built mechanisms" (12), like institutional churches, which can leave people without a savior. "The Christian life is not a code of moralisms, doctrinal creeds, or a semantic/semiotic system. It's a daily indwelling of a Jesus spirit and outcropping of a Jesus life

story. You can't save a system. You can only save a people.... Holding hands is true community, not holding meetings...." (18).

Much of the book describes three great me/we sins: individualism, racism, and consumerism, for which Sweet offers the suggested solutions of "de-selfing in a selfing culture" (21), seeing darkness/blackness as a blessing, and conceiving rather than (excessive) consuming. "Living a Me/We "House and Garden" gospel is not easy. But it is fun, filling, and full of surprises." (153).

There are 19 helpful pages of notes but no index.