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## Book Review: Queer Prophets, curated by Ruth Hunt

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*You had me at the introduction.* It doesn't quite have the rom-com ring to it that Renee Zellweger mustered in the original quote from the film *Jerry Maguire* ("You had me at hello")! But that's the kind of intensity with which I love this book. And, in truth and in shame, I probably wouldn't have read it if I hadn't been asked to review it. I would have added it to the pile of "I really ought to read" books - books I have a nodding acquaintance with and can hold up a conversation about in small talk situations. But then, moving my dated movie references back a few years, it never would have *touched my soul* (*Pretty Woman*, in case you wondered).

So, this review isn't for the people who will read it anyway, whether they will read it to be affirmed or having already decided to hate it. This review is to plead with the rest of you to never let it land on the pile of books you 'ought to read'. It is filled with God's Grace, so why would you set it down before you breathed it all in?

This is a book about love, so of course it is a book about God. In its pages you will hear the righteous protests and gut-wrenching stories of rejection you would anticipate, but even though not every story is resolved, there is something redeeming about reading it. This is not a redemption born of suffering - not an atonement won by dragging ourselves through misery to come out better people - but the redemption that comes from being immersed in love; real, tangible, costly love. If there aren't seekers who find faith somewhere between the captivating introduction and Kate Bottley's grounded, repentant, conclusion, I would be astonished.

I suspect that many secretly wonder: why bother being an LGBTQIA+ identifying person of faith? Why go back to a church, mosque or synagogue where you are hurt, or grudgingly accepted, or even loved with some apology? I think this book answers that, although I also think it shows the desperation of exclusion which leads to so many suicides. The answer, as every Sunday school child will tell you, is God, or Jesus, or both. There are stories here which unfold the mystery of salvation, in the way a person lives their life with God. There is overwhelming, saving love which creates, affirms and holds safe in every storm. And because Ruth Hunt has set her task to plea for empathy beyond simple understanding, we are privileged to feel something of that saving love along with the writer. Perhaps an unintended gift, but one to be savoured.

A good example of this is in Pádraig O Tuma's story. I've heard him talk about some of what he endured as a gay child, teenager and man. I thought therefore that I knew what I was getting into with his story. Yes, the pain is there, and it must be heard, but he also shares with us the magnificent calling into himself that he experienced through God's love. Jeanette Winterson and Dustin Lance also offer windows into intersectionality because it is simply how they make sense of their lives, and along with them, new illuminations come to us too.

Queer Prophets is not an accidental title. There is a tremendous amount to learn from it, but it doesn't, at its heart, look back to these stories as queer histories; rather it shows us what we can expect from God when we make someone an outsider. We can expect heaven to come to earth to bless one queer soul at a time. It shows us what God is doing while the church is worrying itself to death about inclusion. Read this book and become a witness to God's good future.

*Written by Naomi Nixon, CEO of the Student Christian Movement and Inclusive Church supporter.*

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