

Title: The Ragamuffin Gospel	Author: Brennan Manning
Media type: (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Book <input type="checkbox"/> CD/Audio book <input type="checkbox"/> DVD	Call Number: 248 MAN
Review submitted by: Tacy Slade	Date: 11/03/2015
Subject (e.g. Prayer, Family Life, Sacraments, Saints, Bible Study, Moral Conduct, Social Justice)	
Christian Living, Salvation	
1. What is this book about? (describe briefly)	
<p>Manning addresses the question "How could the Gospel of Christ be truly called "Good News" if God is a righteous judge who rewards the good and punishes the evil?", for the author believes the approach to Christian life today is often based in fear and the false idea that we can earn our salvation. He believes the gospel of grace has been twisted into religious bondage and distorted the image of God into an eternal, small-minded bookkeeper. Put bluntly, he states the American church (any Christian denomination) today accepts grace in theory but denies it in practice. Even though scriptures insist on God's initiative in the work of salvation – that by grace we are saved, our spirituality often starts with self, not God. Using the Gospels he sets out to demonstrate that God loves us JUST AS WE ARE. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more; we simply accept the gift of His love.</p>	
2. What main message does the author convey?	
<p>Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast." Galatians 2:16 "Someone is reckoned as upright not by practicing the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ." Theologians refer to this as "Justification by grace through faith" and is apparently an ongoing point of contention between Catholic and Protestant churches. It is important to point out that Manning was raised Catholic during the 1930-1950's in a rigid church he says was totally preoccupied with sin. It left him with the thought it meant a life long struggle to avoid sin – there was no "Good News." He left the church and became Protestant. I was a Protestant that converted to Catholicism in 1992, so I found this aspect particularly interesting. I also married a cradle Catholic who had fallen away from the Church for many of the same reasons as Manning.</p> <p>However, I believe this "faith vs. works" issue to be a contrived argument and, personally, wholeheartedly subscribe to James 2: 14-26 which essentially states faith without works is dead. Nothing in the Catechism regarding salvation, faith and justification differs from the author's message which stems from the Reformation. The Christian revelation for the source of salvation is unified. The Catechism clearly states justification by grace is through faith. Salvation is an on-going conversion of the heart, an acceptance of God's love and grace. If we receive a new heart and are to imitate Christ, it stands to reason it will become visible in our actions and relations with others, including ourselves. Conversion requires change and by its nature will be visible to everyone. Interestingly, I think Manning believes this too because on page 167 he writes that in faith there is "movement and development." He says "to be Christian, faith has to be new- that is - alive and growing. It cannot be static, finished or settled; when scripture, prayer, worship, or ministry become routine – they are dead." As a Catholic, I am encouraged to participate in the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy and a sacramental life which helps faith grow and be active.</p>	
3. What inspired you the most about this book, and why would you recommend it?:	
<p>The author does a wonderful job presenting in plain language what "justification through grace by faith" means. I often hear it and confess the meaning flies right over my head.</p> <p>Manning does a good job highlighting the biblical thread demonstrating God's relentless love for us. This is an important message for any Christian or person searching for God. Some people have "worthiness" issues, somehow they are not good enough for God's love. They might believe they need to "do something" to be more worthy. It's a good book for the weary Christian, down-trodden, those who think their lives are a disappointment to God, the sorely burdened, the inconsistent, unsteady disciple. God's love is constant regardless of where you are in your journey.</p>	

4. Who would benefit from reading this book?

This should be read by anyone wanting to better understand God's salvation and love for us through Jesus Christ and to better understand "Justification through grace by faith," the shared Christian doctrine. However, Manning seems to have out-Luthered Luther by stopping right there. Although not the author's intention, I found his book very illuminating to a particular difference between the Catholic and Protestant faiths. Manning doesn't see the sacramental life as a healing, life-giving nourishment along the way. He never says anything directly negative about the Catholic faith, a sacramental life or any specific Protestant denomination, but as a convert to Catholicism, I sensed that undercurrent. The sacraments and reverence for Mary are among the many reasons I converted to Catholicism. (He obviously objects to the rigid, "Holier than thou" nature of many Christian denominations.) I contend this "faith vs works" attitude is really more a reflection of the individual's attitude and outlook toward life, rather than the "American Church." This attitude can be found among followers of EVERY religion. It is the "nature" of man to project our way of thinking onto God. We are judgmental bookkeepers, not God.

The book includes a spiritual retreat entitled The 19 Mercies with scriptural readings and meditations grouped under: Come, Encounter, Serve, Trust.

5. Any other impressions:

Honesty with oneself is essential and Manning says for Ragamuffins, God's name is Mercy; thus, for the Ragamuffin, gratitude surpasses every other attitude along the spiritual journey. He states that compassionate love is the axis of the Christian moral revolution and the only sign ever given by Jesus by which a disciple would be recognized is "I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you." John 13:34-35. I found this particularly interesting in that Pope Francis has called for 2015-16 to be a Holy Year of Mercy and called upon each of us to show the compassion of Christ to all. In fact, much of what Manning had to say is the exact same message I have heard from Pope Francis.

The other major impression I had was that his understanding of the Catholic faith stopped in an adolescent, pre-Vatican II state, not surprising since he left the Catholic Church. He writes at length about the parable of the Prodigal Son, how the father leaps to greet the son and doesn't even permit him to finish his speech of contrition. That forgiveness does not require us to sift our hearts and analyze our intentions; no need to be crushed with contrition. The gospel of grace announces "Forgiveness precedes repentance"; the sinner is already accepted before he pleads for mercy. Clearly, he is remembering negative childhood experiences of Confession. Yet, the interpretation of the parable is the same for Catholics. I believe God has already forgiven me before asking.

And yet he fully sees the relevance, in fact, the requirement of honesty with oneself and others publicly in AA meetings which, of course, includes much self-analyzation, contrition and public confession each time one introduces himself as Mr. X and I am an alcoholic. He doesn't recognize the similarity of process and value in the Sacrament of Reconciliation which back in the day would simply have been called Confession. In the post Vatican II world, Reconciliation is clearly approached in a healing manner, not a punitive one. (Sad that it ever was perceived or administered that way) However, Protestants fall in this trap too, as I have heard many a Protestant sermon on hell and damnation leaving me with a sense of a great gulf between man and God that could almost never be overcome. There is no "Good News" in that Christian church either.