

# *The Provocative Church*

By Graham Tomlin<sup>1</sup>

In this fine little book (170 pages!) Tomlin gives a penetrating analysis of the contemporary church in the West, both of our shortcomings as well as the direction we need to move if we are to be faithful to our Lord and to the world in which he has placed us. Tomlin writes because he loves the church, but to his dismay Christ's beautiful bride has been hobbled by self-inflicted irrelevance.

Tomlin asks: Why are our churches not credible? Why is it, that even when people are interested in spiritual questions, our churches are the last place they would look to for answers? What's wrong? He answers, "It's not so much a lack of truth... but a missing connection between the words uttered and the style of life that results from it: a lack of depth, of correlation between words, images, and reality. ... If going to church and calling myself a Christian makes almost no discernible difference to the way I live my life, spend my money or use my time, then it is not surprising if my friends who are not Christians are not that interested in finding out any more about it. One of the key themes of this book is that unless there is something about church, Christians, or Christian faith that intrigues, provokes, or entices then all the evangelism in the world will fall on deaf ears. If churches cannot convey a sense of 'reality' then all our 'truth' will count for nothing." (p. 10)

As *The Provocative Church* muses on these themes (and others, such as the way we think about conversion, the deity of Christ, and our guilty feelings relating to evangelism), Tomlin evidences an awareness of the issues which is theologically, philosophically, and historically informed. This is especially true of Tomlin's articulation of the gospel, which avoids tired clichés in favor of a succinct exploration of the heart of the Bible. He summarizes, "Jesus Christ has come as God's king ... his enemies and the enemies of humankind have been dealt a fatal blow from which they will never recover." I was also thankful for Tomlin's conviction that the church is the rightful bearer of the King's grand news. Tomlin believes that the church ought to function as a signpost, pointing the way to another order, another kingdom, where this world is reordered and made right. Consequently, he pleads with followers of Jesus to live holy lives which are publicly Christian. These lives provoke an interest in the things of God, which must be fostered through humble dialogue within sincere communities of faith where people can come to and grow in Christ. Tomlin insists that this Biblical pattern, when coupled with faithful teaching and pastoral oversight, produces churches which are brimming with life and can't be stopped from growing.

Growing churches faithfully, seeing the Kingdom extend, this is Tomlin's passion. Would that all Lord's people would embrace this vision!

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Tomlin, *The Provocative Church* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002).