

**PRESS ON! MICHAEL HOLLINGS: HIS LIFE AND WITNESS** edited by Jock Dalrymple, Joan McCrimmon and Terry Tastard, *McCrimmon Publishing Co.*, Great Wakering, Essex, 2001. Pp. 205, £7.95 pbk.

The dynamic title *Press On!* is appropriate for this biography of Michael Hollings. Once begun, it is difficult to stop being enthralled by the interesting richness of detail in this account of the life and witness of a man, of whom Cardinal Hume said at his Requiem, 'We salute his greatness as a man, we celebrate his holiness as a priest, we admire a devoted shepherd'. The words of Scripture that come to mind are 'About Zion I will not be silent', because this account of Michael Hollings is an attempt, in its un-folding, to reveal the power of God's love working out in the life of a Christian of our time. Jock Dalrymple and his collaborators had a formidable task making use of the vast amount of material made available to them about the life of this friend of all. They have carried out the work admirably, fashioning this book as though they were building a house.

The first chapter tells of the foundations; Hollings's childhood and adolescence, growing up in the aftermath of war in a family 'not penniless but poor within a certain social class and framework'. In this first period, the bricks were fashioned, and fired in early manhood. Experience as an officer, serving in the horrors of war, made him a leader. He went through the tribulations of losing his mother, without the consolation of being able to say goodbye to her before she died whilst he was on active service. His stay in Israel, in the Holy Land, in the places where Jesus travelled, lived and died (in his life, death and resurrection) deepened the call that Hollings received from God to be an '*alter Christus*' for the sake of others, to help and heal the world with the Good News of salvation.

Chapters 2 and 3 are like a staircase to be climbed, or a lift by which he travelled, on to the priesthood and spiritual maturity through study and personal contacts at the Beda in Rome. He pressed on, helped by the example of self-giving persons: Padre Pio and St Theresa of Lisieux. From his experience of celebrations in Rome he acquired a wonderful sense of the universal Church and of the pope as the good shepherd. But, at the same time, at the end of his course at the Beda, he realised that his studies and his spirituality fitted him for being Christ for others. The key is Jesus — 'the elimination of I and the substitution of Jesus'.

In chapters 4 to 11, the collaborators proclaim the themes of Hollings's life. The doors and windows of the house are opened. In Oxford and Southall we meet Michael Hollings in the preliminary practice and perseverance of his 'open door' policy. We see how living the gospel created a witnessing Christian community with its own life, death and resurrection pattern. At the centre was Michael, being Christ to his people and a teacher of prayer.

The different contributors, by opening the doors and windows of the building, let us see how Hollings helped people to live both in the rooms of the house and elsewhere in the turbulent times of the second half of the 20th century. Buy or borrow the book for yourself. 'Press On' reading it. See how the author puts a seal on the witness of the book in chapter 12, 'The Way of the Cross'. Perhaps this book is a new kind of 'spiritual reading' when it gives us a lead in its account of prayer overflowing into action. It also gives an insight into family and social life between the Wars. In contrast, change later accelerated and in a few years the life of all classes became radically different compared to past centuries. We are reminded of this when reading about Michael and his companions living in 'a constant state of change and challenge' in breaking down barriers in Southall and Notting Hill in the exercise of an inner-city ministry. We read about Michael and his cousin and friends, students at the Beda and Scots College, and we are reminded that for British Catholics there has always been the enjoyment of visiting members of their families, the opportunity to see something of life in the Holy City or the joy of participating in great Church celebrations, travelling in Italy and delighting in art, architecture and archaeology. The book gives us pleasure when it tells of experiences at the heart of the Christian world. We feel we are reading a travel book. There is a useful chronology, an extensive list of published and other works, and a bibliography.

This book is a great mosaic to which the many photographs contribute. Each has a significant message and helps to illumine the whole. There are events which flood light widely. For example, Michael Hollings gave up his leave when his mother was dying and he longed to go home to say goodbye before her death, so that a younger officer could go home to his family. He gave up what was life to him to help another. In the last chapter we are told that Michael had a tremendous sense of what was entrusted to him. His vocation was illustrated when we recall his ordination, jubilee and memorial cards. In black script on the first and second of these, and in red script on his memorial card, was inscribed: '*Sitio*'. 'I thirst'. It linked him with the life, death and resurrection of Christ, with whom he wanted to unite in quenching people's thirst by 'drawing water from the wells of salvation'.

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