



divine revelation: the special revelation in Scripture ... and the general revelation we receive through nature. Both are from God. When we destroy creation, which is God's revelation, it is similar to tearing a page out of the Bible."

Suddenly Merritt understood that environmental stewardship was a vital, but missing, part of his Christian walk. As a jaded environmental evangelist myself, I realize that statistics, data charts, or even logical self-interest seldom cause one to prioritize creation care. It is almost always a change of heart—a born-again-again-moment when the eyes of the heart open and the ear pricks up to the subtle song of praise sung by the rest of creation. Sadly, most people never slow down enough to listen nor choose to join in the choir, but *Green Like God* may help change that.

Treading the dangerous middle ground, Merritt makes comments such as: "Forcing environmentalism into a left-right dichotomy harms us all. If you consider yourself conservative, you can remain a solid supporter of biblical values like the sanctity of life, but you should expand your political interest to include historically progressive issues like global poverty, human rights, and aggressive care

for God's creation." Merritt winsomely weaves a discussion of the critical issues—consumerism, climate change, environmental degradation—into the narrative of his own journey.

This is not the book for skeptics with arms crossed demanding an irrefutable case for environmentalism, nor is this a complex theological defense to force a critic to surrender. Instead it is an easy read, insightful and telling, the story of an honest quest to reconnect a personal faith to a world in crisis. Written with the gratitude of a blind man restored to sight, *Green Like God* will inspire some to leave the safe confines of a utilitarian worldview of nature. I predict that, like Merritt, they will find the journey worthwhile. ■

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FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

By Shawn Teresa Flanigan
Kumarian Press

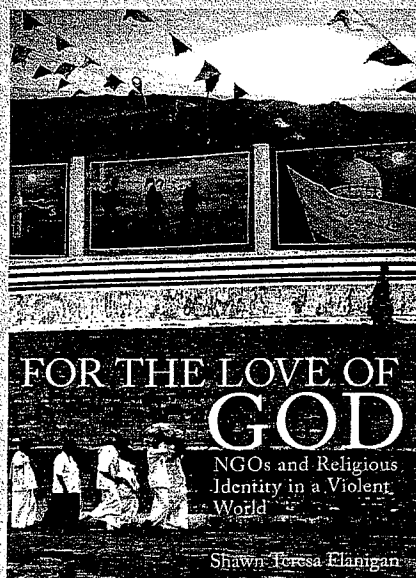
Reviewed by Benjamin L. Hartley

Bad news: This was a disappointing book. Good news: there's a real need for a book like this and for the research it represents. *For the Love of God: NGOs and Religious Identity in a Violent World* analyzes secular and faith-based NGOs across a wide spectrum of world religions in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to discover whether and to what extent NGOs reinforce existing ethnic and religious tensions.

The author does this by analyzing interviews she conducted with 100 management-level staff in NGOs providing healthcare and other social services.

Comparative studies like this one of countries that have roughly similar histories of ethnic and religious violence are useful for NGO workers and policymakers who are trying to better understand the role of religion in complex sociopolitical contexts. A great deal can be learned methodologically from interviewing professionals in a wide assortment of NGOs, and Flanigan seems to have done well with this important, time-consuming work of interviewing, transcribing, and data coding for her dissertation, on which this book is based.

But good dissertations do not necessarily make good books, and this one contains some poor writing and dismissive generalizations. But beyond that, as a seminary professor I was disappointed that the author didn't probe more deeply the nuances of interviewees' faith beliefs. Flanigan notes that she herself is not a person of faith, but while a secular stance may have helped in some aspects of the interviewing process, it also likely inhibited how far she could probe in her conversations. Not surprisingly, in her final chapter she recommends strengthening secular NGOs in countries that have a history of religious violence, but having failed to fully understand the role of her interviewees' faith, she lacks the data to



make that case. I am not at all convinced that secular NGOs can necessarily do a better job than faith-based ones in places that have experienced ethnic or religious violence.

Flanigan concludes her book by noting that "fair and balanced restrictions on proselytization" should be created but that freedom to change one's religious beliefs is also something that must be preserved. In light of this most valid concern, I found it curious that Flanigan mentioned the Red Cross Code of Conduct, which sets important limits on faith-based NGOs' work, in only one sentence. I know that most NGOs strive to follow this code very carefully, but she does not explain how it might be strengthened or changed in order to further protect persons from being denied "services" by faith-based NGOs.

This book represents some good dissertation research on a very important and timely topic and does so in about 150 pages—a remarkable feat in itself for a book that tries to tell the story of three different countries. In spite of my disappointment with the book as a whole, I do believe that NGO leaders especially will find the final chapter of the book worth reviewing. The bibliography could also point to some useful sources for further reading. ■

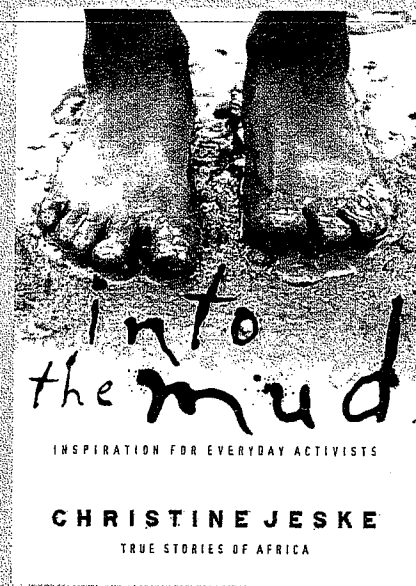
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INTO THE MUD

By Christine Jeske
Moody Publishers

Reviewed by James Thomas

Africa is a magazine ad for a child support program. Young brown eyes pleading for help. Africa is a film about an American swept up in events beyond his



comprehension as warlords battle with machine guns and machetes for power or diamonds. Africa is a place that American church youth groups fix a bit at a time in two-week visits.

Africa is a cliché. It stands for brokenness and hopelessness. It allows us to feel generous and strong as we write a check.

But Christine Jeske won't let us live in that clichéd two-dimensional world. She introduces us to 11 Africans, one at a time. In *Into the Mud: Inspiration for Everyday Activists*, she tells stories of how each person touched her life while she was living in South Africa. In those stories, she gives them and us an invaluable gift—their humanity.

Meet Madondo, for example. One day when his wife complained that they had no food for the table, he said: "You say we have run out of food and money. I say we have run out of faith." In obedience to him, though perhaps also with a hint of mockery, she cleaned the house, set the table, and prepared the ground for a cook fire—though they also lacked wood. In the meantime, Madondo went to neighbors, asking for food. When he came home, he found a Zulu pastor who had felt called by God to give this

family money for food, not just once but monthly.

With food to sustain him, Madondo sought out agricultural extension workers and a nearby university to come to his village to teach him and his neighbors how to increase the yield of corn from their fields. Over time they saw it increase sevenfold.

With food on his table, he was still poor. Some would say to him, "If you are poor, you are not with Jesus, because Jesus would make you rich." Madondo would answer, "Just because someone is blessed with wealth doesn't mean he is blessed in his heart. God is not thinking like us—he does things his own way. In those years when I had nothing, I realized this: God was training me to not just follow the blessings of God but to follow God. To know Jesus—that's a blessing!"

Madondo has taught me something about faith and abundance. I want to sit at his feet or work next to him in his field and learn more. And Jeske has helped me to better understand holistic ministry. Her stories encourage me with small miracles, but they also confound me with paradoxes and unanswered questions just as life does. This refusal to settle for easy answers and clichés, to walk into the mud, sets this book apart from scores of others on Africa.

Jeske also holds back from sweeping conclusions and prescriptions for what we should all be doing. She lets the details of the stories seep into our lives and speak to us with their own voices. For some, this will be frustrating. This book is not for those seeking answers. But for those seeking to transcend clichés, and even to be changed by the remarkable stories of ordinary people, this book is one to read and to discuss with others. ■

James Thomas is an associate professor of epidemiology and director of the public health ethics program at the University of North Carolina. He is also the founder and president of Africa Rising (AfricaRising.org).