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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ RELIGION

God's Prosperity

Michaela Cooke
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In *God's Prosperity*, Michaela Cooke seeks to augment readers' understanding of what God's provision looks like and how to attain it. While like-minded readers will agree with some of the author's interpretations, her many bold assertions and her failure to establish her own credibility will challenge even the most devoted reader.

The book contains thirty-one short chapters, with some chapters continuing themes of earlier ones (for example, "The Rocky Heart I" and "The Rocky Heart II"). Cooke quotes very frequently from the King James Version of the Bible, making it clear that she knows and values it. She does not have any theological degrees or specific qualifications, but readers will recognize her earnestness immediately. Cooke even grants the Holy Spirit an author credit on the cover, designating herself as the "fashioner" of the book.

God's Prosperity is fraught with overemphasis. Cook uses capital letters, quotation marks, boldface, italics, and underlining as means of emphasis, and she often uses two or three of these methods at once. As a result, the book feels a bit heavy-handed. Cooke also uses slightly inconsistent formatting of scripture references (usually in the style of "Isaiah 53" but sometimes "Isaiah Ch. 53"). These references are always in bold, which can be a bit distracting within the text of a paragraph. Cooke's writing is sometimes wordy, but her use of everyday language will ensure that her meaning is always clear.

Many Christian readers will find it easy to agree with the initial assertions Cooke presents—for example, that tithing is important and that it's important to live out the fruits of the spirit. But at other times, Cooke boldly confronts issues in a way that seems to run counter to the beliefs of many, if not most, Christians: "According to the clergy of today's churches, the Gentile believers of the New Testament are not required to do the Mosaic Law. Galatians Ch. 3 is the main scripture used to support this teaching. You need to know, the way the ministers have presented this Chapter to Jesus' [*sic*] people is grossly wrong [in the book, "grossly wrong" is boldfaced, italicized, and underlined]. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are extremely upset with this misunderstanding of Galatians Ch. 3."

Boldness in speaking the truth is certainly an admirable quality, but skeptical readers may feel that Cooke hides behind "the Holy Spirit wrote this" as a defense. The main issues are not what she says or how she says it, but that she fails to establish her credibility and earn readers' trust before making controversial statements. Controversy is always divisive, but Cooke's approach magnifies conflict.

While it is a heartfelt book that could very well have been fueled by the Holy Spirit, *God's Prosperity* will likely push away more readers than it pulls in.

MELISSA WUSKE (June 4, 2013)

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