



Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister

Edith L. Blumhofer

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One of the most influential and dynamic evangelists of the twentieth century, Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) was a complex, controversial figure with a flair for the dramatic. Against the backdrop of the Roaring Twenties, Sister Aimee, as she was widely known, cultivated her ministry, preaching the "old-time religion" and calling for a return to simple biblical Christianity. A religious leader who strongly identified with ordinary folk, McPherson attracted thousands of fiercely loyal followers throughout the United States and Canada.

Edith Blumhofer's thorough biography is grounded in extensive research and academic scholarship. The book offers unique insights into McPherson's Canadian and Salvation Army roots and her relationship with Pentecostalism. Significantly, Blumhofer had access to selected minutes of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, a resource not available to previous biographers, and contact with both of McPherson's children, Roberta Semple Salter and Rolf McPherson. Dozens of photographs also help to illustrate McPherson's multiple roles as missionary, radio broadcaster, editor, mother, wife, and--above all--colorful and inspiring evangelist.

Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister Details

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Susie Meister says

Blumhofer says ASM changed the way American religion is practiced through old-time faith, show biz sensibilities, marketing savvy, and Americanism and she became the personification of the old-time religion by transforming creed into entertainment. She blurred the boundaries of the sacred and the profane. Like Moody did with the media (described by Evenson), Aimee partnered with local politicians, businessmen, and movie execs to gain power. She also adopted their marketing strategies of a simple message, catchy opening, exuding sincerity, and repetition. Her audience was largely women, though she wooed men in the 1930s with her new glamorous image. Among her political positions was strong anti-evolutionism. Blumhofer argues that sexuality was a subtext to her work. Like other evangelicals, Aimee employed drama and the latest technology to market herself and her message. She considered herself God's publicity agent. 1 in 50 Americans attended her meetings. Her critics saw her message as superficial and only containing entertainment value, but she transformed pentecostalism by finding new ways to engage the old-time religion with American culture. She inspired pentecostals to rethink their mission to include patriotism and militarism in the name of God.

Megan says

I read this book because all I really knew about Sister Aimee was from the Pete Seeger song. He mocks her disappearance in 1926 as an excuse to meet her lover at a local resort. It's a really fun song.

Turns out her disappearance is a mystery that will probably never be solved, sorry Pete.

Aimee was an evangelist. She traveled the country for years focusing her ministry around the baptism of the Holy Spirit and healing prayer. In the 1920's she found the Foursquare Church here in LA and built the Angelus Temple, now home of the Dream Center.

While I enjoyed learning about Aimee's life the book never really cracked her open as a person, but held her at arms length focusing on what she did, not who she was. It left me feeling a little put off, though respectful of how she ran her race to the end despite many critics.

Jared says

McPherson was a very interesting person. This book was a good account of her life. The writing at times seemed hard to track with and lacked a steady theme throughout the book, but the content was quite interesting. Hard not to be with the life that was lived!

Matthew Shaw says

Sister Aimee was perhaps the prototypical televangelist. She glamorized her version of Christianity, and her disappearance became a paradigm for the scandal that continues to plague the world of gimmicky, TV "Christianity."

Jeff says

Very interesting biography that was hard to put down. As my grandmother was first introduced to Pentecostalism through a MacPherson crusade in Montreal in 1920, I was very interested to read about this influential figure, not just regarding North American Christendom, but with regards to my family. The author deals frankly with the controversies in Sister's ministry without sensationalizing. Being a Canadian, I was intrigued at how the author often referred to Aimee's Canadian upbringing to explain different facets of her life and ministry. By half way through the book I was getting frustrated that the author would outline in detail Sister's travels and crusades, but spent very little time on her actual message. That was rectified quite nicely in the last half of the book. I was also intrigued to read about how well-rounded MacPherson's ministry was, especially in the 1930's when she embarked on many ministries to the poor. The book went beyond the caricature to examine the real person and ministry without being a puff piece. Highly recommended. (also a great overview of the celebrity culture in the US in the 1920's and where Aimee fit into it all)
