Book Review

Father Damien...

“A Bit of Taro, A Piece of Fish, and A Glass of Water”

Anwei Skinsnes Law and Henry G Law

Published by the IDEA Center for the Voices of Humanity

This excellent book is most timely, coming as the Vatican prepares for the canonisation of Father Damien in October 2009. It is an invaluable and unique contribution to our better understanding of Damien the man. It brings us much closer than any previous biography to the reality of his life and those of the people he worked and ultimately died for. The story of Damien has been told and retold many times but this book uniquely and so vitally includes the voices and personal accounts of those who were most affected by his presence and who worked alongside him on the remote Kalaupapa peninsula in Hawaii.

People affected by leprosy have so often been cruelly and unjustifiably banished and separated from their communities and it is not surprising therefore that their voices have largely been absent from written history. This book goes a long way to redressing this injustice by ensuring that their words and their personal recollections can also illuminate the life and work of the simple Belgian priest who, 120 years after his death, still stands as a reminder of the need for compassion and justice in our society.

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Henry is the former National Park Superintendent of Kalaupapa National Historical Park.

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