St Augustine said ‘Hope has two beautiful daughters: Anger, at the way things are, and Courage, to work for change.’ Tim Costello embodies the holy anger and bold courage that Augustine implied spring from hope. Costello has worked tirelessly as a lawyer, Baptist pastor, activist, advocate for the marginalised in Australia and around the world, and World Vision CEO. Along the way he has collected inspiring stories of saints and strugglers, compassionate leaders and heroic aid workers, justice-minded pop stars and quietly serving grandmothers.

Hope is Costello’s answer to a society that seems to be only increasing in antagonism, loneliness and hopelessness. He tells stories that are not blind to evil, but that foster hope to challenge evil and some of the biggest dilemmas and injustices facing the world. There is also wisdom here for adventurous young people setting out on their careers, the elderly and their families facing death, and spiritual seekers reflecting on the mystery of life. A highlight for me was the reminder of what we can learn from the riches of community in other cultural contexts.

Costello comments people often tell him they admire him for his work in poverty and disaster-stricken areas. He knows firsthand the helplessness when faced with desperation in the eyes of parents who want to simply provide for their children but cannot. But he also knows that development is not just about us saying we have the wealth and we will help those in economic poverty. We have much we can learn from so-called ‘developing’ contexts. Our homes may be orderly, large and well-stocked with food, but our neighbourhoods are often devoid of the laughter, community and solidarity found in slums and squatter settlements. We have our own problems with depression, drug abuse and destructive behaviours. Poor overseas communities often have a strength of community connection that helps reduce those problems. Affluence and oversupply, careerism and obsession with security brings another kind of poverty to us in the West that Costello invites his readers to move beyond. He comments, ‘I hear song and dance and respect for land and tribe. I see children kicking a Coke bottle and having as much joy as our kids with all their gadgets’ (p.55). And reading about the feasts of merit in Nagaland and the ways they affirm community sharing is worth the cost of the book alone.

People love a good story, and there are dozens of hopeful stories and reflections here to warm the heart and inspire action for a better world. Costello’s work and writing help bridge the gap between the church and the world, between faith and indifference, between those who want the church to make a difference and those who are sceptical it can. Hope is on my Christmas gift list – an ideal gift for those who are struggling to make a difference or those looking for inspiration to make a start.

This review was originally published in Equip (September 2012).