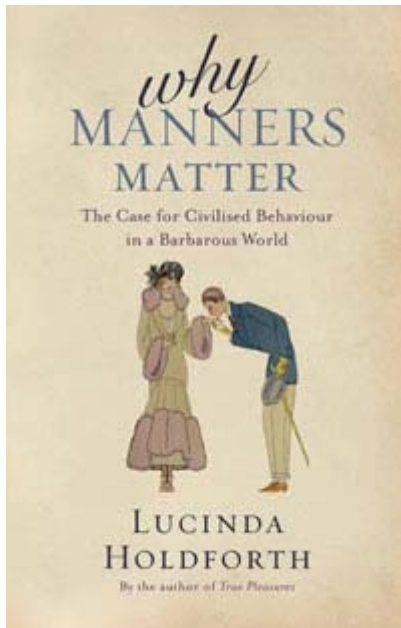


## BOOK REVIEW

**Lucinda Holdforth, *Why Manners Matter: The Case for Civilized Behaviour in a Barbarous World* (Random House, 2007).**



“Manners maketh the man,” said William of Wykeham, and American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson reflected that “Good manners are made up of petty sacrifices.” But few aphorisms are less likely to appeal to the modern mind, says Lucinda Holdforth in her book, *Why Manners Matter: The Case for Civilized Behaviour in a Barbarous World* (Random House, 2007).

Why, then, write a book on manners? Holdforth, a Sydney-based speechwriter, is convinced that civility protects human rights and freedoms, saves us from over-legislation, strengthens community, and “adorns our individual humanity.” In short, manners are essential to civilization.

This is not a book that pines after 19<sup>th</sup>-century sensibilities, nor a manual on etiquette. It’s a perceptive commentary on how we live, a conversation on ideas, and a plea for neighbourly respect and common sense. The author argues that personal civility matters because (to grab a few of her key ideas):

- we are social animals who must cooperate to survive;
- manners are more important than laws, less invasive than morals, and better than social confusion;
- manners nurture equality, modify self-esteem, and express our civic values;
- sovereignty demands self-sovereignty;
- manners resolve the tension between order and freedom, liberty and stability;
- manners express authenticity, goodness and progress in human community;
- corporations are not civilizing institutions; and
- manners give us dignity, improve communication, prevent premature intimacy, reveal our humanity, and render life beautiful.

By our modest mannerly contributions, our little “petty sacrifices,” we combine to make something bigger and ultimately more significant – a civil society. And a civil society is an excellent environment in which Christians and Christian values may flourish.

*Why Manners Matter* is witty and timely, profound and practical, forceful and charming. As the publisher’s blurb notes, it “will ensure you never take courtesy for granted again.” I respectfully suggest you go out and get two copies: one for yourself and the other for someone you know who disdains manners – or who lives among people who do.

*Rev Rod Benson is Director of the Centre for Christian Ethics at Morling College, Sydney. You can respond to this column and read previous columns at <http://speaking-ethically.blogspot.com/>*