

Exploring faith in Ireland

THE 2016 census of the population of the Republic of Ireland reveals the extraordinary extent to which a previously homogenous society has become pluralist and diverse. While 78 per cent of the people identify as Roman Catholic, there are rapidly increasing numbers of Orthodox, Muslims, Hindus as well as more than half-a-million who state "no religion". In this context an ordained priest of the Church of Ireland, Suzanne Cousins, has written a most significant analysis focused upon how the Anglican Church of Ireland might engage with the rapidly growing Muslim population.

The book is entitled **Generous Love in Multi-Faith Ireland**, subtitled "Towards Mature Citizenship and a Positive Pedagogy for the Church of Ireland in Local Christian-Muslim Mission and Engagement" (Church of Ireland Publishing, £5, number 8 in the Braemar Studies series).

There are 122,612 people identifying as Church of Ireland in the Republic and 260,000 in Northern Ireland; there are 62,032 people in the Muslim population in the Republic and perhaps

Book review by Fergus O'Ferrall



more than 15,000 Muslims in Northern Ireland. The rate of growth in the Muslim population has led to the prediction that by the 2040s the Muslim faith will number only second to the Roman Catholic faith in Ireland. This book, while very pertinent in Ireland, may be read with great profit by Christian denominations in the United Kingdom as a case study of how relationships might be fruitfully pursued with non-Christian faiths.

This book, the result of a thesis in fulfilment of a Mas-

ter's Degree in theology at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and Trinity College, Dublin, is firmly grounded in the literature and experiences both in Ireland and in the United Kingdom. While it stills reads very much like a thesis, that should not stop anyone absorbing this relatively short book to explore what is one of the most urgent issues we face both locally and globally: how do Christians pursue mission and engage effectively and fruitfully with other faiths in our rapidly changing societies?

Narratives

The author challenges us to consider our "narratives of non-love": she writes, "Underlying the book is my conviction that mature citizenship involves, not silent assent to the social status quo and to the dominant narratives of fear and social fragmentation, but critiquing and challenging them in a non-violent manner. This involves speaking and practising counter-cultural narratives and actions, as did Jesus." She explores in her qualitative research with Anglicans

and Muslims the barriers to meaningful engagement at local parish level and how churches should engage with Muslim communities with a commitment to the mission as expressed in the Anglican Five Marks of Mission.

The use of the term "pedagogy" is important as she argues for a critical approach to be developed which enables personal growth in understanding, compassion and action: a good pedagogy, she observes, is informative and formative, and leaves learners excited about working for peace. Transformation, then, is the vision behind such a pedagogical approach at local level.

Her book is an excellent introduction to the best that has been written about inter-faith relationships. Cousins draws upon "Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue" produced by the Anglican Communion Network for Inter-faith Concerns and published in 2008 and other works such as the London-focused pedagogy, "Living With Other Faiths: A Presence and Engagement Resource", written by Jonathan Evens (The Centre for Theology and Com-



munity, London, 2013.) She is well versed in the theological explorations of major theologians, such as Jorgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, Paul Ricoeur, Janet Soskice and David Ford, in respect of the issues which arise in inter-faith encounters. This, with her extensive bibliography and valuable appendices, adds greatly to the value of the book which might otherwise be seen as just of local Irish application.

Throughout the author is concerned to bring inter-faith theologies and practice (which she calls praxis) at parish or local level together and how contextualised resources may be developed.

She concludes with an outline of 26 points or recommendations which set an excellent agenda for those considering how sectarianism and indeed violence might be confronted based on a Christian theology of generous love.

How successful we are as Churches in tackling this key agenda will determine the extent of human flourishing in multi-faith societies and whether we prove faithful to the inclusive love of neighbour to which disciples of Jesus Christ are called.

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Enhancing effective evangelism

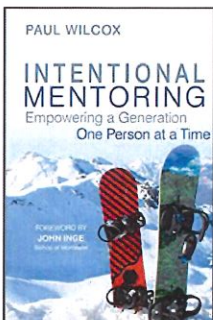
AUTHOR Paul Wilcox is on the leadership team at All Saints, Worcester, as well as hosting Chapel House Ministries. However, his passion is "mentoring" and each page of **Intentional Mentoring: Empowering a Generation One Person at a Time** (Instant Apostle, £8.99) confirms his enthusiasm and desire to see this ministry as significant for the contemporary Church.

The author utilises Leighton Ford's definition of mentoring which is quoted: "Mentoring is an intentional, dynamic relationship of trust, in which one person, the mentor, enables the other, the mentee, to maximise the grace of God in their life-service, by sharing their God-given experience, giftings and abilities."

There will be many different types of books about mentoring. Some will spend time with insights from the field of education and the psychology of learning. Some will focus on more specialised tasks such as mentoring worship leaders or preachers or pastoral visitors. This is not the emphasis here.

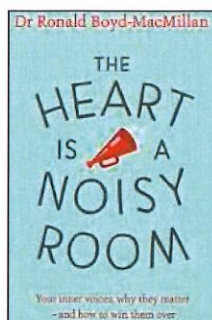
The emphasis here is on the spiritual component of mentoring that is in the au-

Book review by Maurice Stafford



thor's view essential. So, for instance, the author writes: "I am speaking here about the need for the mentor to grow in maturity in the things of God and then be willing to impart what he has learned, wisely, into the life of the Mentee." So, the activity of walking with God, living in the presence of God and prayer are vital.

Later the author declares, "in the mentoring process Jesus Christ has to be central. If the focus goes off him and his words we shall fail". So, in the chapters that follow we do cover reflection, prayer,



discernment, asking good questions, listening, expectations and contracts, action planning, affirmation, encouragement, challenge and empowerment, all against a backdrop of one relationship with God.

Mentoring

This seems to me to overlap considerably with spiritual direction, which does not get a mention at all. The key in mentoring is fostering a quality relationship with God through Jesus. It is these intentional relationships that

will enhance effective evangelism. The problem is the lukewarm nature of much Christian discipleship and intentional mentoring will move discipleship to a better faithful place. Finally, the author asks the question of what a church community, which has an environment conducive to mentoring, might look like.

I was a little put off by the first five pages of the book that comprise of 21 testimonials. It seemed a little over the top to me. Also the bibliography is uneven. Books mentioned and endorsed in the text (such as the work of David Mallinson) and footnotes do not appear in the bibliography at all.

The author of **The Heart is a Noisy Room; Your Inner Voices, Why They Matter and How to Win Them Over** (Hodder and Stoughton, £14.99), is director of strategic research for Open Doors International that works with persecuted Christians through-out the world. But the book is not about that important work. Instead, Ronald Boyce-MacMillan focuses on those "inner voices" (don't worry we are not talking about mental illness here), ordinary voices we all recog-

nise. Perhaps they say, "I am hopeless, I could never do that", or "I must succeed at all costs". These voices must be recognised and realigned. This is a refreshingly enjoyable book to read, which I suspect has been a long time in gestation. It is a bit unusual and I cannot recall reading or reviewing a book on a similar subject.

Embracing

The author carefully introduces his subject. A voice is a "persistent powerful message from yourself to yourself that prevents you from embracing your true self". Then he moves on to describe the voices that come to us and speak to us. Later chapters develop things further; how the voices can renew us, how we can talk back to the voices, befriend the voices, shrink the voices, ask God to share the burden that the voice can be. Then there is a chapter on creating a community of contradiction, a network of Christian friends who will help us not merely to surrender to the voice. It recognises that often the church is not much help here since it is a community of conformity.

Finally, there is a chapter

on the voices in contemporary society that undermine and take us away from what God is saying to us. Here the author draws on his understanding of the world which travelling on behalf of Open Doors International has given him

The book is refreshingly free of technical jargon and citations from other authors. However, I wonder whether the author might have researched links with other approaches. For instance, the Enneagram typologies are nine ways in which a persistent voice prevails. So, Type 3s must succeed, Type 8s must be in charge and Type 9s must at all costs keep the peace and so on. These too are voices that dominate behaviour and life choices if we let them. I wonder if in Transactional Analysis also there are insights into these voices that require us to act in persistent and preferred ways.

At the close of the book we are challenged to not settle for Babel, the plethora of voices making havoc but instead Pentecost. We need to listen to the voices within and the voices of "the others" so we can engage with them. The Rev Maurice Stafford is a minister in the West Norfolk circuit.