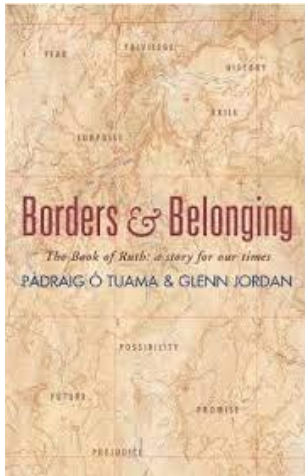


## Padraig O Tuama & Glenn Jordan: Borders and Belonging



At first sight, this short book seems to set itself an odd brief: it is a synopsis of some research undertaken to see if there is anything in the biblical book of 'Ruth' that can speak to the hostilities caused by the Brexit debate and its on-going consequences.

The authors, O Tuama and Jordan, as well as being accomplished theologians, both have vast experience of reconciliation and peace-making at the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, which has for many decades encouraged people of deep animosity and visceral mistrust to engage meaningfully and generously with each other. Apart from its internal tensions,

Northern Ireland has, of course, a unique role in UK border issues and increasingly so as Brexit is unfurled. So, this book comes with something important to say.

'Ruth', they explain, is a book that critiques much of the biblical narrative in that it posits the daughter of a sworn enemy – a Moabite – as the saviour of Israel – the one through whom their greatest king (David) would be born. They point out with clarity and commendable brevity the cultural challenges of the book and the shocking ways in which prejudices – against foreigners and against women - have poisoned the People of God and almost prevented the will of God from being enacted.

O Tuama and Jordan worked over a period of months with groups on all sides of the Brexit debate, engaging them in an examination of their own history – in all its shame and glory – and getting people to examine their fears.

Through a study of 'Ruth' the groups were encouraged to consider the limitations of stereotypes and reductive binary arguments that fill the public square and to think creatively about how the '*chesed*' – the loving kindness of God – might best be allowed to flourish.

The groups were challenged to do more than simply tolerate each other; rather the task was to act with courage and to discover the "practice of generosity in the face of manipulation".

The book ends with a section of questions for each chapter and – just as importantly – a prayer.

The oddness of the book is partly that nobody much – certainly not the mainstream media – is talking about Brexit. It seems like yesterday's news. And yet, as economic and political narratives are contorted in ever less plausible ways to stretch across the inelegant compromises, it seems the job isn't quite as 'done' as it is usually claimed. This book is short. Its message is nuanced and long-term. Quick doesn't fix and easy never does it. Relationships with people with whom we disagree are necessary; and for that there needs to be much honesty, self-examination and repentance.