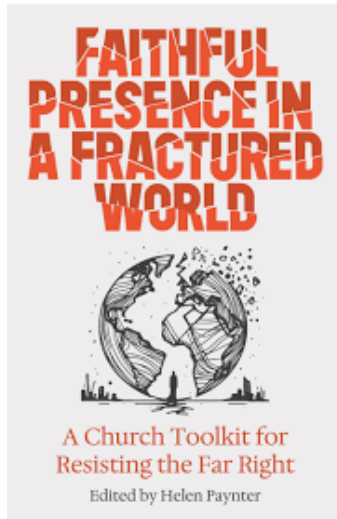




Faithful Presence in a Fractured World

Helen Paynter (editor)

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The sub-title of this book describes it as a “Toolkit for Resisting the Far Right.” In fact, its focus is the urgent issue of countering the appropriation of the language and symbols of the Christian faith for political purposes and the use of Christianity as a cloak for ideologies that are actually divisive and unchristian.

Early in the book the editor Helen Paynter who is Director at the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence and Tutor in Old Testament Studies at Bristol Baptist College quotes part of a speech given by Bishop Cei Dewar (who serves as a missionary bishop for the “Confessing Anglican Church” although not part of the mainstream Church of England or the global Anglican Communion) at a big rally in Trafalgar Square in 2024. He is quoted as saying “This nation of ours is under (religious) attack. We (Christians) are at war not just with Muslims but with woke ideology...”. She also quotes from a leader of Destiny Church New Zealand at a big Tommy Robinson “Unite the Kingdom” rally in 2025... “This is a religious war. It’s Christianity against the rest..., Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism... whatever else you’re into... all false religions...ban any type of public expression in our Christian nations from other religions.”

These are given as examples of what the book recognises as the insidious and dangerous appropriation of the Christian faith for political purposes and the use of Christianity as a cloak for divisive ideologies.

Following a concise, balanced, theologically grounded setting out of sound Christian principles Helen Paynter has assembled 32 relatively brief but concise contributions from people with practical experience and expertise in this area. Each offers practical guidance for church leaders and, by extension, congregations, of ways of resisting and countering or preventing this problem wherever they are.

These contributions range widely across various known or likely experiential aspects of the issue.

For example, there is guidance on various aspects of “promoting inter cultural understanding and “hearts of compassion”, “cultivating understanding of our own faith and that of others”. There are contributions on “learning about racism from black and brown perspectives”, on how to spot “signs of radicalisation in your own team” and about “speaking publicly (with other faiths) about Jesus with discernment and confidence”. There are contributions about “reaching out to asylum seekers in your community” and a section of helpful and thoughtful contributions on ways of tackling the factors that promote resentment (compassion is not a zero-sum game)”. There is a contribution on “building spaces for honest conversations” and one on “knowing when to refuse venue hire.”

Overall, the tone of the 32 contributions and the whole book is balanced and practical. It is theologically grounded if not in extensive depth.

Whether for any church the issue feels close to home and directly experienced or perhaps not, the issue is seemingly present and real, one that is not, as the book recognises, in reality very far from any church or Christian presence in society and community.

For any church, the contents or even just the subject and intentions of this timely and purposeful book should offer food for thought and at least a useful and pertinent conversation-starter.

Peter Wright