

Abstract

The Republic of Ireland has changed as a society in recent years. Ever since the inception of the Free State in 1922, it was monocultural and influenced greatly by the Roman Catholic Church. However, nowadays the Republic of Ireland is a very diverse, pluralist society. There are people from a variety of nations and languages living within its border and religious pluralism is also a reality. This dissertation examines the role of an exclusivist presentation of the gospel in 21st Century Republic of Ireland. It will examine the implications of Christian exclusivism for both the collective Church and society in Ireland. The work will involve both a study of the area of theology of religions and an analysis of sociological changes in the last 25 years. Primarily, this dissertation is theological in nature although it pays great attention to the biblical texts and the pastoral outworking of such an important issue. Does the collective Church in the Republic of Ireland have a consistent approach to this issue?

Chapter one introduces the topic along with some background to the context. It considers the primary positions held by people and organisations in relation to theology of religions. A literature review is completed in chapters two and three to enable more understanding of these positions as well as understanding the process of secularisation that has taken place in the state. Books, journal articles and websites are explored. How the message of the uniqueness of Christ can be presented authentically is an issue as is the role of interfaith dialogue. Chapter three considers the role of the Roman Catholic Church and its relationship to the State both historically and at present, as well as the role of the other churches. Once this review of literature is finished, some Scriptural passages are examined in chapter four and various commentators are analysed as to how they

interpret the meaning of the passages in relation to theology of religions. The theology of the Church of Ireland is considered through its formularies. In chapter 5, primary data collected from questionnaires and from personal interviews is extrapolated to understand the different viewpoints among the Republic of Ireland population towards Christian exclusivism.

Once this data has been analysed, conclusions will be drawn up as to what people think the role of an exclusivist presentation of the gospel has. How should the Church of Ireland respond? Perhaps such a presentation is a relic of a bygone age and not of relevance to a pluralistic society? Or perhaps the collective Christian church in the Republic of Ireland needs to be much more proactive in sharing the gospel message with many people who have arrived on our doorstep?

Key Words

Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism, Mission, Evangelism, Republic of Ireland, Interfaith, Uniqueness