Review for ‘Salt in a Secular Society’ by Jacki Thomas. 2020.

This book is aimed at people wondering how the Christian faith will find its way to continue being a force for love, compassion and care in a society that not only questions the place of faith, but is ambivalent to it as well.

Jacki writes from a place of great experience as a hospice chaplain and shares many thoughtful insights and stories that are characteristically full of passion for chaplaincy as a profession. She draws on her depth of experience to think about translating the way chaplains work with patients, to an understanding of how Christians can be chaplains to society. There is no forceful preaching or conversion tactics to be used, just a sense that people of faith have something valuable to contribute to a stale and lack-lustre society. The church comes in for criticism, hiding behind initiatives and structures that don’t make an impression on the vast majority of people who feel alienated from church practice, or disinclined to pursue their faith due to life experiences.

Chaplains come alongside these people all the time in hospitals, hospices, prisons and other places where the ministry of chaplaincy is rooted in meeting people where they are in their understanding of spirituality. Jacki recognises that many people have rejected the church as a vehicle for comfort and kindness, and draws on her experience of listening to people for whom this is a loss and a sadness. She also makes clear definitions about religion and spirituality, and forcefully makes the argument that they are very different ways of looking at the nature of spiritual care.

Jacki began her thinking, reflecting and writing some years ago, and I am delighted to see the final product in print. Her support and heart for chaplaincy is not dimmed and she remains a champion for our model of working with people for whom faith is an alien creature, yet one to be discovered and valued. I commend ‘Salt in a Secular Society’ to you and am grateful to Jacki for pursuing her aim to add her voice to a way of thinking about faith and belief that needs to heard.

Karen Murphy, December 30th, 2020