



## NORTHERN IRELAND

# God Has Not Finished

Bob Clark, CCMI's European Representative, describes the challenges of literature ministry in Northern Ireland.

John Grier, head of the Evangelical Bookshop in Belfast, Northern Ireland, is optimistic. "A significant development in the last five years," he says, is that "full marketing for Christian products is now available on-line."

"The speed at which I can get stock into my shop [now] enables higher stock-turn. I can keep less inventory," he says. "The publishers' supply of in-store display material has improved ten-fold in the last five years, which in turn improves my window displays and increases foot-fall," says Grier.

## Products for real needs

Another cause for optimism, according to Grier, are better products. "Publishers are progressively connecting with people. Where there is good product, there are excellent

opportunities to be had," he says.

Others agree. Steve Williams, publisher of *Frontier* magazine, wants to raise the standard of public dialogue on religious issues. He seeks to promote an "intelligent approach to Christianity" among Irish Protestants and Catholics. In the same vein, organizations such as the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland are working to rebuild confidence in Christian publishing. It wants publishers to issue books that have relevance to both Catholics and Protestants.

Established Irish teachers and authors, such as Alistair McGrath, Alec Motyer, Trevor Morrow and Phil Roberts, are speaking out for peace in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Rec-

onciliation is the focus of the Warrenpoint Christian Centre for Healing and Forgiveness, whose story was published by Kingsway in Britain.

One concern expressed by a number of publishers is that many Irish evangelical authors publish overseas, notably in Europe and the United States. Their experience and maturity are missed. To issue quality products, Irish publishers must work at author retention and promote their work more effectively.

## Targeted marketing

A major factor in the continuing success of his bookshop, says Grier, is the increased ability to do targeted marketing. "The technology [is] now available and affordable. Use of direct mail-order by customers is growing, as well as e-mail newsletter potential." Grier believes more targeted marketing efforts are necessary, because "Christians are reading less. Pastors and ministers today are not recommending reading material to their flock. The Christian life is seen as experience and feelings, rather than faith and discipline." Grier also blames the decline in

reading on the pressures of society, changes in family structure, and increased workloads.

Grier is concerned that "Bible college students are embracing short-term study courses with hand-outs, not books, and down-loading pages of notes from the Internet." However, a product that has sold well for Grier is Baker Book House's series of reference books featuring Calvin, Spurgeon and Owen. The books include searchable CDs.

## The future

With the recent economic developments throughout Europe, both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have attracted business investments from European and U.S. companies.

In addition, churches are growing as courses such as *Alpha* and *The Road to Emmaus* meet Catholic and Protestant needs. God has been at work in Ireland since Saint Patrick preached the Gospel there in the fifth century, and He has not finished yet. Grier is confident there are exciting times ahead for Christian publishing in Ireland. ❖

Perhaps the most famous of Irish manuscripts is the *Book of Kells*, magnificently illuminated Gospel produced during the late eighth century. Lavished with sumptuous and extravagant Celtic lettering and illustrations, it depicts the life and works of Jesus Christ. The *Book of Kells* is the best-preserved example of Irish 'majuscule' (Old Latin and Vulgate text) and was the devoted and dedicated work of three scribes and four painters. It resides to this day in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.

Other ancient Irish works include the *Ora Maritima*, written by Festus Rufus Avienus in the sixth century, and the *Annals of Inisfallan*, hand-written between 1092 and 1321, by 39 separate scribes, as well as the fifth-century works of Saint Patrick: *Confession* and *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*. —Bob Clark