

Review

Bob Whorton, *Voices from the Hospice: Staying with Life through Suffering and Waiting*. London: SCM Press, 2015, 160 pp. (Pbk). ISBN: 978-0-3340-5426-9, £16.99.

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This is a book born of many conversations – between a hospice chaplain and his patients, between patients and their families, between the ancient psalmist and modern believers, between the living and those on a journey towards death. All these voices resonate and blend in a rich, unfolding reflection on what it means to travel through necessary suffering along the complex stages of life's final journey.

A train journey is the guiding metaphor: with its familiar and unfamiliar stopping points, its waiting rooms along the way, its inevitable *terminus ad quem*. Slowly, fitfully, but relentlessly, the journey proceeds, enlightened, although not always eased, by the compassion and wisdom of accompanying voices. Along the way, we encounter suffering and fear, dark nights and bright humour, existential struggle and human pain, all gently and lucidly explored as stations where something new of God might be discovered.

To read this book – and it begs to be taken slowly – is to appreciate how far hospice chaplaincy has travelled in its own maturation over the last decades. Bob Whorton has been part of this professional maturation for over ten years, both in his personal ministry as chaplain to Sir Michael Sobell House in Oxford and in his highly valued work as a supervisor of other ministers. He presents no simple prescriptions for what we need to know, or how we ought to pray, or even how we should listen to those making their unique journey. Instead, we meet a model of a reflective practitioner searching his own soul for the courageous truths of faith and experience which begin to name, and perhaps bless, something of the holiness of every human journey.

I enjoyed the spaciousness of this book, the patient sense of expectancy which pervades both the writing style and content, as Whorton explores the unlikely potential of winding paths and uncertain destinations. Vivid and

beautiful metaphors light up each page, all of them drawn from conversations with the many 'voices' who have contributed to such a wonderfully collaborative journey.

If there is an abiding message, it is the encouragement to stay with this journey, most especially when we feel entirely out of control, learning as we go to trust the doubts and inevitable mysteries as so many staging posts along the way.

Who is the book for? We are all on this journey. I will recommend it not only to fellow chaplains, but to students and ministers, patients and family members alike. We shall all be the more human for having joined this conversation.