

BOOK REVIEWS

Befriending Death

Woodward J.

ISBN 0-281-05370-7

SPCK

This excellent book is addressed to the reader who wants to reflect not only on the place and meaning of death but on the issues that loss or change bring. It gives case-studies, exercises and questions for reflection and substantial resources for practical help.

Addressed at times to those caring for the very sick as well as those close to death themselves, the book challenges us to integrate the experience of dying so that it can be part of our living and loving. We are all dying and embracing a range of losses, caught up in the contradictions between life and death before death takes place, "living our dying and dying to live" as we leave people and places and let go. This book helps us to look death again in the face, let go of the future and live more fully now as we take stock of our lives and get in touch with our feelings as we face our journey from this world. This restless process of living, changing and grieving takes us to the heart of our human existence.

Woodward empathises the fact that our own living and dying find meaning in the life, death and resurrection of our Crucified God who is with us so completely. The death of Christ has led millions of people to shape their lives and deaths around the way of the Cross.

Writing your own obituary and preparing your funeral highlights the aspects of your life you want celebrating when you've died and makes it easier for those left behind.

On his deathbed, Plato was asked to summarise his great life's work in one sentence. "Practise dying" was his reply. We are not victims of dying and it does not victimise us; though we can be victims of shallow, distorted attitudes to dying. We die the way we live – most people live their dying as they have lived their lives, always losing and finding, always breaking with the old and establishing the new.

These little dyings may teach us what our death may be like.

Befriending our death connects us to our experiences in life. Dying and death are not separate events – they shape our humanity and make us who we are.

Here's a book to buy and ponder and even enjoy!

Paul Greenwell, Chaplain at St Michael's Hospice, Harrogate.

Caring for Jewish Patients

Dr Joseph Spitzer

ISBN 1-85775-991-5

Radcliffe

In an area of mid Essex which is essentially monocultural, the religious and cultural needs of patients of the other world faiths (a rare occurrence) can cause the multi professional team some anxiety. We don't wish to cause offence and we do wish to "get it right", but we don't offer care to Jewish patients often enough to be sure of ourselves. Dr Spitzer's book therefore is both practical and scholarly. He writes from the point of view of general practice (and orthodoxy) and acknowledges that his text is aimed primarily at the needs of observant or orthodox Jews. Nevertheless there is much here to inform the care of Jewish patients of all levels of observance in a general or specialist healthcare setting. These range from Jewish religious practice and theology, to the history of the Jewish faith, the meaning of *Shabbos*, festivals and fast days and their implications for the patient.

While the background is lively and readable, it is always the practical application which is of most interest to the healthcare professional and Dr Spitzer covers ground such as etiquette, Hebrew names, the Hebrew calendar, diet, modesty and hygiene needs. His chapter 12, entitled "Caring for Jewish Patients at the End of Life" is carefully and sensitively written and helped an outsider understand something of the particular needs a Jewish patient and his or her family might have at such a time, as well as the

necessary rituals to be observed. The chapters at the end of the book on genetic diseases found more frequently in Jewish people were less relevant in a chaplaincy setting and more technical. His summaries at the end of each chapter are helpful, the bibliographies comprehensive and all wrapped round with quotations from Hebrew writings.

One or two questions are left unanswered however. Dr Spitzer states that Jewish law does not insist on the need for patient consent if treatment is judged to be life saving which would clearly be opposed to current medical practice. The book also raised interesting questions about what would clearly be serious implications for a Jewish doctor treating non-Jewish patients (which were possibly outside the remit of this book). Nevertheless this book would make a valuable addition to the shelves of chaplains and other health professionals too.

Reverend Louise Morrissey, chaplain, Farleigh Hospice, Chelmsford, Essex.

The Cost of Certainty: How Religious Conviction Betrays the Human Psyche

Young J.

ISBN 0-232-52580-3

Darton, Longman & Todd

Young begins his study of the psychological and social dynamics of Christian belief by contrasting the Gospels of Conditional and Unconditional Love. He identifies the confusion between these Gospels as originating from the views that God both loves us unconditionally and yet, at the same time, invites us to change, to be transformed through our relationship with God. This, for some Christians, means interpreting God's desire for us to be transformed as a rejection of the people we were before the transformation, thus leading to a Gospel of Conditional Love.

Combining his experience as both family therapist and parish priest, the author speaks of the cost to both individuals and communities of the closing of the Christian Mind: e.g. ideological closure, authoritarianism, resistance to questioning and the worship of the "god of group belonging" within the context of a Christian culture and how these may cause adherents to suppress certain aspects of who they are as persons, e.g. their sexuality or the need to explore

their doubts, in order to avoid being rejected by a Church or sect.

What is particularly refreshing about Young's approach to his subject is that his is neither a negative critique of the ills of an over-institutionalised and hierarchical Christianity nor a liberal onslaught on religious conservatism but an honest appraisal of the consequences of preaching and living a gospel of conditional love. His concluding chapter calls for a Spirituality of Uncertainty which, if embraced, will lead to a truly liberating and mature Christianity.

The hope is that "we may be freed from a dependence on ecclesiastical structures and discover the God of unconditional love to whom Christ witnesses". Although there is an element of repetition regarding the main points of his thesis, the author 'sets out his stall' with a dynamic and well-constructed clarity.

Michael Hickford is Hospital & Community Mental Healthcare Chaplain, NHS Highland, Inverness

Imaging Life After Death

Fischer K.

ISBN 0-281-05717-6

SPCK

In this book Fischer explores belief and understanding of the afterlife through what T S Elliott calls 'hints and guesses'. She brings a clearer understanding of the relationship between the 'here and now' and the 'there and then' by drawing upon a wide variety of sources. Ancient and contemporary religious beliefs, both Christian and non-Christian, together with science, literature, secular psychology and the author's own extensive experience as a psychotherapist are the rich soil from which this fascinating and stimulating book springs.

The book is divided into three sections dealing with the three fundamental questions: What survives death? Do relationships continue beyond death? How does life now relate to life then?

Each section is further divided into five chapters and each chapter ends with a brief Prayer and Reflection on the material covered in that chapter. The chapters themselves are between seven and eleven pages (typically eight) including the single page for Prayer and Reflection. This makes the book useful for

small group study as well as being valuable for the individual interested in furthering their own understanding of this tantalising subject. At the end of the book are sixteen pages of Notes and Further Reading which offer a rich source of information for those wishing to explore this subject more deeply.

In the body of the text Fischer grapples with the tension between the Mystery of the unknown (and unknowable) and the rationalistic materialism of contemporary society using sacred writings, poetry and analogy. She sheds light on that which we currently see "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor 13). *Imaging life After Death* is a must-read for all who embark on the great transition between this life and whatever comes after, or for those who seek to accompany others on the journey. It contains a wealth of imagery and information that is both simple and profound, that goes beyond exclusively western Christian belief to discover vast areas of commonality with other beliefs and faith systems. This makes 'Imaging' an invaluable resource in any societal setting, whether that is in the cultural and religious diversity of the modern British inner-city or the less diverse and mainly traditional Christianity of rural areas.

This book is for anyone trying to fathom the mysterious and perplexing question of the afterlife and for those engaged in care for the dying and bereaved in any setting.

Revd Mike Nevill, Chaplain, St Michael's Hospice, Hereford

Voices in Disability and Spirituality from the Land Down Under: Outback to Outfront

Newell C. and Calder A. Editors

ISBN 0-7890-2608-2

The Haworth Pastoral Press

In an attempt to engage a wider audience, these articles from 'down under', are offered as '*a metaphor of the way that images and experience from a "foreign" land, like the lands or worlds of disability, can become images and metaphors that speak to everyone ...*', challenging the '*dominant understandings of disability in terms of deficit and charity*'.

The '*options of miraculous healing and heroic suffering*', are considered unacceptable and unhelpful for people with disabilities grappling with everyday

life, ignoring that '*God offers grace through a broken body*'. '*Alternative pastoral responses*', based on non-judgmental companionship that listen to and learn from those uniquely placed to speak from the perspective of disability, are required.

Each article rewards careful reading and several benefit from the immediate experience of those who speak first-hand of what it is like to live in a world that disparages perceived imperfection. For example, do advances in the *new world* of genetics and bioethics promote understanding and acceptance of disability or lead to the exploitation of an already vulnerable and excluded group of people?

In a moving personal account, Buddhist Peter Hawkins writes of the unavoidable inter-relatedness of able-bodied/minded and disabled people. We are who we are because of the relationships we have or do not have. Starkly, he writes, '*Death is what we foist on those whom we see as other in relation to ourselves and judge as lesser than ourselves.*' This article and one written from the Jewish perspective make the point that '*... much that is disabling is socially constructed*'.

There is also, a poignant account of how someone with extreme verbal communication problems nonetheless, was able to describe vividly the difficulties of living with a progressive disease and terminal diagnosis.

Speaking from her experience in a school for young people with severe physical disabilities and chronic illness another writer focuses on the dynamic that drives much charitable giving - that those on the receiving end must be seen to be '*both worthy and grateful*'. She argues that this can mask the genuine feelings of sadness and loss that accompany disability, hindering the legitimate expression of these. The article describes how the introduction of a spiritual element in health intervention transformed the life of the school, bringing a new sense of community to staff, pupils and their families.

Personal accounts of exclusion, an advocacy service for people with intellectual difficulties, the provision of education for blind or vision-impaired children, how the Uniting Church in Australia has recognised people with disabilities, all contribute to a gem of a collection of papers that not only confront societal attitudes to disability, but also give expression to a

deeply felt spirituality that those of us involved in healthcare do well to hear.

Iain Telfer, Spiritual & Pastoral Care Team, The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh

The Spiritual Revolution
Heelas, P and Woodward L.
ISBN 1405119586
Blackwell Publishing

This book is the latest in the series 'Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World'. The series aims to present non-technical contributions to contemporary thinking in this area, in such a way as to be of interest both to academics and to the informed general reader.

The authors begin by outlining what Charles Taylor describes as the 'massive subjective turn' of modern culture. This is said to consist in a decisive shift away from a culture of defined roles, obligations, duties, and obedience to an external locus of authority, to a culture in which the authority of the inner life, the individual's inner feelings and experience, are paramount. This 'subjective turn' has become deeply embedded in our culture, and has already resulted in 'mini revolutions', for example in the worlds of health care, education, business management and consumerism. All of these now speak the language of the person centred approach which emphasises the authority of the individual's inner experience, personal development, and perceived quality of life.

But are we living through a *spiritual* revolution? Is the above cultural climate having its effect upon the associational ways in which we express our sense of the sacred? The authors set out to answer this question by embarking on a locality study, the 'Kendal Project'. Within this defined area, they investigate activity in the 'congregational domain' (ie the traditional churches), and in the 'holistic milieu' of alternative spiritualities. Their expectation is that religion, understood as emphasising roles, duties and external authority, will be in decline, and that the holistic milieu, being more in tune with a subjectivist culture, would show growth. Their research confirms that, while the spiritual revolution has not yet taken place, it is certainly underway, and the authors predict that it will take place in the next few decades, with both the churches and the alternative

spiritualities each catering for 3-4% of the population.

This is of necessity a very brief outline of what is a detailed and challenging piece of work. The book has interesting distinctions to make regarding the extent to which different types of Christianity accommodate a subjectivist culture; it explores issues of gender; it presents alternative future scenarios on the basis of alternative readings of current evidence. Nor does it assume that the subjective turn in the culture will sweep all before it; indeed, other modern trends are identified which tend in the direction of a new authoritarian version of the regulated, controlled life.

This is a most enjoyable book, which I would recommend to all who are in ministry or chaplaincy, and who seek a deeper insight into the cultural currents and trends of our time.

Georgina Nelson, Editor

Dancing with Dementia: My story of living positively with dementia
Bryden C.
ISBN 1-84310-332-X (pbk)
Jessica Kingsley Publishers

This is a remarkable book, whose author is living with fronto-temporal dementia. Prior to her diagnosis in 1995, at the age of 46, she had a very responsible job in the office of the Australian Prime Minister and was a single mother with three daughters.

'Dancing with Dementia' is an amazingly articulate and objective account of what it is like to live with the condition and it attempts to dispel any myths that a diagnosis of dementia indicates that life is over. The author is honest about the difficulties which she has faced and describes the part medication has played in controlling her symptoms. Her condition is gradually declining, but the rate has been much less rapid than suggested by her diagnostic tests. This has enabled her to verbalise in some detail, what it feels like to live with dementia and the type of support which is helpful. She has battled against the negative stereotyping of people with dementia, become an active member of the Dementia Advocacy and Support Network, and spoken about dementia at venues around the world.'

The author acknowledges that each person with dementia is an individual and how they function will depend on the person they were before diagnosis. However, she underlines the benefits of maintaining a positive attitude and recognising that although some functions will decline, it is possible to develop new talents. In addition, 'in the face of declining cognition, and an increasingly emotional sensitivity, spirituality can flourish as an important source of identity'. She suggests that Carers can help the person to remain as independent as possible, by complementary support, rather than doing everything for them - hence, 'dancing with dementia'.

Two appendices are included: in the first the author explores her understanding of Christian faith and healing as it applies to her condition; the second gives some helpful answers to commonly asked questions about dementia.

This book should be read by everyone - patient, carer, friend or professional - for it is full of invaluable insights to enhance the lives of those living with the challenges of dementia.

Sheila Nunney, Chaplain, Mental Health and Palliative Care, Norwich

Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening

Lindahl K.

ISBN: 1-901557-90-1

Wild Goose Publications

I remember when I was appointed to the hospice as chaplain the matron was quite clear and up front: "I'm not appointing you because you are ordained, I'm appointing you because I think you are someone our patients could talk to". Since then I've thought on myself as a good listener and regularly reviewed and up-dated my communication skills. This book,

however, takes a key aspect of communication skills to a new level: listening.

In a follow up to *The Sacred Art of Listening* we are encouraged to look deep into ourselves, reflect on the ways in which we listen, and then put it into practice.

We are led through a number of aspects of Listening including: Reflective listening, Contemplative listening, Heart listening, Open Space for listening, Impact of listening, Listening in Groups, and Listening in Conversations. Each section explores the topic in detail and concludes with a number of Practices for readers to consider and experiment with. For example in Contemplative listening we *explore the qualities of silence*, which notes that silence is embedded in listening after all they use the same six letters: S I L E N T - L I S T E N. The practices concluding Contemplative listening include: meditating with music, walking meditation, centring prayer.

This book encourages the reader to look deep into themselves while at the same time being aware of all else that is around us. It encourages us to prepare for listening, to concentrate not so much about the words that we hear but rather the experiences we have as we listen. The book concludes with a section of Frequently Asked Questions relating to each of the chapters which adds reassuring practical answers to sincere questions.

This book is not a weekend read to brush up on communication skills theory, rather it is a thought provoking read that will take time and effort. It is a book that will challenge your understanding of listening, develop your own approach and practice, and integrate it into your daily work and relationships.

David Mitchell, Editor.