

**Defiant Birth**

*Women Who Resist Medical Eugenics*  
Melinda Tankard Reist

- Spinifex Press 2006
- £12.95 Pb 338pp
- ISBN 1 8767 5659 4

Russell T Davies, writer of the current 'Doctor Who' series, may well applaud this book. Discussing the insane cyber controller's vision of eradicating all human weakness and sickness, Doctor Who warns him of the result: 'a metal earth, with metal men and metal thoughts'. Sadly, in the real world, those who believe all weakness should be eradicated are not written off as insane but, in some cases (such as Peter Singer and Julian Savulescu), given chairs in some of the most prestigious universities in the Western world. Equally sadly, those with the voice of reason, such as Melinda Tankard Reist, do not have the influence and power of a Doctor Who, but are a largely unheard, underground movement.

Initially, the title of this book jarred with this comfortable, middle-class reviewer. It contains thirteen narratives by able-bodied women who continued with pregnancies despite diagnoses of disability in the unborn child. Defiant? Surely not. As Teresa Streckfuss, who continued with not one but two pregnancies despite prenatal diagnoses of anencephaly writes: 'It's about love. It's about our babies'. There are five other narratives by disabled women, and one collection of stories from HIV-positive women. They understand that in today's climate, such love is truly defiant because it flies in the face of the insidious process of shaming imperfection that is growing in our society.

Ms Tankard Reist is an Australian researcher and freelance journalist with an interest in bioethics and women's issues. This book does not take a specifically Christian viewpoint, but there is a danger that in this post-modern age, even Christians may become unquestioning and uncritical. If that is you, then read this book. The narratives are preceded by a meticulous, carefully annotated and referenced overview of how current thinking relates to the policies in our hospital and genetics departments today. It paints a terrifying picture. If you are still unconvinced, you need only look at the antipathy and venom with which Ms Tankard Reist is treated by the 'pro-choice' movement on the internet to see that liberalism is not the harmless thing we might have thought.

Can this book make a difference? Medical staff do not come out of it well so maybe it will change your practice. In the afterword, Melinda Tankard Reist writes of her hope that the narratives will give courage to other women. Unfortunately the very lengthy 72 page introduction would be daunting for most and maybe, for her hope to be realised, the book should be published in a more digestible form, with the narratives forming the first part and her excellent introduction and afterword combined in chapters as a second part. This book does, however, deserve to be widely read.

**Karen Palmer** is a staff grade psychiatrist in Glasgow



**A Reason for Hope**

*Gaining strength in your fight against cancer*  
Michael S Barry.

- Life Journey (Kingsway)
- £6.81 Hb 126pp
- ISBN 6 12503 8831

The author is a medical doctor and Christian pastor at an American cancer treatment centre. He is therefore familiar with people's reactions both at diagnosis and during the trials of often long drawn out therapy. For all this, his message is upbeat. God is pro-life and has designed the body for self-healing, from a cut finger through to malignant disease. It is postulated that to give way to fear and pessimism insults the immune system, predisposing to slow decline. Dr Barry cites instances of miraculous healing where the injection of hope, even at an apparently terminal stage, transformed the outlook and cured the disease. 'Every form of cancer known to man has been survived' is the hope offered, backed by reliance on God's ability to heal.

'The diagnosis of cancer is not in itself a death sentence' and though acknowledging that full recovery does not always happen, Dr Barry does not dwell on this. In this, he joins company with so many other authors of books about miraculous healing. Throughout, his emphasis is on the expectation that God can heal even the worst of conditions if we rely on him.

There is no doubt about God's ability to heal, both in New Testament days and today, and we can trustfully commit all sickness to him for his will to be done. However, there is a delicate balance between this and insisting that he obeys our will. His healing is not necessarily what we would call curing, and many sufferers from

advanced cancer have found that he has enabled them to live joyfully and trustfully, whether or not he chooses to remove the disease. The application of palliative care to the whole person can contribute enormously to such an outcome. That it receives little detailed attention here is a sad omission. Unfortunately, sufferers reading

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this book could be left with the impression that failure to recover is somehow their own fault and that there is little more to be done about it.

The last section of the book suggests ideas for self-help in arresting the disease, such as the exercise of forgiveness in overcoming disabling bitterness. Dr Barry's unswerving optimism has doubtless encouraged many of his patients to live hopefully with cancer but it is not clear that he also shares with them a lively hope beyond the grave. It is good for us to be reminded that our own prayerful reliance on the God of hope is something to be shared with our patients. They need to know that he is indeed pro-life – life everlasting.

**Janet Goodall** is an emeritus consultant paediatrician in Stoke on Trent



## Euthanasia. A License to kill?

Anthony M Smith

- Kingsway 2006
- £6.99 Pb 175 pp
- ISBN 1 84291 249 6

The assisted dying debate, fuelled by a succession of Bills put before the House of Lords by Lord Joffe, is not going to go away. It is an issue of huge importance, and has the potential to change the practice of medicine profoundly. Yet the debate is often superficial. Many in our churches, and indeed in medicine, appear uninformed and even confused about the issues.

Anthony Smith's book tackles a wide range of issues relating to assisted dying in a clear and logical way. The arguments for and against euthanasia are detailed, as well as the experience of legalised euthanasia overseas. Physician assisted suicide is given special mention, recognising that this is now the focus of the effort to change the law in the UK. The difference between euthanasia and the withdrawing and withholding of treatment, including food and fluids where appropriate, is clearly and helpfully explained, as are the benefits and potential pitfalls of advance directives. The positive alternative of palliative care, and the current limitations of its provision both in the UK and worldwide are also discussed.

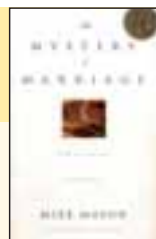
The book is illustrated throughout with patient stories drawn from Dr Smith's long experience as a hospice physician. Wilfred is an elderly man with metastatic cancer whose son asks whether anything can be done to stop him suffering. Cheryl's dad

has Alzheimer's, recently suffered a stroke and now has pneumonia. Should he be treated with antibiotics? The stories that have hit the headlines such as those of Tony Bland, Diane Pretty, Terry Schiavo and Harold Shipman are also described.

Aimed explicitly at the Christian reader, the book considers the biblical viewpoint on euthanasia. It also addresses the wider issues of suffering and hope from a Christian perspective. I found these sections particularly powerful. They encourage us to lift our eyes from the relatively narrow focus of assisted dying up to our loving Lord, who suffered on our behalf and provides strength for today and eternal hope for the future.

This is a concise and helpful book, taking only a couple of hours or so to read. It is accessible for a non-medical readership, but has much to offer health professionals as well, especially those with less experience than Dr Smith of caring for terminally ill patients. The book will equip Christians with a greater understanding of the issues around assisted dying, and enable us to engage more fully in the ongoing debate. It also encourages us to confront the issue of our own mortality both at a practical and spiritual level.

**Claire Hookey** is Medical Director of Douglas MacMillan Hospice, Stoke on Trent



## The Mystery of Marriage

Meditations on the Miracle

Mike Mason

- Multnomah Press 2005
- £6.99 Pb 219pp
- ISBN 1 59052 374 1

This book fully deserves this revised and expanded 20th anniversary edition. I enjoyed reading it for the first time years ago and valued greatly rereading it with another decade of married experience behind me. The author is a Canadian who intended to become a monk but fell in love with and married a doctor. Without doubt, this is one of the best books on Christian marriage and it deserves to be more widely known in the UK.

The book is beautifully written with extended allegorical illustrations. The opening story of hawks soaring over the monastery gives the flavour of the book instantly. Mason looks at predictable issues such as love, intimacy and sex, as well as less well-travelled terrain such as death, brokenness and submission in marriage.

On submission, for example, those looking for endorsement of patriarchy will be sorely disappointed. If men are fortunate enough to be treated like kings at home it is only, in Mason's view, that they 'might better be enabled to become a servant'. He sees no distinction in Paul's words to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22-25 because for Mason, 'to love is to submit and to submit is to love'. Brokenness is viewed as being at the heart of intimacy. What is tough in marriage is what's tough in encountering God – the strain of living in the light of a conscience other than our own. The only way it can be done is in the strength of God's love which overcomes our pettiness and exposes our selfishness.

There are many thought-provoking applications of

Scripture. On 1 Corinthians 7:4, for example, Mason writes: 'In marriage not just the body is given but the heart. One heart is given in exchange for another, and in this mutual proprietorship is found the deepest and most radical expression of intimacy. It might almost be said that love is the total willingness to be owned'.

There are also some superb one-liners. On sex, for example, he believes that for many it is 'the most powerful and moving experience that life has to offer, and more overwhelmingly holy than anything that happens in church'. On the sense of feeling trapped in marriage he suggests, 'When the prison door of love clangs shut, the only thing to do is to become more in love than ever'.

Perhaps one of the reasons this book has not been widely promoted is that we increasingly live in an age of instant 'fix-it' solutions. It does not fit into that mould and is much more of a 'Why?' rather than a 'How?' book on marriage. 'Why?' is however, an increasingly relevant question as the role of marriage is constantly undermined, marriage-rates are falling and many young people, including Christians, opt to live together instead.

I have a cluster of weddings coming up and this book will be among our gifts for each couple. If you need a fresh touch from God upon your marriage, or know others who do, then this book may help.

**Trevor Stammers** is a GP in London and Chairman of the CMF Public Policy Committee