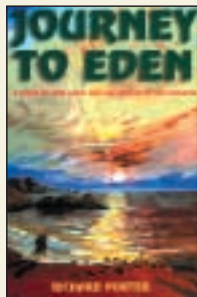


BOOKS

Journey to Eden



Richard Porter
Ambassador Publications
2003
£12.99 Pb 410 pp
ISBN 1 84030 143 0

Why is this gripping tale of Le Carre style espionage spiced with science fiction being

reviewed in *Triple Helix*? The answer is that *Journey to Eden* is a tender story of Christian testimony and also embodies Richard Porter's fascinating hypothesis that reawakens the creation / evolution debate. As a novel it provided one of my most enjoyable (can't put it down) reads. However, the most stimulating aspect is the author's entrepreneurial concept that enlivens the discussion over whether the first few chapters of Genesis are a poetic portrayal of God's creation or are indeed a scientific record.

The fiction is surprisingly realistic with its contemporaneous setting in occupied Iraq. It surrounds a brilliant young Russian-trained Iraqi scientist who develops a satellite-linked 'time probe' which, like H G Wells' time machine, has the potential to see into the recent past and so reveal atrocities of oppressive communist regimes. The plot takes off with the involvement of a young Christian doctor, her geologist husband and both the Russian secret service and the CIA.

Porter goes on to propose that cosmic time, unlike biological time (ie the body clock), has been slowing down since the world was created. He cites over 100 references in support including, for example, the astronomical red shift phenomenon. On this basis he finds it reasonable to propose that the patriarchal fathers of the Old Testament did live for 800 years or more when the Earth was spinning round the Sun more quickly. Equally, as time slowed, it became possible for man to run a 4-minute mile. Records will continue to fall. He says that even carbon dating is susceptible to cosmic time, and asks what basis we have for accepting that time is absolute. From this, he surmises that the world could well be only a few thousand years old.

Professor Porter's considerable lateral thinking ability (known to those who have shared in his clinical research in orthopaedics) combined with his spiritual

depth comes to the fore in this dynamic book. It is more than a scientific allegory; it is a rare combination of scientific thesis and good novel writing. However, like all good theses, it provides more questions than answers and so we still have to accept that 'now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Michael Edgar is a retired consultant orthopaedic surgeon in London

Healing the Culture: a commonsense philosophy of happiness, freedom and the life issues



Robert Spitzer, Robin Bernhoft, Camille De Blasi
Ignatius Press 2000
£8.96 Pb pp347
ISBN 0 89870 786 2

Those with a materialistic and utilitarian outlook have already demeaned

personhood by liberalising life-protecting laws. The writers attribute this to acceptance of the lowest of four possible 'Levels of Happiness'. Although they do not say so, these levels mirror the sequence of conceptual maturation in children.

As with infants, Level 1 offers pleasure through immediate satisfaction. Level 2 is self-centred and competitive, like young children whose inexperience makes them judge by appearances. They squabble over desirable toys, showing how autonomies can conflict when perceived rights exclude responsibilities. Debates about beneficence and non-maleficence conducted at Level 2 are skewed by viewing pain as intolerable, hence promotion of abortion and euthanasia, with no serious regard for alternative but costlier options. Like many in early adolescence, those at Level 3 have ideals beyond self, applying principles (truth, goodness, justice and beauty) which benefit others. Based on supposed 'love', though, the outworking is often materialistic (eg care orders not parentcraft, handouts not hands on). Level 4 brings an eternal perspective to these same principles with God's love inspiring and undergirding their application, thus involving personal self-giving.

It is this common nature, capable of

eventual maturity, which the writers see as defining a person. For 'the tyranny of the majority' that seeks to exclude some as non-persons indicates a culture dominated by minds at Levels 1/2. This affects views (and laws) on personal rights, justice, ethics and the common good. Conceptual growth spurts often follow painful crises. Yet 'suffering well' opens up possibilities of developing Level 3/4 humility, empathy, justice and, sometimes, prayer. Competitiveness becomes creative cooperation, whilst the goal of freedom from pain yields to that of freedom for other-centred love. This brings lasting, not ephemeral, comfort and happiness both to carers and cared for.

Those at Levels 3/4 are urged to teach their perceptions about personhood to the more immature. Theoretically, this should be eye-opening, stimulating other-love and thereby bringing about communal and cultural healing. Yet even with the Lord himself as teacher most hearts, ears and eyes remained closed. He indicated that conversion precedes healing (Matthew 13:15). However convincing the philosophy, therefore, education alone is not enough. Informed heads and repentant hearts can be separated by stiff necks.

Janet Goodall is a retired consultant paediatrician in Staffordshire and former CMF President

Johnny Head-In-Air. Memoirs of a Doctor-Journalist



Ronald Winton
Book House 2002
£10, 110 pp
ISBN 1 74018 221 9

Ron Winton, now in his 90th year, was a distinguished editor of the *Medical Journal of Australia* from 1957 to

1977. This gave him the ideal platform for combining his medical training and his love of literature. Every aspect of his life was under girded by his sturdy Christian faith applied in a host of different ways: for 20 years as warden of a hostel for overseas students in Sydney, as chairman of the ethics committee of the World Medical Association and through extensive support of ICMDA with memorable contributions to *Doctors' Life Support*.

In 1977 Douglas Johnson, first General



Secretary of CMF, invited him to be guest speaker at a dinner for leaders of the medical profession in London, hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. The subject was as timely then as it is now: 'The future of professional freedom'. This address was subsequently published by CMF and could bear re-reading.

The memoirs are typically unpretentious, but will evoke many memories for the older generation of CMF members and for those who knew Ron Winton. His was a life well spent and an example to follow.

Peter Pattison is ICMDA Regional Secretary for Europe and the former USSR

Being Me – what it means to be human



*Pete Moore
Wiley 2003
£16.99 Pb 277pp
ISBN 0 47085 088 4*

'What does it mean to be human?' is a question that has been asked throughout the ages, and definitions are difficult

to find. As Pete Moore recognises, 'Any approach to define who I am is doomed from the outset because we will always be more complex than can be catered for by any single definition. It is however, not intractable to investigation once you have broken the subject down into bite-sized pieces, and have admitted that revealing the nature of one aspect of our existence is not the same as describing humanity.'

With this in mind, he explores nine different aspects of human existence – embodiment, consciousness, genetics, history, relationship, materiality, spirituality, sexuality and society – by telling the stories of people for whom a single aspect is especially relevant. For embodiment we read about Arthur White, the reigning world champion power lifter, whose physical ability has been a defining feature of his life. A very different experience is seen in the story of David Bird, who was born with a vascular anomaly surrounding one of his eyes that has profoundly affected the way others view him, and consequently his own self-perception and personal development. The importance of our history is considered through the

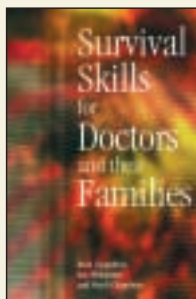
research of David Barker, whose findings show that our health is radically influenced by the diet and environment that our grandmothers experienced whilst pregnant with our mothers.

Some well-known interviewees, such as Rowan Williams and Mary Warnock, are included in the chapter on spirituality. However, it was the stories of everyday people that really drew me in. These provoked consideration of the various environmental, historical and biological factors that have interplayed to make me who I am today, and how changes to any of these might affect my life. It is, perhaps, this kind of reaction that Pete Moore hopes to produce. Modern scientific thought often reduces us to categories that determine who we are, 'there are two branches in particular that are currently making that sort of claim – genetics and neuroscience.' Pete Moore's aim of 'taking a holistic view of our existence' highlights how limited such a view of humanity is.

The content is not specifically Christian, though some of the interviewees express a Christian faith, and it does not detail philosophical arguments on existence. Rather, there are some interesting insights, engaging stories, and useful overviews of current thought – all of which make this an enjoyable and stimulating read.

Jacky Engel is CMF publications and research assistant

Survival Skills for Doctors and their Families



*Ruth Chambers, Kay Mohanna and Steph Chambers
Radcliffe Medical Press
2003
£21.95 Pb 140pp
ISBN 1 85775 990 7*

Ironically, the only way that I could find time to a review this book was to take it on holiday, a holiday already marred by planning uncertainties at my NHS work which were going to affect me as soon as I returned. So I sat on my hotel balcony and in the airport lounge writing this review and felt guilty since taking work on holiday is definitely one activity which the authors do not applaud!

This is a very good book. The authors are

two female academic GPs and a teenage daughter. Their writing is given added weight by being based on survey data and responses. Within an attractively printed paperback, about 100 pages of text are addressed directly to the reader. Both the quotations that are highlighted in text boxes and the well chosen cartoons succeed in breaking up the text, making it a very readable book. The nine chapters cover career-marriage conflict, the team family, stress, surviving time pressures, the importance of listening and talking, taking time off duty, and illness. The final chapter on making a logical plan will appeal to those personalities who like the grid box solution approach to problem solving, but are less useful to intuitives like me.

There is no Christian angle to this book, and in fact the only biblical material is the list of seven deadly sins, curiously unreferenced in an otherwise very well referenced piece of writing. Whilst these are described as strong motivators, the authors clearly do not regard them as desirable ones, although most of them can be observed on a regular basis in the NHS. This book sits very harmoniously alongside biblical teaching, and both Christians and non-Christians will benefit. It is timely since many of us have been forced into a much greater degree of personal reflection about our work and its personal impact as we go through appraisal. In the final chapter the authors state: 'This book is filled with good advice. You will have heard a considerable amount of it before...' They are right, but what makes this book special is the way that knowledge is illustrated and applied.

Who should read it? Any doctor will benefit, but those who need it most are unlikely to choose to read it, at least until they get desperate, have burned out, or their marriages have failed. It would make a superb gift to the newly or recently qualified doctor, which is probably where it will be most effective before attitudes become hardened. It has easily solved the problem of what to give my GP daughter for Christmas! And if I ruled the NHS I would give this book as a free handout to all doctors with their appraisal forms, and then make sure that it was handed on to their literate family members.

Michael Jones is associate specialist, Regional Infectious Diseases Unit, Edinburgh & Director Edinburgh International Health Centre