

**Wired for God?**

*The Biology of Spiritual Experience*  
Charles Foster

- Hodder and Stoughton 2010
- £12.99 Pb 331pp
- ISBN 978 0 34096 442 2

I doubt many CMF members will have read a book quite like this. If, like me, you haven't read other works by Charles Foster, this will be an eye opener. The author is a Christian polymath – barrister, vet, scientist, explorer and writer.

It is one of the most learned yet lively looks on the nature of religious experience that I have read. Vast arrays of scientific papers are made accessible and woven together into a coherent set of themes. Chapters include: 'Religious experience and the origin of religion', 'An introduction to other states of consciousness', 'How psychoactive substances can throw open the doors of perception', 'Near-death and

other out-of-body experiences', 'The holy helix: genetically predestined to believe?' and 'Wholly mad or holy madness?'

Many fascinating case examples of religious experience are examined. Foster takes on top scientists, such as Professor Susan Blackmore, and disputes her dismissal of the self and individual consciousness. The writing style is energetic and full of punchy one-liners. Because of this, the author uses turns of phrase which might occasionally jar with some readers. You might not agree with all in the book but it is a thoroughly good read, and there are some good pictures too.

*Dominic Beer is a consultant psychiatrist in London*



**Empty Arms**

*A mother's journey through grief to hope*  
Keren Baker

- Evangelical Press 2009
- £6.69 Hb 125pp
- ISBN 978 0 85234 704 9

The Bible reminds us to 'comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God'. Keren Baker does this beautifully through this book, which she wrote during the year following the death of her two-year-old daughter Natalie from septicaemia.

While not minimising the heart-wrenching agony of a grieving mother, it is clear that she knows and trusts a good and loving God. Scriptural truth is woven throughout the narrative. She describes frankly the emotional, physical and spiritual effects of Natalie's death, particularly on her other children, and provides sensible and practical

advice on how to navigate the turbulent waters following.

It is short, easy to read, and ideal to offer to somebody struggling with the raw pain and distress that Keren and her family experienced. When my daughter Eva died in 2008, I searched for such a resource. Since its publication, I have given copies to many friends and relatives. All have wept, but all have been helped to understand the goodness of God through such trials and have been greatly encouraged. I highly recommend this book for the bereaved.

*Catriona Waitt is a physician in Liverpool who described her own loss in Triple Helix Summer 2010: 9*



**Cara**

*A hope and a future*  
Rhona J Tolchard

- IVP 2010
- £7.99 Pb 184pp
- ISBN 978 1 84474 430 5

This is the story of a mother's spiritual journey, interwoven with the practical challenges of parenting and accessing support for a severely disabled daughter. It is an honest and painful account of one family's struggles but also a clear testimony of God's grace and care, even in the bleakest times.

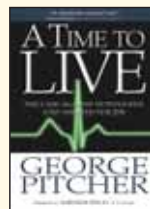
I found myself challenged by the justified anger directed at both individuals and systems that stood in the way of Cara reaching her potential, and with which her family had to battle day after day. Our society's attitudes and actions are laid bare in an account where no profession – medicine, education or social services – comes across

in a universally good light.

The key messages include choosing our words carefully as even throwaway lines can have a profound effect. We are encouraged to offer time and understanding when we have no cure, to avoid imposing our own views of disability, to offer practical support rather than platitudes, and to be advocates for the needs of the vulnerable.

As Christian health professionals we will all, either personally or professionally, look after disabled people and their families. I highly recommend this book for all who would like to do better in standing alongside them.

*Kirsty Saunders is an associate specialist in community paediatrics*



**A Time to Live**

*The case against euthanasia and assisted suicide*  
George Pitcher

- Monarch Books 2010
- £8.99 Pb 158pp
- ISBN 978 1 85424 987 6

The author makes a very strong case against euthanasia and against 'assisted dying' as a route to its legalisation. He starts with his experience of his mother's death and uses accounts of others' experiences effectively. Pitcher tackles social, medical, legal and theological arguments thoughtfully, but so as to make the book interesting and readable. As an Anglican minister and Religious Editor and columnist at the *Daily Telegraph* he writes authoritatively, and is up to date with recent developments such as the UK Director of Public Prosecutions' guidelines.

His central and longest section is concerned with current practice in Oregon, Holland and

Switzerland. He shows clearly the dangers for vulnerable and disabled people, as well as the effect that introducing euthanasia has had on the development of palliative care in these places, compared with that available in the UK.

In his final two chapters Pitcher discusses a theological viewpoint new to me, that of 'open theism'. I found it interesting, but suspect that many may not be able to agree with it. With this proviso, I would recommend the book as a valuable and persuasive addition to the literature against assisted dying and euthanasia.

*Anthony Smith is a retired palliative care physician and surgeon, and a tutor with PRIME*



**Feathers in the dust**  
A hospice doctor's tale  
David Trevelyan

- Authorhouse 2010
- £7.99 Pb 266pp
- ISBN 978 1 45204 387 6

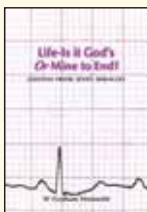
**D**avid Trevelyan is the pen name of a hospice doctor who wrote this novel because 'for too many, what happens in a hospice is cloaked in mystery and misunderstanding'. He tells the story of a young surgeon who takes a temporary post at the local hospice. He is given a lot of information about the hospice movement and is introduced to some newer challenges such as clinical governance and care plan protocols.

Once the scene has been set, the pace quickens. David is challenged by the different ways of working that he encounters, and is increasingly impressed by the behaviour of the staff. He grows in maturity and empathy

for his patients. A large part of the book is taken up with descriptions of a burgeoning love affair and, finally, David has to decide whether or not to return to surgery.

This book's strength lies in the way the author brings to life complex ethical dilemmas surrounding treatment decisions in a simple and engaging style. There are some intriguing insights into the necessity for good communication and the nature and management of pain beyond mere medication. This simple book could help those seeking a brief introduction to the uniqueness of palliative care.

*Rosie Knowles is a part time GP locum in Sheffield*



**Life - Is it God's or Mine to End?**  
Lessons from Seven Miracles  
W Graham Monteith

- Grosvenor House 2010
- £8.00 Pb 124pp
- ISBN 978 1 90765 237 0

**T**he major aim of this short book is to examine the 'value of life' in the light of all the resurrection miracles in the Bible, such as the story of Lazarus, and to ask why they took place. The author concludes these miracles reflect the extremely high value and meaning that God gives to human life.

In the last two chapters, the book addresses the value of human life in the 21st century, where a rise of individualism and control are emphasised. It also examines the question of euthanasia and assisted suicide, where boredom (French *ennui*) and existential suffering (German *angst*) seem to become an excuse

for some to end their lives.

One of the final questions discussed is whether the West is fast becoming a post-biological-family society where only the Christian church can address the important needs of real unconditional love and meaning given by God. The author, who sometimes reflects in his style his long experience as a minister of the Church of Scotland, challenges the churches to continue in their battle of love for God and others – with the help of God. Overall, this is a very readable and topical book.

*Calum MacKellar is Director of Research of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics*



**Audacity to Love**  
The story of Hospice Africa  
Anne Merriman

- The Irish Hospice Foundation 2010
- £11.99 Pb 296pp
- ISBN 978 0 95348 809 4

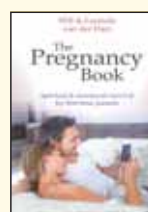
**A**fter years as a missionary in Nigeria and then as a geriatrician in Merseyside, Anne Merriman developed an understanding of palliative and terminal care and took it to relieve cancer sufferers, first in Singapore then in Uganda. The 'audacity' of the title describes her struggles with officialdom before winning approval, first for recognition of this different form of care, and then so that trained hospice team members could prescribe oral morphine in the home.

Hospice Africa was born, modelled on Ugandan practice. A highly respected local physician helped Anne take the concept to other African countries, the ongoing struggle being for

adequate funding. The 'love' linked with 'audacity' is other-centred and self-sacrificial, often wounded, yet always valued by the sufferers it embraces. This reflects the love of Christ that has motivated Anne from childhood and, encouraged always by the hospice team, has shaped her major life work.

Mixing analysis and anecdote, her book should inspire any finding it hard to blend idealism with realism. To establish good relations within and beyond a team, with audacity and love energised by the Spirit of God, is evidently to find a prescription for more than we could ask or think.

*Janet Goodall is a retired paediatrician from Stoke on Trent*



**The Pregnancy Book**  
Will and Lucinda van der Hart

- IVP 2010
- £7.99 Pb 189pp
- ISBN 978 1 84474 440 4

**W**ill van der Hart is an Anglican minister and national speaker of rising repute, and his wife a key partner in this work. The book spans conception to the first year of a first child's life. The van der Harts contextualise each time period biblically, give some practical pointers and vignettes from interviews with Christian parents of very young children, and pose challenging questions to be worked through as a couple. It was somehow written while their daughter was very young, so the issues were fresh in their minds, and there is little waffle.

They are clear that reading this

book will not prepare a couple to become parents, only give a blueprint for working through issues with God. The section on creative use of time with God, rather than expecting regular quiet times to proceed as normal, was very helpful. I would highly recommend this gem to all Christians hoping to become parents, going through pregnancy, or who have an infant already. It would make an ideal gift, even to non-Christians, as this can be a time of surprising spiritual openness.

*Anna Reynolds is a young doctor in Winchester, and she and Mike have recently become parents*