

The plausibility problem

The church and same-sex attraction
Ed Shaw

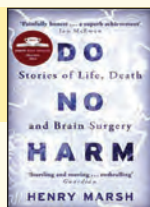
- IVP, 2015, £8.99 Pb 160, ISBN 9781783592067
- Reviewed by **Andrew Sims**, emeritus professor of psychiatry, University of Leeds

A biblically-based, and very personal, account of how a celibate same-sex attracted Christian works out how to lead his life, accepting that God has his hand on every part of it. He aims to live in fellowship with Christ and obedience to the word of God, accepting that he has to miss out on sex and marriage.

The problem with plausibility, he finds, is that most people outside the church and many inside cannot understand or accept his principled position of being exclusively same sex-attracted and yet celibate. He considers that within evangelical churches there are nine 'missteps' that make his position often incomprehensible.

He deals with each of these from a biblical perspective. Throughout he is brave, honest and personal – at times his description of his dilemma is agonising. He writes to help and encourage others who, through their Christian commitment and sexual orientation, may wish to follow the same path. He also writes for himself: to work through what he believes and how he should act.

Many of his 'missteps' give salutary advice to those of us in churches who enjoy the benefits of marriage and family but have little sensitivity for those in his position. He longs for the possibility for friendships, within the church, to become more intimate.



Do no harm

Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery
Henry Thomas Marsh

- Orion Books, 2014, £8.99 Pb 278pp, ISBN 9781780225920
- Reviewed by **B Anthony Bell**, emeritus professor of neurosurgery

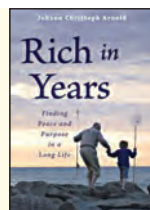
Most of the 25 chapters are dramatised case reports of patients treated in a south west London's neurosurgical unit. If you have no neurological background the clinical descriptions can be intriguing, less so for the neurologically trained, but the literary style makes entertaining reading and the book can be hard to put down.

If the book was about cakes, it has plenty of guidance on ingredients and culinary techniques to bake one, the only thing missing is the reason cakes are made. Marsh observes the central nervous system's exquisite complexity, the tragedy of disease and death, the fears and emotions of human existence, but never delves deeper

to grasp the hope within us.

Hugh Palmer used part of chapter one to illustrate his Easter sermon at All Souls Langham Place. Author Ian McEwan describes the book as 'Painfully honest... a superb achievement'. *The Guardian* reports 'Startling and moving... enthralling', the *Spectator* 'Excellent... hugely compelling', *The Telegraph* 'This is a book about wisdom and experience'. Should you read *Do No Harm*? Can you afford not to?

The Observer should perhaps have the last word 'Well thank God for Henry Marsh... One of the finest admissions to emerge in this phenomenal book is that of every surgeon's dilemma, which is the inability to play God'.



Rich in years

Finding peace and purpose in a long life
Johann Christoph Arnold

- Plough Publishing, 2013 £8.00 Pb 161pp, ISBN 9780874868982
- Reviewed by **Mark Cheesman**, retired consultant geriatrician

This is a good book. It's written from both heart and head, and pastorally explores growing older and dying. It's far from gloomy, with lots of practicalities and some challenges. It's written very much from a Christian standpoint, but people with no faith would find it helpful too. It's not hard going at all, and warmly invites the reader to accept the gift of older age and use it and its gifts for Christ.

The value of community and family is discussed as the most natural way of living late in life: but the author is realistic about the difficulties there can be with that. There is sensitive exploration of dealing with regrets, and with increasing disability, briefly

touching on mild cognitive impairment and depression. The emphasis is on keeping faith in the presence of limitation, and refusing over-medicalisation.

It is a book about late-life mindsets and living them out: it does not go into detail with difficult disability, and perhaps glosses over a little just how difficult life can become. But we are encouraged to continue to make new friendships, to get good at intercession, to live as an encouragement, and as an example in faith and holiness. And to have faith that broken things can be fixed, peace is findable, and that 'goodbye' can be a blessing and a benediction. Great stuff.



Care for the dying

A practical & pastoral guide
Sioned Evans & Andrew Davison

- Westcott Foundation/Canterbury Press, 2014. £16.99, Pb 166pp, ISBN 9781848254701
- Reviewed by **Andrew Fergusson**, retired GP & Patron of hospice 23

Palliative care is now arguably a victim of its own success: over-medicalised and in danger of losing its commitment to a holistic approach to death and dying. This comprehensive handbook, written by a palliative care physician and a priest with experience of hospice ministry, comes from the best traditions of Anglicanism and helpfully redresses the balance.

It is intended for clergy, chaplains and hospice/hospital visitors as well as all health professionals. After introducing palliative care and a fascinating chapter on death in Christian theology, it asks provocatively: What is a good death? A necessary chapter follows on the

importance of professionals looking after themselves, and there are well written sections on issues affecting the dying, communication, terminal care, and approaching the end. The medical and pastoral inputs blend seamlessly throughout.

The authors quote both CMF and *Care Not Killing*, 'I just want to die' and they unequivocally reject euthanasia and assisted suicide. Caring for family carers, dying children, continuing care after a death, and an Appendix with prayers for use with the dying complete the book. Overall, an amazing amount of relevant, up-to-date and practical material is packed in. Highly recommended.



The healing tradition of the new testament

Douglas Ellory Pett

- Lutterworth Press, 2015, £19.00 Pb 194pp, ISBN 9780718893873
- Reviewed by **Russ Parker**, Acorn Healing Trust

This is essentially a work of scholarship focusing on a Form Critical approach to the New Testament. At its heart lies the conviction that the original and authentic Gospel message is to be found in the Gospel of Mark and a 'sayings' document known as Q which Matthew and Luke adapted.

Pett believes that the healing stories in Mark have been changed by Matthew and Luke and as such are of an inferior quality as they represent the convictions of the developing church. It is for this reason amongst others that he maintains that it is a fallacy to believe that healing was a central part of Jesus' and the church's mission. Pett

points out that Mark, unlike Matthew and Luke, does not include healing as part of the Apostolic mission, only preaching and the casting out of demons.

In this he is correct. However, to dismiss the other Synoptic writers as inferior is to pay scant attention to their alternative sources whilst failing to appreciate that Mark undoubtedly adapted his own source material.

The welcome challenge of this book is to re-examine our assumptions about the nature and practice of Christian healing. It is not so much a separate category to the proclaiming of the good news of God's saving grace as an integral element of it through which we extend our care to and for the whole person.



Growing up God's way (for boys)

Chris Richards and Liz Jones

- Evangelical Press, 2014, £7.99 Pb 76pp, ISBN 9780852349991
- Reviewed by **Pippa Peppiatt**, CMF Nurses' Student Staffworker

This is a short book, very accessible and well illustrated. It explains puberty, marriage and sex all from the perspective of being wonderfully created by God.

I read it with my twelve year old son who, although he found the style of writing young for him, still benefitted from a read 'with mum' to plug any gaps of his knowledge.

After dealing in adequate detail with the changes that happen in the body for pubescent boys, it was good that the following chapter addressed changes in the body in girls. My son informed me that sexual education at his state primary school (year five and six) separated sexes for its puberty

talks, so my son appreciated learning about the changes in the opposite sex. We used the book as a springboard for discussion, and so it was really helpful. There is a companion volume for girls.

The thing I most appreciated, which distinguishes it from many other books on puberty, was the Christian, biblical context throughout; that God is the one who has ordained the different seasons in our lives, and that growing up and puberty is his idea in the first place. My son found this reassuring. And that these changes take place in readiness for future adult responsibilities, physical intimacy within marriage and the opportunity to procreate. All God designed and for his glory!



What makes us human?

And other questions about God, Jesus and human identity
Mark Meynell

- The Good Book Company, 2015, £3.99 Pb 96pp, ISBN 9781909919051
- Reviewed by **Julian Churcher**, CMF London Staffworker

The writer describes humanity in various roles such as thinker, worker, and animal, then demonstrates how inadequate is *any* self-referential approach, before turning to Scripture to unpack both how God sees us – our true state – and its remedy at the cross.

He explores our limitations and potential, and our flourishing in generous interdependence. Jesus' complete humanity and utter uniqueness are described ('the best of us'), along with what this reveals about redeemed humanity, both at the present and in the coming age. It's inspiring!

My only gripe is with the author's assertion that we were made and saved to be 'other-

person centred'. For those raised to believe that others' needs should always have priority over their own – and as a result impaired from healthy self-love – this is reinforcing of pathology. At its worst this produces the compulsive giver striving for acceptance, inhibited from receiving from either God or man. The corrective, I believe, is being God-centred. Experienced son-hood of God results in what might be called *other-orientation*, arising from confidence in his care and provision for us.

The final summary 'postscript' chapter is superb, ending with a quote of Dag Hammarskjöld that could sum up the book: 'I became a Christian in order to become a man.'



Finishing line

John Wyatt

- Care and Keswick Resources, 2015, Leader's pack & DVD £22.02, Study booklets 10 for £16.65, Pb 54pp, ISBN 9780905195209
- Reviewed by **Kathy Myers**, emeritus consultant in palliative medicine

Talking about death and dying remains a hard thing for many people, including Christians, to do. *Finishing Line* comprises a DVD and leader's guide to support five small group discussions. These aim to explore different aspects of death and dying 'from the perspective of the historical biblical Christian faith'.

The first topic covered is 'Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide' followed by 'What does it mean to be human?', 'Can suicide ever be a Christian way to die' and two sessions on 'Dying well and faithfully'. The talks are given by Professor Wyatt and are about ten minutes long. The leader's

guide contains the full transcript followed by four or five questions for further discussion, Bible passages for reflection and a closing prayer.

The material covered in this course provides a helpful framework for church groups to discuss sensitive issues related to dying. However it is not exhaustive and discussions may well raise questions that are not answered in the leader's guide. For some the material may touch on significant pastoral issues, for example those who have had a loved one who has not 'died well'. Mature leaders skilled at guiding discussions and able to recognise the need for further pastoral support will be required.