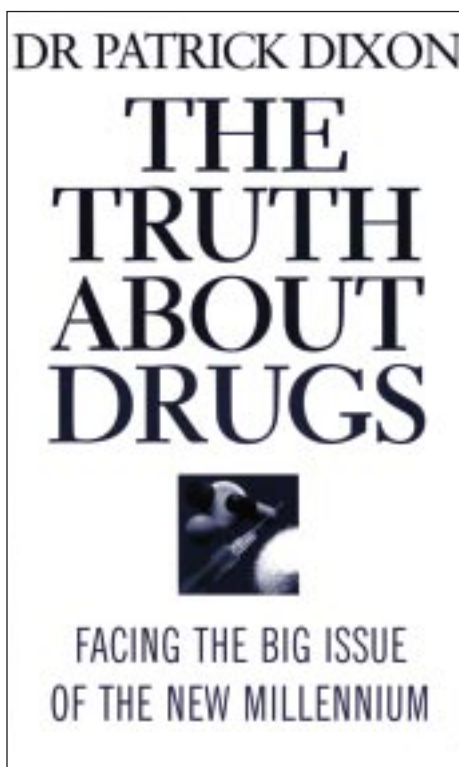


reviews:

The Truth About Drugs

Patrick Dixon. Hodder & Stoughton, London. 1998. 279pp. £7.99 Pb. ISBN 0 340 66505 X

Setting out to read this book I recalled how blessed I had been by reading *The Truth About AIDS*. In it Patrick confirmed so succinctly the validity of unconditional love as the paramount approach of Christians in the caring field, authenticating the way a Christian drug agency should operate.



Sadly my anticipation that this latest book in the 'Truth' series would have the same seminal effect was not met. The book felt rushed, as though produced just to fill a niche, rather than being an expression of a burning concern on the part of the author. This so affected me that I found myself being very critical about details, rather than concentrating on the principles being illustrated. Where for instance he says 'current laws on smoking turn every smoker under sixteen into a criminal', I wanted to say that's not the truth. It's one of the absurd anomalies of our legislation that it's illegal for a shopkeeper to sell

cigarettes to a person under sixteen but the youthful purchaser commits no offence, either then or when he smokes them.

Whilst agreeing 'more research is definitely needed' to quantify more accurately the extent of UK drug use, his concentration on US figures (which 'have no parallel in Britain') was unhelpful to the point of irritation. Many of the American statistics he quotes seem irrelevant. In those cases where the UK figures are relevant, I would suggest they are available, eg 'preventable deaths'. Neither are they 'soft estimates, based on hunch, intuition and educated guesswork'.

Again, who could argue that future generations will find our approach to tobacco ludicrous? Surely though we could find the UK equivalent to 'If a single ten-year-old boy or girl in a school can be persuaded to start, the total extra sales will be up to \$100,000 over seventy years. Ten pupils are worth a million dollars.' Such a sober reminder of the potential to suppliers of getting someone 'hooked', whatever the drug, needs to be culturally explicit to make the point as forcefully as possible.

Despite previous cynicism about Government action to tackle drugs, I don't share Patrick's pessimism concerning the Government's new ten year strategy. Now, having been given substantial additional funding since this book was published, the signs are more promising.

Adding a question-mark to the title would, for me, give the book the credibility it lacks, making it a greater challenge, helping people to question more radically the morass of man's allurements to states of altered consciousness.

Peter Farley

(Director of The Matthew Project, a Christian drug agency in Norwich, and member of the executive committees of the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse and the Evangelical Coalition on Drugs)

Why Do They Do That?

Nick Pollard. Lion Publishing, Oxford. 1998. 160pp. £5.99 Pb. ISBN 0 7459 3760 8

Nick Pollard is a specialist in sixth form moral and religious education and this book is based on his experience of working with teenagers in schools and colleges. It examines issues associated with today's youth culture. Chapters cover the use of drugs, the soaring rate of self harm, eating disorders, sexual activity, etc. Many books have been written on this topic but I found Nick's approach to be stimulating and challenging. The reader is encouraged to look beyond some of the superficial explanations for adolescent behaviour such as peer pressure, self image, boredom. His personal knowledge of so many young people's dilemmas and problems is combined with an understanding of the development of Western thinking. In this way he sets these issues in the context of a post-Christian society in which belief in absolutes has been rejected, and scientific determinism has eliminated the belief in free will and hence responsibility for one's actions. He demonstrates how self image is now derived from the temporary icons created by society rather than from a belief in the absolutes associated with faith in God.

The final chapter is a challenge to the reader to respond to the needs of today's teenagers and those of the generations to follow. The task is twofold. The first part is to get alongside teenagers, to listen, and to begin to question the basis of their beliefs and choices. Secondly, Christians need to engage with our society so that belief in a Creator and Father God can replace the nihilism of post-modernism.

This is a book which will set you thinking, whether you are a parent, someone who works with young people, or are just wanting to understand the issues which face teenagers today. The analysis is lucid and pertinent. The only criticism would be that the final chapter is too brief to do justice to the challenge he outlines in it. When will you be writing the sequel, Nick?

Elaine Crutchley

(Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Guildford)

Being a Person - Where Faith and Science Meet

John Habgood. Hodder & Stoughton, London. 1998. 307pp. £8.99 Pb. ISBN 0 340 69073 9

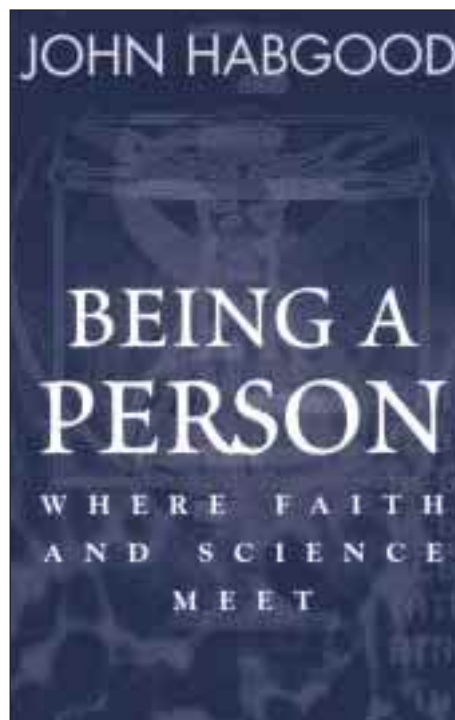
Described as a 'modest non-technical book for general readers', this is a remarkable success in exposing ethical problems about people. The style is transparently lucid, carefully expository and subtly humorous. An immense array of historical, philosophical and literary scholarship is used, with life experiences, in a light and open way which draws a reader on. The exposition of ethical dilemmas is deep, and carefully meticulous without burden, thanks to elegant language and illustration. An easy read indeed.

Careful exposition occupies the first two thirds. One looks to the rest for some good solutions; there are some indeed, but others are weak or questionable. So, a parson's egg, but extremely good in many parts.

The account begins with and refers back to two hard cases, the tragedies of Tony Bland and abortion. Others might have lacked such courage and started with 'normal' persons. The perspectives presented are postmodernism, science, consciousness, the role of language, evolutionary theory and theology. The first chapter deals with denying personality, dictators' techniques, illustrated from Lewis Carroll, Nietzsche, Kafka and post-modern 'demolitions'. The freedom issue figures prominently. Then Hillsborough; how may the possession of brainstem but not cortex constitute a person? There are long preliminary glances towards embryos and disabled persons. Factors which condition 'persons' are described - culture and communication - with that central problem of personal development, gradualist versus instantist acquisition of 'personhood'.

Then another key problem for today: is 'personhood' atomised independence or mutuality? There is an excellent presentation of the history of ideas from Greek and Roman projections on. Here the origins

and pivotal importance of the Trinity to the 'person' idea are exposed. 'Person' lacks self evident meaning; like a stocking it takes the shape of the packing. Trinity defines person, not vice versa; the 'image of God' concept contributes strongly; 'knowing God' is relation to him, not imagining him. 'Personhood' is evident to self. 'I AM THAT I AM' is self-existence; we are the same. There is a splendid critique of 'self-realisation' and 'self-fulfilment' philosophies. Descartes' dualism and Pascal's critique, and the importance (seen now, not then) of 'webs' and 'networking' are explained. (Cognosco ergo sum would have been wiser, Descartes.) 'Person' is largely recognisable by relationship, human and divine.



The mind-brain problem is presented, lucidly; 'emergence' is organised complexity; dualism and reductionism demolished (with Dennett), excellent stuff.

But there are some problems; the 'Word of God' is presented, but with a seeming implication which does not cohere with its biblical context. Its meaning is seen as the role of language in the declaration of personhood; but scripture presents this as divine authority, creative revelation, 'Godhead'; about how God declared personhood not singly about the importance to personal identity of declaration.

An evolutionary view of man is pervasive; we are told that this rules out a 'fall' (odd, in a text about persons and their relations to creation). The basic view is 'Darwinian' throughout in that it gives reason and observation prior place, at times alone. 'Miracle' has no place in personal evolution; God is not permitted to speak about who are persons, even if what he has said is analysed; the stance is 'observer' not 'listener' oriented. There appear to be two logical concerns here: if 'person' transcends observation, is greater than the body and its parts, then how is this entity recognised by observation? And if transcendent, why can't the revelation in scripture of I AM be authoritative for 'I am'? Is this a new version of 'God of the gaps'? Is what we can't explain what we are, persons? In presenting this view of the Word, does Habgood saw off his sedile?

This style follows; what it is to be a Christian is said to be 'an invitation to share an exploration of the human condition in the light of Christ . . .' Man again is agent, not God. But the 'on and up' Teilhard and Huxley view of evolution is demolished well, albeit on evolutionary grounds, not scripture. Paul, it seems, was seriously wrong about 'original sin'. But we do have the resurrection (with apologies, it is the only miracle to be mentioned).

So, with this background we draw near - to memory loss, to personality change, to PVS, to embryo loss and research, to abortion. The key arguments are gradualism, scientific fact, 'attributes' (cell differentiation into embryo and 'support services') and therapeutic intent. Genetic impact is discussed particularly well. But even if it were agreed that scripture can be taken variously on the earliest embryos or on the brainstem, there is a curious failure to record the clear scriptural statements about 'normal' persons, whether children in- or ex-utero, the elderly or the infirm. The key to understanding 'persons' is said to be 'theology'; God's personal revelations about it don't seem to figure. Again, oddly, the problem of 'attributes' is presented simply as the impossibility of knowing them in the

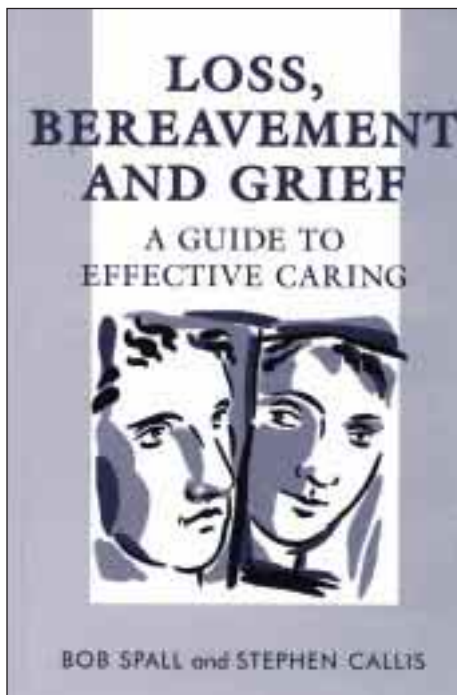
grossly diminished (Tony Bland), not for the genuinely theological if debatable reasons adduced by, for example, O'Donovan.

Duncan Vere
(Emeritus Professor of Therapeutics,
University of London)

Loss, Bereavement and Grief - a guide to effective caring

Bob Spall and Stephen Callis. Stanley
Thornes, Cheltenham. 1997. 198 pp.
£14.99 Pb. ISBN 0 7487 3322 1

Books about counselling often suffer from two problems: they can be highly theoretical and can fail to address the needs of the healthcare professional. This book avoids those pitfalls. Alongside a review of various theoretical models, the authors draw on their experiences of real situations and people - professionals as well as patients - in the healthcare environment.



Bob Spall is a consultant clinical psychologist and the Rev Stephen Callis is a hospital chaplain and GP practice counsellor. They bring over 40 years' experience to this book, which is designed to help nurses, midwives, doctors, paramedics and social workers answer the question: What is required to be an effective helping professional?

Each of the 16 chapters ends with a summary of the main points and includes questions with which the reader can explore issues in more depth. Topics covered include dealing with change; being 'professional'; personal loss and its impact on work; understanding the death and bereavement process and dealing with it; techniques for breaking bad news; religious, spiritual and cultural needs; recognising when further help is required, and when to seek personal support. A comprehensive list of references for further reading is also included.

The book is designed to be read as an integrated unit but readers will undoubtedly also want to dip into particular aspects for help with specific questions. One of the great strengths of this book is that, with its compelling easy-to-read style, it will help healthcare professionals understand themselves. This leads to more effective and appropriate understanding of the needs of patients.

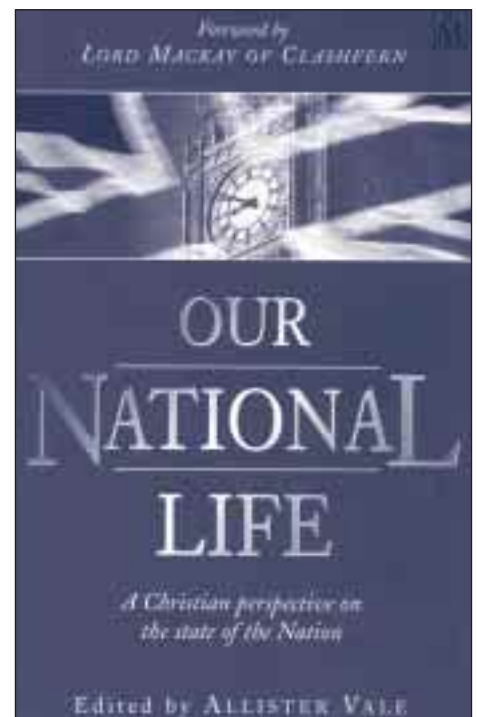
Mike Wilman
(Lecturer and Consulting Analyst in
private practice, Hampshire)

Our National Life - a Christian perspective on the state of the Nation

Edited by Allister Vale. The National
Club/Monarch, London. 1998. 250pp.
£12.99 Hb. ISBN 1 85424 391 8

To mark 150 years from its foundation in 1845, The National Club of the United Kingdom produced this book as 'a clear statement of what the The National Club wanted to see on the nation's agenda for the future'. It is a collection of essays by leading Christian experts and makes both a state-of-the-art summary of where we are now and a clear statement of where we could and should be going. Most readers of *Triple Helix* would be familiar with at least half the authors. Perhaps recent changes in Britain mean that perceptions of the old political understandings of 'left, right and centre' are fading, but overall I did not detect such a right-of-centre feel as might have been expected.

Edited by a consultant physician, five of the fifteen chapters are specifically about healthcare issues, and all the others are relevant to the big-picture understanding needed by health professionals, whether committed Christians or not. The book covers 'What makes a nation great?', national values, the role of the monarch, morality and the marketplace, education, the family, personal money management, the National Lottery, priorities for health, euthanasia, genetic manipulation, pornography, substance abuse, the environment, and 'a Christian lifestyle'.



I enjoyed every chapter and because of my own areas of ignorance found those on the economy, education and gambling most rewarding. The book is a beautifully produced hardback, which to be sold at £12.99 must have had considerable subsidy. It is a pity therefore that the standard of proofreading falls off dramatically towards the end and mars the presentation.

This is a timely snapshot which should concentrate our thinking and praying about our personal, our professional, and our national lives.

Andrew Fergusson
(Editor)