

CS Lewis: A Life
Alister McGrath

- Hodder & Stoughton, 2013
- £20.00 Hb 448pp, ISBN 9781444745528
- Reviewed by **Giles Cattermole**, CMF Head of Student Ministries

Author, apologist, academic. McGrath's excellent biography of CS Lewis shows us the man behind these three faces. A man shaped by his childhood in Ulster and in English schools before the horror of the trenches, by Oxford, and especially by his friends. A man who could be odd – even nasty; this is no hagiography. But most of all, although a 'most reluctant convert', a man who came to know Christ, and made him known to so many through his broadcasts and books. McGrath is thorough – perhaps at times giving too much detail, and there is much repetition. Masterfully weaving biography, theology and literary review together, he shows the development of Lewis' thought and writing. From

the objectivity of *The Problem of Pain* to the passionate intensity of *A Grief Observed* we see Lewis the intellectual confronted by personal searing loss. From his wartime apologetics to the imaginative *Chronicles of Narnia* we see Christian truth fleshed out in story. It is this, McGrath argues, that makes Lewis so influential still. Lewis appeals beyond modernist didactic approaches, to a post-modern audience seeking emotional narrative. But he provides this within an objectively true Christian framework. It's no surprise that Christian writers like Tim Keller, successfully reaching a thoroughly post-modern culture, so obviously stand on Lewis' shoulders. If only more of us could present God's truths so winsomely!



What Happens after I die?
Michael Allen Rogers

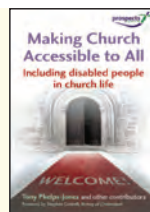
- Crossway, 2013
- £12.00 Pb 256pp, ISBN 9781433533020
- Reviewed by **Robin Fisher**

Michael Rogers tackles this vast subject with biblical rigour, while maintaining a light touch. He moves easily from the deep horror of hell to the unspeakably great joy of eternity with God. He does not gloss over the catastrophe awaiting those who reject Christ, noting that he is both the one who speaks most of hell and the only one who can rescue us from it.

Rogers moves quietly from disaster to triumph, allowing the drama to speak for itself. Rogers deals with modern secular perspectives of heaven and hell, exposing them as comforting

falsehoods. He is obviously a theologian, but the pastor is never far away. The book is full of the ordinary questions that people ask. Will I be united with my relatives? Is my child in heaven? Written for the Americas, there are occasional cultural difficulties. The practicalities after a death being one. A chapter on what to do after a death in this country would add to the book's value.

Rogers brings into relief the darkness and horror that Jesus rescued us from, and the unimaginable joys of our future with Christ. This book deserves a place on your shelf.



Making Church Accessible to All
Including disabled people in church life
Tony Phelps-Jones and other contributors

- BRF, 2013
- £7.99 Pb 144pp, ISBN 9780857461575
- Reviewed by **Ruth Eardley**

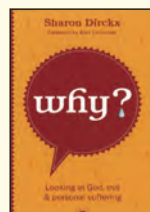
The front cover says it all: a big 'WELCOME!' but the red carpet stops just short of the steep stone step at the entrance. The door in the grey Norman arch is only half ajar (will I get my wheelchair through that narrow gap?) and there is no sign of human life, let alone a warm handshake.

One person in six in the UK has a disability. This great little book helps us think biblically and inclusively about church life. 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that the church is a body: there are different parts, but all belong. God strengthens and blesses the church through disabled people:

all we need is common sense and a willingness to make everyone really welcome.

Chapters include autism (not so keen on 'sharing the peace'), learning disabilities (could we say 'let's talk to God' instead of 'let's bring our petitions to the throne of grace?'), sight loss (let's all sing from the projected words...), mental health conditions ('What you need is deliverance') and mobility problems (Andrew Bartley uses a mobility scooter but was asked to speak at a church disability awareness meeting to be held upstairs).

Medics are well-placed to take a lead on inclusivity. Buy one, read it and donate to the church library.



Why?
Looking at God, evil & personal suffering
Sharon Dirckx

- IVP, 2013
- £8.99 Pb 176pp, ISBN 9781844746194
- Reviewed by **Laurence Crutchlow**, a London GP and CMF Associate Head of Student Ministries

It is all too easy to reduce suffering to an intellectual question, forgetting that the questioner is very often dealing with a deep personal hurt that is behind what they ask. An inspiring story about a baby with holoprosencephaly is the first of five personal stories that ensure this book is much more than an intellectual response to questions about suffering. A logical and clear approach looks at both questions of individual suffering, particularly around illness, and wider questions such as natural disasters. Dirckx's scientific background comes across clearly, as does her experience of caring for her husband during illness.

I particularly liked the focus on our personal role ('Am I responsible for anyone else's suffering?' is one chapter heading), and the

constant pointers back to Jesus' work on the cross ('Can a broken story be fixed?'). Although accessible for non-Christians, I think this book will be of most help to Christians who struggle with their own questions about suffering.

Quotations draw heavily on others associated with the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics where Dirckx is based, which may seem a little narrow to some. There is also a chapter looking at whether religion itself causes suffering, which addresses this common question of today. It is for its contemporary relevance and clear thought that I would primarily recommend this book; it may not replace *The Problem of Pain* on most bookshelves, but complements CS Lewis and others with its insight into questions being asked by many.



Rescuing Darwin

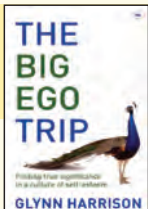
God and evolution in Britain today
Nick Spencer and Denis Alexander

- Theos, 2009
- £10.00 Pb 63pp, ISBN 0955445353
- Reviewed by **Mark Pickering**, a Yorkshire prison GP

Rescuing Darwin. A noble thought. But from whom, and to what purpose? The authors attempt to dispel notions of Darwin being anti-religious, by charting his painful journey into agnosticism. They then try to rescue him from the science versus religion debate; first by showing that evolution is compatible with Christianity, and was widely accepted by many Christians in the early days, then by challenging scientific creationism on the grounds that it sets the Bible out as a rival to the *Origin of Species*.

They lament the way that atheist fundamentalists such as Richard Dawkins have portrayed Darwin and Darwinism as

inherently anti-religious, thus provoking a fierce reaction from scientific creationists, and in the process polarising and confusing the general public about the true merits of Darwinism. They hope to rescue Darwin to be seen simply as 'an exceptional natural scientist', without the metaphysical overtones his work is often given. There is much to commend in this short book, with its helpful treatment of the history and contemporary issues. I felt the treatment of the Intelligent Design movement was predictably caricatured, but overall it is a helpful summary of the theistic evolutionary perspective and is well worth a read, although the price tag is high for a small paperback.



The Big Ego Trip

Finding true significance in a culture of self-esteem
Glynne Harrison

- IVP, 2013
- £9.99 Pb 224pp, ISBN 9781844746200
- Reviewed by **Evelyn Sharpe**, a Consultant Psychiatrist

Since the 1960s, attempts to boost self-esteem have become part of our culture, but it has become evident, as Glynne Harrison says, that 'self-esteem ideology promised much but delivered small'. Dr Harrison, an Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, describes the origins of this ideology and how it came to have major influence in the worlds of teaching, public health and religion. He shows its failures very clearly but also seeks to provide a 'biblical and more psychologically secure approach to the big questions of significance and worth'.

The second half is a combination of showing the Christian

view of humankind, advising how to stop judging ourselves and how to counter the status anxiety which makes us constantly aware of our seeming importance or lack of it. The style is very readable, using biblical examples, personal narratives and anecdotes to illustrate various points. A recent secular article on self-esteem advocated 'think less about you and more about others' as the way to feel good about yourself. Dr Harrison agrees that we need to shift our focus from ourselves, but that our status and significance is to be found in Christ, leading one day to a glorious 'heightened self-forgetfulness' in heaven.



Christians in the Firing Line

Richard Scott

- Wilberforce Publications, 2013
- £7.29 Pb 200 pp, ISBN 978095752515
- Reviewed by **John Martin**, CMF Head of Communications

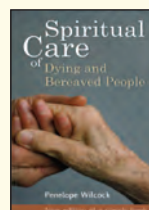
In 2009 at a CMF conference Richard Scott heard four Christian doctors and nurses who had run into trouble with their professional organisations. He left with five words ringing in his ears: 'It could be you next!' Three years later he himself would face the GMC over advice given to a patient.

Richard, a CMF member and GP from Margate writes well. He presents his case alongside twelve others in trouble over matters of conscience. They include a van driver, a relationship counsellor, a street preacher, an airport beautician, a city councillor and a pro-life activist. The book was compiled in cooperation with the

Christian Legal Centre which was involved with most of these cases. This is a good read and Christians will benefit from heeding its message.

In his foreword, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali comments: 'We don't have to agree with every word of the author's or those mentioned here to admire them not only for their courage but also for their persistence and their faithfulness sometimes in the face of overwhelming odds.'

Whether Christians in Britain are being 'persecuted' is an ongoing debate, but most of the people whose stories appear here have paid a heavy price for their stand.



Spiritual Care of Dying and Bereaved People

Penelope Wilcock

- BRF, 2013
- £9.99, Pb 112pp, ISBN 9780281048779
- Reviewed by **Valerie Rowe**, a Consultant in Palliative Care

Books on 'Spiritual Care' are often theoretical but not this one. It is about *people*. It is intensely real as the cost of fulfilling a patient's request to 'be there' ('watch with me') is acknowledged. But the privilege of journeying with someone on their Emmaus Road and then finding the Lord himself coming alongside is also expressed.

It is a practical book, covering topics such as silence, humour, touch, tears, anger and clothing. The shock of death at the beginning of life is covered as are suggestions and prayers for conducting a funeral. Questions are posed which set me thinking – 'vulnerable God' or 'almighty God'? 'heaven and hell'? Mostly I agreed with the author's opinions but not always!

The first edition of the book seventeen years ago 'scratched where I itched' but this expanded edition benefits immeasurably from the author honestly sharing experiences she has faced herself in the interim years. The breakup of her first marriage, the terminal illness and death of her second husband, and the loss of integrity felt after family divisions during her third marriage are all exposed to the light, and her vulnerability adds strength to the book.

I would recommend it to everyone who seeks to be a companion to their patients, to communicate better the compassionate heart of God and to listen out for inner pain, especially on the final journey. Surely this should be all of us!