

The question that never goes away

What is God up to in a world of such tragedy and pain?
Philip Yancey

- Hodder, 2014, £9.99, Pb 160pp, ISBN 9781444788556
- Reviewed by **Eve Thangaraj**, intercalating medical student and CMF student volunteer

Shoving sweeping statements and apologetic commiseration aside, Philip Yancey follows up his bestselling book *Where is God when it hurts?* with a very different approach to pain than we routinely encounter. In this book, he chooses to travel through the 'land of suffering' and tell us what he's learnt. It is an approach that is inviting from the outset as the reader pictures him not as someone wise speaking from a podium at a seminar about grief, but as a fellow traveller on the road of suffering that has in some way marked and scarred us all. His candour and his unwillingness to simply 'solve' pain would likely strike a chord deep in the heart of someone coming to terms with

incomprehensible pain.

The title itself makes it very apparent that he knows this question doesn't just 'goes away' with an easy answer. He relates his encounters with people who have experienced unmitigated misery – from natural disasters to terminal cancer – and remarkably distils their experiences to show us God at work in their lives. He reminds us that as short-sighted and fallible humans, 'we're concerned with how things turn out; God seems more concerned with how we turn out' and that 'pain redeemed impresses more than pain removed'. It is challenging read, whether you're in the midst of suffering, helping someone through it or exploring big questions.



Inspiring hope: Helping churches to care for the sick

Dr Jane Bates

- EMMS International, 2014, Pb 76pp, Free PDF from emms.org or hard copy £5, ISBN 9780992661908
- Review by **Mhoira Leng**, palliative care consultant, Makerere University, Uganda

This helpful, practical and innovative book encourages churches to engage more fully and effectively in palliative care. The introduction reminds us 'We are called to build God's kingdom, spreading Jesus Christ's good news of love, forgiveness, salvation and hope, through the power of God's Spirit at work among us'.

The book has an African focus where up to 40% of healthcare is provided by faith-based organisations. While most relevant to a sub-Saharan African setting, it also has important messages and resources for churches everywhere. The author, Dr Jane Bates (a CMF member), demonstrates her experience of working in

Malawi as a palliative care physician and also draws on many examples of church engagement.

The book was commissioned by EMMS, which, along with others, is promoting and supporting palliative care based on Christian values. Inspiring Hope covers the background to palliative care, outlines the source of our inspiration as Christian communities to engage and provides relevant stories, practical resources and helpful references. I recommend this as a tool to empower the Christian community to address the twin imperatives of seeking justice for the vulnerable and reaching out with compassion and a message of hope; being the love of Christ in this world.



Sex, dating and relationships: A fresh approach

- By Gerald Hiestand & Jay S Thomas
- Crossway, 2012 £7.55

The dating dilemma: A romance revolution

- By Rachel Gardner & Andre Adefope
- IVP, 2013 £8.99
- Reviewed by **Laurence Crutchlow**, CMF Associate Head of Student Ministries

Both these books are helpful. Though reaching similar conclusions, the approach taken differs markedly.

Sex, Dating and Relationships could be recommended for its opening chapter alone. A challenging and refreshing exposition of sex as an expression of the gospel sets the book's tone. Arguing that the Bible defines three 'categories' of relationship – family, marriage, and neighbours – dating relationships are placed firmly in the 'neighbour' category, leading to advocacy of 'dating friendships'. However, there is a risk of assuming a biblical

example always constitutes a biblical command (which I was not fully convinced these categories do).

The Dating Dilemma is, on the surface, more supportive of modern society's view of dating and relationships; current practice is to be redeemed and improved, rather than torn up entirely. It is intensely practical, and also strong on putting God at the centre of all the things we do, encouraging us to date differently. The theological approach is quite different to *Sex, Dating and Relationships*, but the underlying 'answer' is not so different beneath the very different terminology.



Good news for the public square

A biblical framework for Christian engagement
Edited by Timothy Laurence

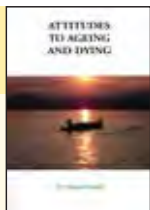
- Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, 2014, £8.99, Pb 126pp, ISBN 9780950645438
- Reviewed by **Steven Fouch**, CMF Head of Nursing

Christian political and social involvement has a long and rich history, but leaves many believers today confused. Some churches' teaching and some secularists' campaigning have left many Christians asking if we should engage with the public square at all, let alone why and how we should.

This theologically and philosophically dense but concise book seeks to give a broad framework to address these questions. Distilled from lectures organised by the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, it sets out the four sides of the public square as 'public authority', 'public truth', 'public good' and 'public hope'. In these four dimensions the divine mandate to governments and authorities are bibli-

cally explored, and the limitations of these mandates and the deeper reality of the gospel's implications for conduct of the church and individual Christians are made clear. The focus is Christ as King, the supreme authority under which all human and spiritual authority is delegated, and what this means for our own engagement with the public square.

This could come across as quite abstract, so there is an attempt to illustrate these concepts with historical examples. The book comes alive at these points, and could have done not only with more examples, but with more contemporary ones. Overall, this is a good starter for anyone wanting to think biblically and critically about public debate around contemporary issues.



Attitudes to ageing and dying

Dr David Powell

- Powell Charity Trust, 2013, £7 (from cmf.org.uk), 216pp, ISBN 9780956233622
- Review by Mark Cheesman

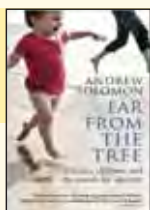
A thoughtful and perceptive book on the subject of our later years and our deaths. Movingly discussed by David Powell, a godly man remembered by many old Cardiff CMF students with much affection. He says he was 82 on starting this book: would that more older Christians wrote out their wisdom for us! I am now 60 and on some points I think differently; no doubt 40 year olds will disagree with me on some things. It was ever thus, and maybe should be.

Christians remain remarkably uncomfortable when talking about death. It should not be so. David displays a formidable grasp of the uncertainties and difficulties found in the real world, which often does not turn out as it

'should'. This is so much better than the slogans one sometimes hears from campaigners. Humans are precious, souls are immortal, relationships are paramount, God is good. Heaven is real, we're going there, and being with Christ, in life or death, is what matters. Excellent.

David goes through many of the cases which have hit the headlines, with a godly scrutiny and a kind heart. Sometimes there is a clear direction, other times it is honestly really difficult to know what's best. He covers a wide and demanding subject with gentleness and skill.

This is a good read, particularly for Christian doctors and campaigners. In particular, I found the last chapters on the Christian's future really uplifting.



Far from the tree

Parents, children and the search for identity
Andrew Solomon

- Scribner Book Company 2012, Pb £8.50 962pp, ISBN 9780743236720
- Review by Anne Parfitt-Rogers, a foundation year 1 doctor in Tayside

What defines disability? In this wide-ranging book, the prolific author and psychology lecturer Andrew Solomon – himself the father of a disabled child – explores the lives of hundreds of children who don't fit the mould. It shows how having an apple that falls 'far from the tree' can be a life-changing experience, from gifted offspring to dwarfism and deafness to multiple physical disability.

From beginning to end it is a long read, but as each chapter includes many different anecdotes and life stories, busy readers can dip into the work without losing its meaning. Award-winning author Solomon

is bold in exploring the heart-break and struggles that occur, speaking to families from around the world and not shying away from describing their views and feelings.

At times the stories become very challenging, but the tenacity and honesty of people interviewed makes this a very human work, giving a voice to people not often heard as well as more well-known contributors. Although not specifically a Christian book, it delves deeply into spiritual themes, such as finding a path through suffering and how we value individuals in society today. This book casts a fresh view on disability and is an eye-opening read.



Just the two of us?

Help and strength in the struggle to conceive
Eleanor Margesson & Sue McGowan

- IVP, 2010, £7.99, Pb 160pp, ISBN 9781844747481
- Review by Rev Dr Jason Roach, Co-author of Facing Infertility, CMF

Perhaps the most helpful people on the hard road of suffering are those who both know God deeply and can understand our struggle deeply. *Just the two of us* amply supplies both. Eleanor Margesson and Sue McGowan have blessed the church with this beautiful word to those struggling with childlessness.

Their message reads like a modern day Psalm 13. The psalm begins by honestly crying out 'How long O Lord?' and yet also declares a deep trust in God's steadfast love. Margesson and McGowan begin similarly, by connecting with the pain of infertility. Section one asks questions like 'why me?'. Section two deals with how to cope with: stresses

about identity, others' expectations and grief. Section three considers fertility treatment and adoption. The final section addresses how we can adjust to the changed expectations of married life.

Three things make this book particularly helpful. First, real people's stories constantly remind the reader we really are not alone in this struggle. Second, the authors build reflection into the book by suggesting things to read, do and chat about. Thirdly, all this is coupled with a wonderfully accessible weaving of the deep truths of the Christ's suffering, control and love into every chapter. Anyone who reads this book will not fail to feel understood, loved, helped to persevere and equipped to comfort others.



At the end of the day

Church of England perspectives on end of life issues
Brendan McCarthy, Mia Hilborn, Mike Hill, James Newcome

- Church House Publishing, 2014, £12.99, Pb 116pp, ISBN 9780715144534
- Reviewed by Andrew Fergusson, Care Not Killing Alliance

This is an excellent review of the approach Christians should take when considering ethical and pastoral issues at the end of life.

Brendan McCarthy's introduction starts with core beliefs, from which guiding principles are derived, and these lead to particular policies and practices. Those who don't necessarily hold our core beliefs should nevertheless support most of these guiding principles and their consequences. Core Christian beliefs are: God as life-giver, Trinity, incarnate, redeemer; and concern for justice and community. These lead, in order of priority, to affirming life, caring for the vulnerable, building a cohesive and compassionate

community, and respecting individual freedom. Note that autonomy comes last!

Bishop Mike Hill applies this framework to opposing physician-assisted suicide. James Newcome, current lead bishop in the Lords for health issues, follows with a comprehensive review of organ donation, emphasising the importance of gift; and Mia Hilborn, who chairs the Chaplaincy Leadership Forum, describes the end of life roles and responsibilities of the church in NHS healthcare.

What a pity George Carey and Desmond Tutu hadn't taken these truths on board before their recent misjudged pronouncements supporting assisted suicide.