

The Way We Die Now

Seamus O'Mahony

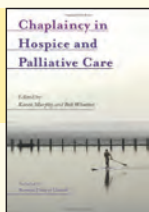
- Head of Zeus, 2016, £14.99, 292pp, ISBN 9781784974268
- Reviewed by **Claire Stark Toller**, a Consultant in Palliative Medicine based in Southampton

Written by a consultant physician, this erudite but readable book explores the philosophical, cultural and medical influences that mould our Western view of death. O'Mahony starts with a personal overview of death and the ritualistic framework provided by the Catholic church. He discusses how the mutual conspiracy between the medical profession and society to deny death has contributed to its medicalisation.

With almost unbridled frankness he argues that our society chooses to use hospitals as 'dustbins' for the inconvenient elderly and dying; anyone who has worked in an NHS hospital will recognise the situations described. He examines the impact of 'celebrity' deaths and legal cases on our narrative

of death. Exploring briefly the views of 20th century philosophers, he conceives the rise of autonomy and individualism as drivers for our unattainable wish for a controlled death, but expresses pragmatic reservations about legalisation of euthanasia. Reviewing the development of palliative care, he argues that while aiming to demedicalise death, it has also been responsible for contributing to its specialisation.

The book is not written from a Christian perspective, but O'Mahony completes his ten chapters with 'modest proposals' that the expansiveness of over-medicalisation needs to be reined in. A work that would be of interest to all doctors, but particularly those working in secondary care and who seek broad philosophical, cultural and historical reflections on death.



Chaplaincy in Hospice and Palliative Care

Karen Murphy and Bob Wharton (eds)

- Jessica Kingsley, 2017, £18.99, 208pp, ISBN 9781785920684
- Reviewed by **Jeff Stephenson**, Medical Director, St Luke's Hospice Plymouth

In the evolving context of multiculturalism, secularisation, and outcome-driven healthcare, the role of hospice and palliative care chaplaincy faces enormous pressure, not least to justify its continuance as what the book describes as an 'essential piece in the patchwork of holistic care for those with life limiting illness'.

This masterly compilation of contributions from those working in the field, drawing on personal experience and the wider literature, cogently and movingly argues the case for that

description. It not only informs about the complexity and diversity of a palliative care chaplain's work, but also invites the reader into that 'space between', in which they operate, a 'safe space... to consider the "ultimate questions"' that we will all one day face.

This is probably the most accessible and enlightening book I have read on spiritual care, and I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone who wants to be, or works alongside, a chaplain – or might someday find themselves in need of one.



What are they teaching the children?

Lynda Rose (ed)

- Wilberforce Publications, 2016, £12, 354pp, ISBN 9780957572584
- Reviewed by **Paul Malcolm**, Clinical Radiologist based in Norwich

This is a collection of essays by authors with experience of teaching, politics, the law and the history of child education. As Tim Dieppe of Christian Concern comments in his review, 'The education of the next generation is the key battleground for the soul of our society'.

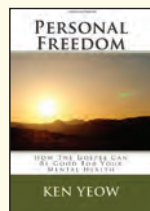
These essays explain how the biblical view of men and women as equal under God has been the basis of British education. Decades of attack from Marxism and secularism are removing the rights of parents to choose how their children are educated.

The Equality Act (2010) is

used to promote sex education that attacks the family with the support of Ofsted. In a brave new world in which 'protected characteristics' and not the 'person' are defended by the law, dissent is outlawed and Christians are silenced in the public sphere. Sound familiar in the NHS?

An essay by Baroness Cox pleads: 'May we not leave our children to fight the battles we have not had the courage to fight'.

We need to know this battleground if we are to counter the threat to Christian freedom in the public sphere. I enjoyed and recommend it.



Personal Freedom

How the Gospel can be good for your mental health
Ken Yeow

- Createspace, 2014, £7.99, 204pp, ISBN 9781505415742
- Reviewed by **Andrew Sims**, Emeritus Professor in General Psychiatry, based in Shropshire

Living the Christian life and walking daily with Jesus is Ken Yeow's theme. The author is a practising Christian and a consultant psychiatrist. He links working out the Gospel in everyday life with better mental health: 'the potential positive impact on a person's psychological and emotional well-being whenever they personally encounter the powerful truths of the gospel is a blessed by-product of belief in and experience of the truth itself, the person of Jesus Christ himself.'

The book is not primarily intended for psychiatrists or other medical practitioners and, although 'mental health' is mentioned quite often, there is little about mental symptoms or psychiatric disorder or debate.

The emphasis is a practical guide to the Christian life. The appendix briefly outlines his support for 'Christians and churches having a collaborative, complementary model' when working with professional services. He dispels the fear that some Christians have of mental health professionals.

Personal Freedom is aimed at a Christian readership, as shown by the volume of scriptural references and the use of some language not readily understandable outside the Christian community. Church members who are timid about using psychiatric services will find his approach reassuring: there is no conflict between the Christian way of life and receiving psychiatric care when it is required.