



From the Psychiatrist's Chair
Selected works of Dr Monty Barker
Monty Barker

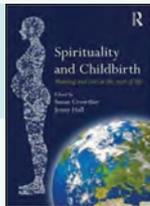
- Words by Design, 2018, £12.50, 220pp, ISBN: 9781909075672
- Reviewed by **Peter May**, a retired GP in Southampton

In 1970, medical students from the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine were allowed just one month for an elective period. I chose psychiatry. Dr Monty Barker was the newly appointed consultant at Bristol and was already being recommended by other students. Sorting out the spiritual from the mental, and feelings from hard facts seemed to be his prime concern for a Christian doctor. Monty became a close friend and mentor until his death in 2015.

Widely read, he was a gifted teacher deeply interested in history, behaviour and culture. He taught theological students in England and Paris. In the 1980s, I would invite him to give lectures to lay audiences in Southampton,

knowing many would come to hear him. After retirement, he spent much of his time teaching in India, ably supported by his wife Rosemary. Sadly, he wrote very little and we are indebted to his editors for assembling this collection from Monty's lecture notes.

In a rapidly changing world, the hot topics today are so different from a generation ago. There is nothing here about recreational drugs, transgender identities, eating disorders, knife crime or 'conversion therapy'. But there is plenty of wisdom about marriage, parenting, teenagers, bereavement, burnout and sleep disorders. There is also much about cross-cultural mission, the call to ministry and most importantly, pastoral care.



Spirituality and Childbirth
Meaning and care at the start of life
Edited by Susan Crowther and Jenny Hall

- Routledge, 2017, £28.79, 222pp, ISBN: 9781138229402
- Reviewed by **Mary Hopper**, retired lecturer in midwifery at Oxford Brookes University

A midwife is asked how she sees spiritual care being achieved in her practice area, she replies 'I'm not sure. We call the chaplain if there's a problem and it's fine if people want time to pray after the birth of their child. Is that the right answer? There's no time for anything much'

Anyone associated with child-bearing and parenting, can only benefit from the wealth of information found in this book. It sets out to question the art and meaning of childbirth by considering spirituality from a variety of perspectives.

Edited by two long standing midwifery academics, they draw upon a vast array of evidence and practice offered by experts from

different fields. Throughout the text, there is a linking of theory to practice for current practitioners on how to achieve the optimum outcome for mother and baby when there is a shortage of staff or beds, limited resources or a high-tech environment.

Every aspect of the birthing experience is covered – from the moment of conception through to parenting. Exploring the spiritual impact of pregnancy and birth on parents and those around. It addresses both positive and negative outcomes.

The book suggests we reconsider how we 'hold the sacred space' during pregnancy, labour and birth and reshape practice, while listening to our own, inner spiritual voice.



Perfectly Human
Nine months with Cerian
Sarah C Williams

- Plough Publishing House, 2019, free, 160pp, ISBN: 9780874866698
- Reviewed by **Steve Fouch**, CMF Head of Communications

It was no longer primarily a matter of abstract ethical principle but rather the gentle imperative of love. 'When Sarah and Paul Williams are given the devastating news that their unborn child has a rare and lethal form of dwarfism, they are faced with the heartbreaking choice of whether to abort or continue with the pregnancy. Williams shows how much pressure to terminate a pregnancy can be put upon parents faced with such a diagnosis, and the real opposition from the medical professions and wider society that come against those who choose a different path.

As Christians, the Williamses chose to go ahead with the pregnancy, and to welcome the daughter they named *Cerian*

(Welsh for 'beloved'), however fleetingly. Williams' account does not shy away from the real heartache, pain and anger that she and her family went through in making this choice. It also shows the power of God's grace and love to transform her family, friends and colleagues through this difficult time.

Furthermore, in the process, she also reflects on the nature of our humanity, what it means to love and be loved by God, family and friends, and embeds her painful story in a much wider context.

This book helps earth in personal experience some of our most profound contemporary ethical and spiritual debates, about what it means to be a human being.



Transformed
A brief biblical and pastoral introduction to understanding transgender in a changing culture
Peter Lynas

- Evangelical Alliance, 2018, available to download: bit.ly/2u4rytB, 35pp
- Reviewed by **Katharine Townsend**, a GP in East Anglia

Transformed is a superb online resource summarising the main issues for churches and Christian organisations in relation to people who identify as transgender. It encourages and equips them to be ready for and warmly welcoming to transgender people and their questions of faith and identity.

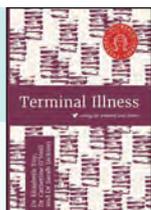
Written compassionately, it covers the philosophical thinking and cultural trends that have led to the rapid rise of this phenomenon. It speaks of the pain and isolation felt by so many transgender people, and of their mental health and suicide rates. It has a section on medical treatments possible with a sound grasp of the poverty of scientific evidence to support hormonal

and surgical options.

An excellent overview of a biblical understanding of gender, human identity, sex and the importance of the body, followed by a section on the present day (but rapidly changing) legal situation, and the impact on education and freedom of speech.

However, especially useful is the pastoral advice for organisations supporting transgender people. Recognising the possible tension between a theological/ideological response and a personal/pastoral response, its suggestions are helpful and practical – combining grace, truth and love.

It is short but surprisingly in-depth. It has helpful links to resources for further information.



Terminal Illness

Caring for yourself and others

Elizabeth Toy, Catherine O'Neill, Sarah Jackson

- Redemptorist Publications, 2018, £4.95 53pp ISBN: 9780852315217
- Reviewed by **Claire Stark-Toller**, consultant in palliative medicine at Countess Mountbatten Hospice, Southampton

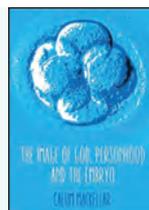
Written for people facing life-limiting illness and their carers, this short booklet is written by three doctors and aims to provide a practical resource for Christians, particularly from Anglican and Catholic traditions.

It is divided into three sections: *Terminal Illness: a definition*, *For the person affected*, and *For those who care* and finishes with prayers and further reading. Written in simple and clear language, the first section explains medical terminology and the process of diagnosis. It raises practical and useful issues eg. holidays and clinical trials and explains legal aspects such as 'Lasting Power of Attorney'. There follows a gentle and sensitive discussion about prognosis, what dying is like, what to expect as life ends, and a brief overview on grief.

Focusing on the affected person, the second section explores themes including

preparing for dying, hope and dying well. It provides a wise and approachable overview, recognising complexity and suffering without excessive emotion. The next section, written for the carer, acknowledges the pain of loss and explores the meaning of healing. It examines practical matters eg. planning for the future and finding help. Each section is illustrated by real life stories. The final part comprises a section of mostly Christian prayers and Scripture around the themes of God's presence and dying.

Other than the section on prayers, the content is practical rather than faith-based, although rays of Christian faith and hope shine throughout. This booklet can be given to and read by those with and without faith. It would be most useful for carers and those facing a life-limiting illness, who value reading and the opportunity to reflectively prepare.



The Image of God, Personhood and the Embryo

Calum MacKellar

- SCM Press, 2017, £35.00, 265pp, ISBN: 9780334055211
- Reviewed by **Trevor Stammers**, Reader in Bioethics, St Mary's University, Twickenham

This is the most comprehensive defence I have ever read of the view that the human embryo is a person from the completion of fertilisation. Sceptics and the already persuaded alike will find plenty to consider here and the book's clear Christological emphasis is faith inspiring, even if one cannot agree with all the book's conclusions.

It is a scholarly work with hundreds of references, divided into two unequal parts. The first (shorter) section looks at historical and contemporary perspectives on the moral status of the embryo, the meaning of the *imago dei* and what it means to be a person.

The five chapters comprising the bulk of the book explore the embryo in relation to creation and incarnation and then substantive, relational and functional aspects of the embryo are examined to determine its status. TF Torrance is quoted in

relation to the incarnation: 'Christians came to regard the unborn fetus in a new light, sanctified by the Lord Jesus as an embryonic person' (p143).

The chapter on functional definitions of personhood critiques the much-embraced gradualist approach championed by Peter Singer and others and there is a very helpful section providing counterarguments to all the standard objections raised against fetal personhood such as twinning, recombination, molar pregnancies and high rates of spontaneous miscarriage.

A wide range of sources from Calvin to Pope Francis are cited, but Christ is the central focus of this book which deserves a wide readership, in spite of the publisher's hefty price tag.



Love thy Body

Answering hard questions about life and sexuality

Nancy Pearcey

- Baker Books, 2018, £12, 336pp, ISBN: 9780801075728
- Reviewed by **John Greenall**, CMF National Field Director

We have a new category of an individual: the human 'non-person'. So argues Nancy Pearcey in a compelling new book following on from her bestseller *Total Truth*.

Drawing heavily on the work of Francis Schaeffer, Pearcey argues that the right way to treat people depends on what we think it means to be human. In the modern age, people have

concluded that morality does not qualify as objective truth – it consists merely of personal feelings and preferences. Pearcey traces the origins of these views through Plato and a Cartesian Dualism which today shapes secular views on issues such as sexual orientation, euthanasia, abortion and transgenderism.

Pearcey argues that we have relegated the body to a 'fact realm', lower story and elevated

the person to a 'values' realm, upper story. Take transgenderism: 'I'm not my body – I am a spiritual being' is a claim that the real person resides in the mind, spirit, will and feelings rather than in a physical body. Instead of 'hating our bodies', Pearcey contends that they give us a clue to our personal identity, our purpose as human beings and provide rational grounds for our moral decisions. She warns of the trajectory of such dehumanising world views

– that whoever has most power (ultimately the State) will decide who qualifies as a person. She urges Christians to resist a privatised, other-worldly spirituality and to defend a high view of the human body as Christians did in similar cultures before us.

As healthcare professionals, we should be at the front and centre of this apologetic. That is why it is my book of the year and a veritable must-read.