



The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes

Dr Nancy R Pearcey

- Baker Books, August 2023, 324pp, £16.99, ISBN: 9780801075735
- Reviewed by **Steven Fouch**, CMF Head of Communications

Dr Pearcey's last book, *Love thy Body*, has become one of the go-to texts for many CMF members for developing a biblically robust understanding of the body, sex, and sexuality while compassionately and wisely exploring how this relates to a culture mired in gender confusion. She has achieved a similar feat in her latest book, but this time exploring the equally confused issue of masculinity.

Men die younger than women, are more likely to commit suicide, and are less likely to seek medical care. Boys and young men are increasingly socially alienated and isolated, falling behind in education and employment, and are far more likely to end up in crime and at the wrong end of the criminal justice system. They are much more likely to become sexual abusers of women and children. There is a script in society that says men are the problem and are irredeemable. Young men and boys hear that they are hopeless cases and the world is better off without them! Furthermore, the narrative, especially in the US, is that conservative Christian men, in particular, are tyrannical abusers and that Christian families are as likely to implode as their secular counterparts.

Pearcey begs to differ and, with forensic rigour, digs into some oft-sidelined areas of sociological research showing that a biblically-grounded concept of masculinity

is good news – for women, children, and men themselves. Genuinely biblical models of masculinity, she argues, far from leading to macho tyrants, produce caring, compassionate, involved fathers and supportive husbands and colleagues who are engaged with the community. Such men tend to have better mental and physical health and happier families. Through equally meticulous historical research, she shows the crisis in masculinity among boys and young men to be a problem created by secularism and industrialisation, creating false ideas of what it means to be a man and dragging men away from faith and family to the world of work. Men have lost their role in the home, community, church, and family, leading to alienation and a generation of boys and girls with 'father hunger' for the increasingly-absent male figures in their lives.

The crisis in masculinity, Pearcey argues, is also a mission field, an opportunity to bring the gospel to father-hungry young men through surrogate father figures in the form of mentors, teachers, and youth leaders. Changing work patterns and bringing men back into the home to work alongside their wives and kids has measurable benefits. The crisis in masculinity that the secular world is struggling to answer has an answer, above all, in the example and person of Jesus and the men and women who embody the saving grace of his good news to the broken world of gender relations.

While this book focuses on American society, culture, and social history, its findings are just as relevant and resonant to us in the UK. While it is not a medical book, it explores issues we all encounter in clinical practice and challenges us to consider how we relate to each other as men and women in the workplace. Another 'instant classic' by an increasingly relevant and important author.



The Final Lap

John Wyatt

- 10Publishing, 2023, £6.99, 80pp, ISBN: 9781915705808
- Reviewed by **Howard Lyons**, Treasurer of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA)

This is a book to give away. My copy was given to me by the author himself at the ICMDA World Congress in Arusha, where Professor John Wyatt was a very popular plenary speaker. I devoured it on the flight home and promptly ordered several copies to give to church friends of a similar age.

This is not the first book to be written on '*navigating the transitions of later life*', to quote its subtitle. Jim Packer's *Finishing our Course with Joy* is more detailed and perhaps more challenging. But this book is short and fresh and comes from an author who has developed a strong body of work on the subject, including 2018's *Dying Well*.

In this latest offering, Professor Wyatt uses the analogy of a marathon and considers three phases: moving from work to retirement (Hitting the Wall), moving from independence to dependence (The Home Straight) and moving from life to death (The Finish Line). I have never run a marathon, but from the comments made by those who have, the analogy seems to work well.

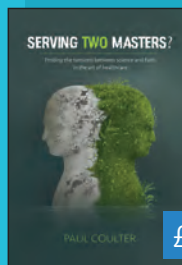
The book may only be 80 pages long, but I gleaned several insights from my initial reading that will stay with me. The first was the importance of recognising that we will become increasingly dependent as we grow old, and, therefore, we should plan for it, discussing it in advance with loved ones who may end up being our carers. The second compared going to sleep each



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Sarah Louise Bedford

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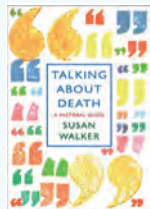
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evening with falling asleep in Christ at the end of our lives and how we can learn from this nightly experience to prepare ourselves for death.

But the most startling insight came from the author courageously sharing his experience of being locked up in a psychiatric ward and how Jesus reached out to him through the kindness and care of family and friends. He quotes Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Christ himself kisses us in the love of friends'. We don't know what our friends have gone through when we meet them later in life, but reading this graphic testimony made me realise how much people I interact with at church and elsewhere may have suffered earlier in their lives and are still carrying those burdens each time I meet with them.

So, I will give this book away to friends and hope it will open the door to fruitful conversations as we help each other towards heaven, just as John Wyatt helped me with this little book.



Talking about Death A pastoral guide Susan Walker

- Canterbury Press, 2022, £9.50, 128pp, ISBN: 9781786224637
- Reviewed by **David Smithard**, Consultant in Geriatric Medicine at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, Visiting Professor at the University of Greenwich & Triple Helix Editor

Susan Walker is a former hospice chaplain and a minister in the United Reformed Church. Her writing is not heavy on theology yet has enough to provide some answers and raise more questions. Walker starts off by discussing the difficulties associated with talking about death. Like Andrew Ferguson a decade or so ago, she understands that death is as taboo today as was sex in Victorian times. She quotes Leonardo da Vinci 'While I thought I was learning to live I have been learning how to die'

Walker discusses the Christian approach to death, commenting that, despite the acknowledgment of eternal life and that death is not the end, many Christians want death postponed as long as possible. In the



Cut to the Soul Sarah Louise Bedford

- CMF & Integritas, 2023, £10, 158pp, ISBN: 9781789728446
- Reviewed by **John Hindley**, an elder at Broadgrace Church in Coltishall, Norfolk, and author of several books, including *Serving without Sinking*.

In her preface, Sarah Louise expresses her hope that this book will be helpful – practically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is!

I do not self-harm, but as a pastor and friend I know those who have and do. I have found *Cut to the Soul* helpful in my own faith but also in giving me insight and real help in walking with those who self-harm. By providing honest and straightforward

last chapter, Walker comments 'I have always found the words of Jesus on the cross to the man being crucified beside Him a tremendous comfort and inspiration: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise!"'

I enjoyed this book. It was helpful, statements supported, where needed, by evidence, and an easy read.



Notes on Blindness A journey through the dark John M Hull

- Profile Books; Welcome Collection, 2017, £8.32, 240pp, ISBN: 9781781258590
- Reviewed by **David Smithard**, Consultant in Geriatric Medicine at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, Visiting Professor at the University of Greenwich & Triple Helix Editor

John Hull was an academic and professor in theology and religious education at the University of Birmingham. He was registered blind in 1980 and by the summer of 1983, he was totally blind. This book, initially published by SPCK under the title *Touching the Rock*, details Hull's experience of blindness, his coming to terms with his disability, and the way blindness alters the visually impaired or blind person's perception of the world and

insights into her own journey, coupled with a feast of wisdom, truth, and care from the Bible, Sarah Louise has equipped me to better serve others.

She has also given me a book I will give and commend without hesitation to those who are self-harming or who are trying to navigate this confusing, hidden, and dark world with those who are. This is not only because of the deep and accessible content of the book, but also because of its tone.

This book is kind. Written by a kind author, she reflects the kindness of Jesus Christ. Such gentle kindness will make this book a source of healing and hope to Christians who are self-harming and, wonderfully, to those of other faiths or none. Here is an offer of hope, peace, and wholeness. If you are reading this short review, please read this book!

time. It also explores the sighted person's perceptions of the visually impaired.

Hull explains that the blind person, being unable to pick up the visual clues that sight provides, 'sees' the world through other senses: touch, hearing, and a strong reliance on concentration and memory.

Yet at the same time, Hull's faith in God was undiminished. His response to people telling him that God would heal him are a joy to read, including one episode on a station where a stranger offered healing; his reply was that he was healed but his 'sight did not work'. It ended up with Hull providing money so that the stranger could buy a gift for his daughter.

Hull died in 2015 from pneumonia following a fall at the age of 80. John Hull was a significant figure in the academic world of religious education. A book worth reading to gain an understanding of one person's struggle with disability. Not written from a victim's stance, more from someone facing a struggle and coming to terms with life's situation. ●