



Care Across Cultures
Communicating well with our ethnic patients
Robin Fisher

- New Generation Publishing, 2020, £8, 114pp, ISBN: 9781800319752
- Reviewed by **Steve Fouch**, CMF Head of Communications



Pregnancy and Abortion
A practical guide to making decisions
Houghton MH, Luthy E, Fidler C

- Grace & Down, 2020, £9.99, 265pp, ISBN: 9781912863198
- Reviewed by **Laurence Crutchlow**, a GP and CMF's Associate Head of Student Ministries – a version of this review appeared in the June 2021 edition of *Nucleus*



Jennifer
a life precious to God
Karen S Palmer

- Instant Apostle, 2020, £8.99, 123pp, ISBN: 9781912726271
- Reviewed by **Sarah Germain**, Medical Writer and former Specialist Registrar in Obstetric Medicine

There are three traps that any book on cross-cultural communication can easily fall into. The first is 'othering' those from a different culture, making the reader see them as somewhat outside the norm. The second is the assumption that the readers are all from the same culture as the author and therefore share the same perspectives and views. The last pitfall is to express the idea (even unintentionally) that every culture is monolithic and that all people from a given ethnic background are tied into it in the same way and to the same degree – all Americans say this, all Germans believe that etc.

The author largely avoids all these pitfalls, recognising that his readers will be from multiple cultural backgrounds. He even does some reverse anthropology in places, seeking to give insights into British culture for non-UK trained professionals. He also admits from the start that this is no more than a primer. It's a starting point to help the health professional avoid making assumptions. He aims to help us understand the questions and different values to consider when working with patients whose cultural backgrounds may be different from our own.

While some generalisations in the book are unavoidable, Fisher does his best to get inside the values and perspectives of different cultures in the healthcare setting without stereotyping. While not an academic treatise on world views and cultural assumptions, the book does a good job of opening up the value systems that may, at times, clash with NHS culture. Furthermore, Fisher is clear that many people (especially second and third-generation immigrants) live readily across these cultural boundaries and can be allies as 'cultural translators'.

Many younger health professionals will have done some cross-cultural training in their student years. This book will still be a helpful little refresher or starting point.

How can we navigate the minefield of evidence around the effects of abortion? Challenging enough for any health professional, let alone the teenager with an unexpected pregnancy, or the counsellor with limited medical background trying to help her work this through.

Drawing together the evidence in a way that is accessible to all these groups, this book is divided into three sections. The first deals with how decisions about an unplanned pregnancy are made. The next deals with the three fundamental options in this situation (parenting, adoption, or abortion). The final section tackles some of the more complex and controversial areas, including the effect of abortion on mental health, future fertility, premature birth, breast cancer, and mortality. Appendices give a brief overview of the positions of major religions on abortion, and link to a host of mainly web-based resources offering help.

The authors all bring considerable experience to this field, which shows through particularly in the first section of the book; the tools and exercises suggested would be very helpful either to a patient thinking through a decision independently, or to a healthcare professional supporting them. I can see this being helpful in my own work as a GP, although consultations where someone is genuinely weighing up a decision about an unwanted pregnancy are increasingly rare. But it is also likely to help if we have to deal personally with someone close to us facing the challenge of an unplanned pregnancy.

The layout is straightforward and clear, and the language largely accessible to the educated layperson and avoids the angry rhetoric or condemnatory language that can be so unhelpful when discussing this sensitive subject. The book is also well referenced. This is particularly helpful for the more sceptical reader who may want to check the source of figures on more controversial topics.

Many books seek to describe the grief process and offer advice from a theological, medical, or psychological point of view. In contrast, Karen Palmer offers her very personal story as the mother of a particular baby girl, Jennifer, who died a few hours after birth. Yet, she also powerfully brings to that moving testimony her insight as a doctor and her faith as a Christian.

Karen and her husband Gordon discovered during pregnancy that their eagerly awaited first child had multiple abnormalities, but they decided not to terminate and to carry on with the pregnancy. Based on her diary entries from that time and supportive letters from friends and family, Karen interweaves the story of Jennifer's life with insights into a good and faithful God who considers every life precious to him. She can bear witness that he loves us and wants to be intimately involved in our lives.

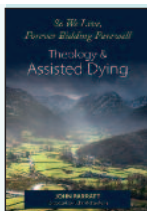
Gordon reflects that they may never be able to explain why this had to happen to them, but they could testify to the lasting good that has come out of this personal tragedy. Jennifer was loved by many and touched numerous lives, even in her short life.

I recommend this book to anyone facing the loss of a baby or walking alongside those who are. John Bell (Iona Community), who dedicated his 'A Cradling Song' to Jennifer, describes the testimony of faith that shines through the Palmers' experience: *'faith is not an insurance policy against disaster, but the means by which we can walk through the darkest of valleys and believe that there will yet be light'*.



Dancing with Wisdom
A Sacred Quest to Restore Meaning, Purpose and Fun to Your Life and Work
 Sunil K Raheja

- Author Academy Elite, 2021, £14.99, 248pp, ISBN: 9781647463465
- Reviewed by **Steve Fouch**, CMF Head of Communications



So We Live, Forever Bidding Farewell
Theology & Assisted Dying
 John Parratt

- Sacristy Press, 2020, £3, 130pp, ISBN: 9781789591095
- Reviewed by **David Smithard**, a consultant geriatrician, and *Triple Helix* editor



Wrestling With My Thoughts
A doctor with severe mental illness discovers strength
 Sharon Hastings

- IVP, 2020, £9.99, 208pp, ISBN: 9781789740882
- Reviewed by **Ruth Eardley**, a GP in Market Harborough

'Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?' – T S Eliot.

The gap between our highly informed, data-saturated lives and living genuine, wise, and authentic lives has driven more and more people to seek wisdom from different sources. It has fuelled the massive popularity of authors like Jordan Peterson or the dive back into the ancient philosophy of the Stoics.

Raheja takes us on a different course. Looking at the complexities and challenges to living aright in the modern world, he leads us, unapologetically, back to biblical wisdom. Drawing from his experience as a psychiatrist, and his own, often painful life experiences, he lays bare the futility of much modern thought.

The problem is that we look for quick fixes and simple rules for living that can set things right. But these superficial solutions cannot deliver the goods. Instead, delving first into the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures and then into the New Testament, Raheja brings us back to the root of wisdom – the living God, whose very creative nature is wisdom. If we are to live aright, he argues, it is only through the gospel of Jesus, the foolishness of the cross, and a profound, day-by-day walk with the risen Christ, that we may find true wisdom by which to live.

A book you could easily put in the hands of a colleague or friend seeking wisdom, this is also a clear exposition of the gospel and why it makes sense of the modern world like nothing else.

John Richardson (Bishop of Portsmouth 1994–2002) comments that this *'...book sets out clearly and brilliantly the way...we should be beginning to think'*.

When I accepted the offer to review this small tome, I expected it to examine the theology surrounding assisted dying. Sadly, the book does not live up to this, nor to the eulogy offered by Richardson. I was left baffled and, at times, exasperated.

John Parratt has written this book to support the assisted dying cause. I struggled to understand the angle from which he was approaching this. Was it Christian or was it not? I finally came down against it being either a Christian or a medical approach. In fact, he dismisses arguments put forward by thinkers such as John Wyatt as *'shallow and unsubstantiated'*, showing neither biblical nor theological rigour.

When the author discusses pain, his main focus is on physical pain. He barely acknowledges spiritual pain, psychological pain, and the pain of separation or despair. Consequently, he is at a loss as to how arguments for improved palliative care can be sustained.

Parratt also confuses martyrdom with suicide, rather than acknowledging that the loss of life in defence of one's faith is an act of courage rather akin to the defence of one's colleagues in war despite overwhelming odds.

To me, this book is written as a personal opinion, selectively referencing Scripture to support his arguments. It is not a dispassionate view of the facts and lacks theological rigour.

Sharon Hastings sang her heart out at her baptism. She was a medical student, and she was going to devote her life to God and the service of others. Within three years, she was detained in a psychiatric hospital and denied a licence to practice despite passing her finals. This is Sharon's story, grippingly told with desperate scenes, terrifying hallucinations, hilarious conversations (in her manic phase) and a surprisingly touching ending. No spoilers here!

As her doctors struggle to pinpoint a diagnosis, Sharon lurches from deep despair to florid psychosis. Hijacked by the additional torment of an eating disorder, suicidal urges and a manic episode that sees her building a seven-foot snowman called Trevor, Sharon is eventually diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. A student from her class at medical school (now a consultant) delivers the anaesthetic for her electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). *'I recognise him immediately...Consultant anaesthetist, psychiatric patient. How our paths have diverged.'* (p158)

Sharon openly sets forth her suffering. She talks about her struggle with shame and grief over the change in her prospects. Such plain speaking does much to dispel the stigma and fear surrounding this subject. Particularly useful are the highlighted factual 'inserts' that punctuate the text and explain mental illness and treatment straightforwardly. Examples include: 'What exactly is a psychiatrist?' 'Should a Christian have CBT?' 'What are antidepressants and when are they helpful?'

God seems distant for much of the story, but there is a lovely reflection on his power at the end. Verses of Scripture proved precious to Sharon, and there is even a list of things to be thankful for. The appendices (FAQ & Contacts & Resources) are brief but helpful. Overall, this is an easy-to-read eye-opener that will benefit pastoral teams and sufferers alike.