REVIEWS



A CHILD DIES: A PORTRAIT OF FAMILY GRIEF

J. H. Arnold & P. B. Gemma, Aspen Publications, Rockville, Maryland & London, 1983.

Two American nurses, one working in a babies' hospital and the other counselling parents losing an infant through Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) have written a compassionate, moving and helpful "portrait of family grief". They draw abundantly on literature and art for, as they say: "It seemed that much of the clinical literature on parental bereavement did not adequately convey the intensity and depth of feelings experienced on the death of a child".

The authors then proceed to refute this by themselves writing prose which captures the unique yet universal experiences of bereaved parents and siblings. Here they are writing about surviving sibling responses. "A child can continue about the business of play and work without the incumbrance of constant, unrelenting grief" (p117) or "What of the angry thoughts and wishes provoked by the sick child in a moment of teasing or rage? What of the hostile acts that may in fact have contributed to a sibling's death?" (p116).

Always adopting a family perspective, we learn of the experience of losing an infant, a young child, an adolescent, an adult child and a sibling. The last two chapters are on the therapeutic use of self and working with bereaved families. The early chapters will be helpful to some bereaved parents to read, the latter two of immense help to all who counsel the bereaved. Although the first chapters are useful to counsellors as well, it is doubtful if the latter ones meet the needs of bereaved parents. I suggest that the earlier chapters could be reprinted as separate pamphlets to give to parents.

I have not done justice to the illustrations and the poems, all carefully chosen and apt, and many new to me. Particularly interesting are the posthumous mourning portraits popular in 19th century America—the dead child, painted as in life, with her parents in mourning clothes in their home setting (p24), certainly an effective way of expressing grief and enabling mourning to occur. And this beautiful poem from 11th century China:—

On the Death of a New-born Child

The flowers in bud on the trees
Are pure like this dead child
The East wind will not let them last.
It will blow them into blossom.
And at last into the earth.
It is the same with this beautiful life
which was so dear to me.
While his mother is weeping tears of blood
Her breasts are still filling with milk.

Dr. DORA BLACK

IMMORTALITY OR EXTINCTION?

Paul and Linda Badham, SPCK. 1984. £3.95.

This is a tough but readable book. The first part considers the philosophical and theological status of the idea of life after death, and follows this with 'the naturalistic case for extinction'. The opening sentences of each of the chapters devoted to these topics presents the rather depressing negative theme of the first half of the book: 1. 'To many contemporary philosophers life after death is not merely unlikely, it is inconceivable'. 2. 'The philosophical problems we discussed in the last chapter, combined with the empirical difficulties we shall consider in the next, have led many Christian theologians to the conclusion that life after death is no longer a tenable belief'. 3. 'The strongest argument against our immortality is the fact that each of us "owns" a body with a datable origin, and our conscious personal self comes into being, grows and develops in the closest possible relationship to the body'.

In the second half of the book the authors turn to the substantial body of well attested evidence for the after-life which they consider cannot simply be brushed aside, most notably evidence from near-death experiences, but also from psychical research and claimed memories of former lives. Finally the authors turns for evidence to the experience of entering into a living relationship with God and trusting in the reality of that fellowship against the force of death, as found widely in many religions and notably among Christians. The book ends 'To many this will seem an exceedingly frail foundation on which to build so momentous a claim. But for those to whom God is a reality, no basis could be more secure.'

Sometimes I think the authors are perhaps over-impressed with what they call the 'naturalistic' case, which is in effect the positivist case. They might have called in evidence many advances in science and philosophy during the last ten years which have eroded the Enlightenment world-view, that tends to squeeze out the possibility of life after death. However they do, rightly, berate a number of modern theologians for the various, often bizarre, ways in which they entirely re-interpret the word 'resurrection' as found in the Bible.

The book is a revised version of the book of the same title which appeared in 1982. For those who want to have a tough think about the issues raised in the title and to have a battery of further reading, it is highly recommended.

JOHN M. TODD
Writer & Publisher

FUNERALS AND MINISTRY TO THE BEREAVED: A Handbook of Funeral Practices & Procedures.

CIO Publishing, Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3NZ. 1985. £2.00.

Funerals & Ministry to the Bereaved is a 34 page booklet, edited by Canon Norman Autton, the fruit of 5 years' work by the ecumenical Joint Group on Funeral Services. All the full members of the Joint Group are ordained, but there are two lay observers, one each from the Church Commissioners and the Churches Main Committee. The Group has consulted the professional associations involved in the arranging of funerals and memorials, and representatives of voluntary organisations concerned with the bereaved.

The booklet is believed to be the first of its kind. Produced out of ecumenical discussion, it covers issues otherwise spread through several publications. There are sections on the role and choice of minister and funeral director; on the design, furnishings and equipment of chapels at crematoria, also showing sensitivity to the needs of those who hold a faith other than Christianity, or no formal faith at all; and valuable information on procedures when death occurs abroad or bodies are donated for research.

There are useful lists of professional organisations involved in funerals, voluntary organisations that help the bereaved, and a guide to further reading. The launching conference stressed the importance of clergy and ministers having such information to encourage co-operation and referrals.

The booklet is about practices and precedures, and the "Ministry to the Bereaved" part of its title is confined to these as they affect the funeral. There is no attempt to suggest model orders of service, nor comment in detail on pastoral care.

Those involved in conducting and arranging funerals and those who support the bereaved through them will find it a very useful aid in improving practices and care. Its real value, however, probably lies in its potential to increase co-operation and communication between all those involved in one of the most significant things we do, assisting bereaved people put to rest the body of someone they love and will miss.

DEREK NUTTALL

FATHERHOOD

Brian Jackson. Allen & Unwin. 1984. £9.95.

Brian Jackson, always a seminal thinker, interviewed a hundred first-time fathers at length, to ascertain their views about their new rôle, and then developed his own ideas on the subject from what they told him. He excluded fathers bringing up children on their own, whether divorced or widowed; he just wanted to study fairly normal experiences.

And yet the book seems to be of great potential interest to widowed fathers who are trying to thrash out how to be mum as well as dad. Some of the insights will stir up precious memories of closeness at the time of a birth. But the book is full of possibilities as to what fatherhood could entail, of how to increase communication and tenderness, and how to find positive fascination in the development of children. There may not be anyone very close to share this with, but surely a Cruse Parents' Circle could provide this facility to some extent.

The book will obviously not hold the same potential for newly widowed mothers, but only underscore the immensity of the gap at home.

This was Brian's last book, finished just before his untimely death. The knowledge that his family (and to a much more diluted extent, all of us) have lost him pervades every page as one reads. Yet surely his epitaph must be that few contemporaries have done so much in a short life to change our thinking and our institutions in a more enlightened direction.

AGNES WHITAKER

Correction: In Bereavement Care, Vol. III, 3, Mrs. Reba Bhaduri, (who wrote the article *Approach to Loss & Grief: A Hindu Philosophical Perspective*) was described as Ph.D. In fact Mrs. Bhaduri is currently studying for a doctorate.