REVIEWS



ON CHILDREN AND DEATH
Elizabeth Küb'er-Ross, Collier Macmillan, 1984, £12.50.

Dr. Kübler-Ross made her reputation with her book on **Death and Dying.** How sad it will be if she loses her reputation as a result of views expressed in **On Children and Death.** In he· first book, her great contribution was to overcome the phobic avoidance of death and dying that appeared to have become common in society as a whole, and particularly in increasingly technological hospital practice of medicine especially in the United States. She achieved this with a style that was enthusiastic, direct and anecdotal. These are qualities she brings to her present book. In addition howeve·, the enthusiasm is tinged with boastfulness and dogmatism; the directness is charged with a curious mixture of 'Grandmother's home-spun philosophy', spiritualism, and quasi-medical statements; while many of the anecdotes arise from group experience where previous events have been reconst ued in a highly charged atmosphere.

Does this matter? Is this harmful?

In order to answer these questions one has first of all to consider to whom the book is addressed. This does not seem to me to be a book for professionals, even allowing for t ansatlantic cultural differences. Apart from the first chapter, which is a letter to bereaved parents—the rest of the book causes me increasing concern about the development of Dr. Kübler-Ross's thinking. For example, she asserts that "our research" has revealed "beyond a shadow of doubt" that "those who make the transition . . . are not really dead". She also talks about the "clairvoyance" that children have of their impending death and encourages parents to look for "signs" of thei· children's clairvoyance. Furthermore, in a chapter describing how to prepare children for life, the reader is suddenly introduced to the theory of man being born with "five natural emotions" and consisting of "four quad ants", presumably Dr. Kübler-Ross's own theory of personality.

The text is a mixture of case-histories interspersed with statements of a quasi-medical kind and assertions that would be more appropriate in a cha ismatic prayer meeting. Case histories can be vivid and interesting and should increase and expand the experience of the reader. Unhappily these are not always used in a way which illuminates. Most worrying of all is the number of assertions unsuppo·ted with evidence and the total absence of reference to any reputable scientific research.

It seems to me that this book illustrates how very important it is to distinguish between powerful metaphors, and statements that have a basis in scientific thinking. Hunches derived from clinical experience need to be tested scientifically, rather than to be elaborated in the emotionally charged workshop with the bereaved, whe e crazy ideas can develop. Group analysts have always been aware of the dangers of homogeneous groups, where the whole group may produce a mad solution to a problem and the pressure to conform can be overwhelming.

After be eavement the need to deny loss and look for false solutions makes the bereaved prone to charismatic spiritual leaders and open to exploitation. The need to make sense of deeply disturbing and painful experiences such as the death of a child, particularly a murdered child or a child who commits suicide, may well inc ease this urge.

However, for those who have experienced the most appalling losses, clinging to some not altogether rational way of const·uing the experience may be temporarily necessary and more common than is generally appreciated. Perhaps we should ponder about the distinction between fanaticism, orthodox religion and psychoanalytic thinking. An important distinction should be made between the use of powerful metaphor in a theory of meaning, (which can be poetic or religious) and that same metaphor expressed as a statement, as if it were a theory of explanation. Karl Popper discussed this in his philosophy of science, in o·der that we should properly discriminate between scientific and non-scientific statements. But at another level, this distinction is what many people would make between sanity and madness. So for professionals, apart from the letter to bereaved parents, which contains good sense and uses mov'ng anecdotes and makes sensible points about the management of dying children and their siblings, this book seems to be a cautionary tale of misdi·ected enthusiasm. Perhaps if the book were written by a layman I could accept it at a personal and metaphorical level, but written by a professional I think it has left the professional rails.

The dust jacket says that Dr. Kübler-Ross speaks directly to the relatives of dying child·en. Clearly she writes with warmth and sincerity, but is it helpful to encourage parents to look for "signs" of their children's clairvoyance before death? Does this matter? Is this harmful? It seems to me that some people might find that Dr. Ross's conceptual system offers a tempora·y support, but overall it appears to be a complex defence used to avoid painful reality. Much more careful painstaking research of the quality of that of Beve ley Raphael needs to be done before we have evidence to support or repute many of the statements so glibly made in this book.

Popper, Karl. Conjectures and Reputations: The G·owth of Scientific Knowledge.
Raphael, Beverley. (1977) Archives of General Psychiatry: Volume 34, Pgs. 1450-1454.

VEIRA BAILEY
Consultant Child Psychiatrist

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS:
Pastoral Ministry through the Occasional Offices. Wesley Carr SPCK, London, 1985 In the 'New Library of Pastoral Care' series. £3.95.

In a text of 140 pages the section of concern to readers of C·use, that on funerals, occupies 21 pages. They are well worth reading, being full of practical wisdom, pastoral insight, sensitivity and a deep understanding of the bereavement situation. Neither the section nor the book sets out to deal with bereavement as such —this was ve y ably covered in this series by 'Letting Go: Caring for the Dying and the Bereaved' (1982) by Peter Speck and Ian Ainsworth-Smith. Canon Carr's choice of title for his book reflects the fact that all-too-often the clergy have but a brief encounter with people at three highly significant times in their lives, namely, at a bi·th, a death and a marriage.

The first half of the book is concerned with the theological and pastoral significance of the Occasional Services of which Baptism, Weddings and Funerals are the most commonly requested. In the second half these three are dealt with in detail in a concise and efficient manner. The section on Funerals is probably the most 'clergy orientated' but th·oughout the book there is an attempt to provide a wider perspective of ministry, involving both lay and ordained people

Although our society has to a great degree abandoned religious convictions and practice there remains a strong desire for a Funeral service involving a minister of religion. Mr. Carr sees the minister having a special role in that 'He articulates on behalf of people what they cannot at this moment manage for themselves' and 'he stands for them on a boundary where they feel at present unable to stand and to manage a process on their behalf'. Wisely he reminds us that each bereavement is a unique bereavement for each individual. A minister has a special responsibility in giving people permission to grieve, of helping them to acknowledge the fact that someone has died, accepting the fact that the bereavement process is lengthy and that all of us are mortal.

In the conduct of a Funeral Mr. Carr argues that the service must allow expression and time for reflection in three areas: thanksgiving, what the dead person meant to those bereaved, and the acknowledgement that we are all confronted with the reality of our own death. He notes clearly that Funerals are essentially for the living and that bereavement is the focal issue rather than death. He gives sound practical advice when he stresses that the minister must not collude with the denial that is a common feature in bereavement, nor make promises to visit in the future if these cannot be fulfilled. Whilst the minister brings his own spiritual insights and faith to bear on the situation this must be handled with care and integrity. In a ministry which rarely has much or any contact with the deceased immediately before death the minister's role is difficult but vital. He or she must remember that their ministration is initiated at a time of greatest shock, denial and numbness and people are unable to take much in at a Funeral. What often sticks in the mind is not what is said but rather the demeanour and attitude of the minister.

DAVID SMITH
Vicar St. Paul Penge
Chairman Beckenham & District Mind

COPING WITH DEATH IN THE FAMILY
Gerald Schnelderman, N. C. Press, Toronto, 1985 (2nd Edition) Paperback. No price stated.

"A death in the family should not mean the death of the family". With these words the author, a psychiatrist working in a children's hospital introduces this book, which he has written to help the family to cope with death. The book is divided into sections dealing with death in infancy, childhood, adolescence and with the loss of a parent, grandparent and spouse. Chapters on 'your own death" and "suicide" complete the work. It is not till the concluding chapter that the processes of grief are described and thus the previous chapters are sometimes confusing as they refer to stages of grief that are not fully explained. I found that this book, whilst con-

taining some very moving quotes from dying and bereaved people, was too pathology-oriented to be of comfort or real help to those for whom it was intended.

Most of the examples appeared to be drawn from the author's clinical psychotherapy practice so that few examples of well-functioning families are described. The message seems to be that without long-term individual professional (i.e. psychiatric) help, bereavement often leads to inability to lead a normal life. Very little attention is paid to other forms of available help—family therapy, self-help groups, voluntary organisations like Cruse (or the Canadian organisation Widow's Aid—which is only mentioned in passing as an activity which occupied one of his patients).

Two areas where I feel the book is positively and dangerously misleading are "your own death" and "suicide". In former chapters he talks about dying as a "lonely and painful experience". Dying is rarely painful and need not be lonely. To make such a statement in a book meant for dying patients and their families is unhelpful. In the chapter on suicide I looked in vain for a statement about the cause of suicide. Since in 90% of suicides, the individual is suffering from a serious mental illness (depression or schizophrenia) which impairs his judgement and distorts perceptions, this chapter is likely to induce considerable unmerited guilt in the relatives of a suicide as it tends to attribute rationality to suicidal behaviour.

All in all I cannot recommend this book to the dying and the bereaved but it may be of some help to those who counsel them because of the quotations. Disappointingly, the author does not address himself to helping the reader to achieve what he states he wishes to do: to prevent the death of a family when death strikes in the family.

DORA BLACK
Consultant Child Psychiatrist

DHSS/NAHA CONFERENCE ON CARE FOR THE DYING
Central Hall, Westminster, 3rd December, 1985

Extract from a report:

An important point was raised by the Rev. Tom Scott, Education Secretary for the National Society for Cancer Relief, when he stressed the need for educating neighbours and friends in coping with death and bereavement. The taboo that existed on death had meant a de-skilling of people. We need to help those who are personally involved with care of the dying, so that the total needs of the patient can be catered for: physical, social, spiritual, emotional. There is a need not only to face the reality of death but also to listen to the dying person and allow him to talk in the words and time that he wants. We may need to rediscover a language for this, and to recognise that our own personal involvement often leads to feelings of helplessness. Sadness, he said, is inevitable, but helplessness is a state which can be overcome. He felt we should work to obtain the professional maturity to be inactive when appropriate, to stand back and observe and allow the dying to take that last step of the journey in the confidence that all has been said and that all has been done.

Dame Cicely Saunders, who received a warm ovation, finally summed up the Conference re-emphasising that the Hospice movement provides the opportunity for people to give time and professional care to the dying. Its whole essence is to offer the dying the total care and support that they and their relatives need.

MONICA A. WHIPP
Senior Medical Social Worker,
Yeovil Hospitals

WIDOWED
Philip Jebb, St. Bede's, 1984. £3.35.

I received an invitation to review the new edition of this book a week after my brother died, so I read it with special interest. I found some of the chapters, and their concluding prayers, very helpful. Dom Philip Jebb obviously writes from first-hand pastoral experience. He is not afraid to spell out many of the practical and painful aspects of bereavement, and has some sound advice to offer.

He writes unequivocally—as a Christian to Christians, setting death within the context of Christian belief. This is good. But if a person's faith is not so robust, or is of a different Christian tradition from his own, I think there would be some large question marks over some of his assertions and assumptions. Sadly but inevitably these lessen the impact of his message.

The book is well produced, light to hold and with good print. It took me some time to get used to the style of writing which I did not always find easy: some sentences I had to read twice! But for the most part the subject matter was important enough to make me persevere.

May we hope that someone will produce a book for those of the bereaved who do not have quite such a strong conviction about life after death—which makes their bereavement perhaps even harder to bear. They may not be able to call themselves Christians, but they too are hungry for reassurance.

NIEL NYE
Archdeacon

A TRIBUTE

Agnes Whitaker was Publications Officer of Cruse and Managing Editor of **Bereavement Care** from Summer 1983 until her untimely death in January of this year. In that short time she saw it grow to become the foremost regular publication on Bereavement Counselling. Although already ill she attended the International Conference on Bereavement in Jerusalem in order to report on that important event.

She managed to ensure that neither Bereavement Care nor the other publications in her care ever became too clinical or too sentimental—a reflection of her own compassion and good sense. Her gentle and tactful guidance enabled her to handle the most recalcitrant of contributors and no one could doubt her genuine concern and commitment to the care of the bereaved.

Perhaps her greatest contribution was to draw together under one cover the compilation of writings whose title stands as her own best epitaph, "All in the End is Harvest".

C. M. PARKES

CRUSE ACADEMIC PAPERS

SUICIDE
Academic Paper No. 1 comprises a reprint of the article on *The Risk of Suicide following Bereavement* by Dr. C. Murray Parkes (originally published in **Bereavement Care,** Vol. 1, No. 1), together with A Review of the Literature on Bereavement following Suicide by Dr. S. Henley.

SUPERVISION
Academic Paper No. 2 is a reprint of the article on *Supervision and Consultant Care —Counselling the Counsellors* by Gill Parker, Family Therapist, from **Bereavement Care,** Vol. 1, No. 2.

BEREAVEMENT IN ISRAEL
Academic Paper No. 3 is an expanded version of the paper on *Bereavement in Israel from War, Holocaust & Terror,* given by Prof. Shamai Davidson to the 1983 Cruse Conference on Bereavement following Violence. *NEWLY PUBLISHED.*

GROWTH THROUGH LOSS
A Jungian View of Loss
Academic Paper No. 4 is developed from an address given at a Cruse Annual Conference by Dr. Rosemary Gordon, Training Analyst at the Society of Analytical Psychology, London. *NEWLY PUBLISHED.*

Cruse Academic Papers Nos. 1 & 2 are available at 70p each (plus 30p p & p) from Cruse House. Papers Nos. 3 & 4 cost £1.70 (plus 30p p & p).

Since our last issue, Cruse Branches have opened at:

DURHAM: Mrs. Jenny Brookes, 24 Neville Dale Terrace, Durham City DH1 4QG. Referrals to 0385 42313 (Mon.-Sat. 9-5).

FELIXSTOWE: Mrs. Audrey McCallum, 4 Croxton Close, Kirton, Ipswich, Suffolk. Referrals to Felixstowe 284649, 282023 or 272457.

WREXHAM: Mrs. Mary Scott, PSW, Maelor Hospital, Wrexham, Clwyd. Tel: Wrexham 253153.

There are Steering Committees currently working at:

Archway, Aylesbury & District, Biggleswade, Bradford, Chester-le-Street, Chesterfeld, Clacton-on-Sea, Croydon, Dartford, Dumbarton, Dundee, Rainham, Romford, Shrewsbury, South Suffolk, Stirling, Swindon, Thatcham, Wellingborough.

BEREAVEMENT CARE is published for all Cruse workers and others who wish to deepen their understanding of bereavement. It is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be lent, re-sold, reproduced in part or in entirety, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's consent.

The editors welcome advertisements and inserts, but do not necessarily associate themselves with the views of the advertisers, or books advertised.

Editorial Office: Cruse House,
126 Sheen Road,
Richmond,
Surrey TW9 1UR.

Editors: Colin Murray Parkes
MD DPM FRCPsych
Dora Black
MB ChB FRCPsych DPM

Cruse Director: Derek Nuttall
Information Officer: Barbara Pentreath