

Helplessness and Hope: Pastoral Care in Terminal Illness by Bruce D. Rumbold SCM
Press 1986 x + 147pp. £5.95 p/b

Rumbold sums up why it is difficult to appreciate the growing amount of literature written on death and dying: 'a person brings to dying the resources by which he has lived. If he has not found any particular means or purpose in living he is unlikely to find it in dying' (p. 66). Dying, for each of us, will be an individual and unique event. It is difficult to generalize from the particular. It follows that the resources each of us possess depend upon our class, our education, our spirituality or even on accident of geography. Hospice care is limited to a privileged few and time for and with patients in the National Health Service is at a premium. The book succeeds in giving an excellent overview of terminal care from a pastoral perspective. Its strength is in its honesty and realism borne out of a wealth of personal experience. Rumbold's reflections produce a well-argued and stimulating development of the issues and values in caring for the terminally ill.

The book starts by looking at terminal care today. His discussion of staff-patient relationships asks us to think again about communication in institutional health care; 'we need to find new ways of training professionals so that they can transcend the limitations of their institutional roles' (p. 17). Chapter 2 explores helplessness as a theme in helping. He discusses such issues as control of information; understanding expectations, behaviour and responses; and mutuality in relationships. He goes on to explore a variety of pastoral perspectives and the nature and content of hope in the face of death. In chapter 5 he investigates what may be said to be a good death, and this leads to a study of the ingredients of better terminal care and the relationship between professional and pastoral care. The appendix contains exercises for reflection on one's own death and the experience of loss, belief and personal power.

There are three areas that stimulate further thought. First, Rumbold reminds us of the fact that less than five per cent of cancer deaths take place in hospice programmes (p. 106). The challenge then is to find all ways in which hospice values and methodology can inform and penetrate existing systems of terminal care. 'It is not possible for hospices as largely charitable institutions to service a whole population: this can only be done through proper co-operation within the total health-care system' (p. 109)

Second, reading this book continues to remind us of how much we have to learn from the human sciences. Theology needs to take the sweep of information and wisdom from the human sciences seriously and learn ways in which we can integrate that learning in our practice. So often theology is divorced from our pastoral practice. 'The pastoral stance needs more flexibility and creativity' (p. 44). Our dogmatic theological insights frequently lack 'flexibility, sensitivity and relevance' (p. 43).

Third, although the theological input is good, particularly the reflection on hope (chapter 4) and the exploration of 'the servant' as a model for care (pp. 46-54), one might ask questions about the nature and use of language. How appropriate and meaningful and

liberating is this kind of language for people unfamiliar with the theological 'map'? What sort of images and stories enable people to make sense of their situation? How do we enable people to make the affirming connection between faith and experience? How important is it that people should come to faith? With these questions in mind I was surprised that Rumbold did not explore the reasons behind innocent suffering and the profound difficulty that that poses for faith.

The book ends with a series of positive challenges. I hope that all those involved in pastoral care will be able to find ways of responding to these challenges and stimulate new directions, more research and education and political action.

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