

A Dignified Dying, Hans Küng and Walter Jens (SCM Press 1995), 133 pp, £9.95 pbk

Sooner or later all of us have to face death. Do you ever consider how you will die or how much control we can have or should have over our deaths? This book is a very useful discussion of the range of issues that emerge from exploring the process of dying and, in particular, the question of voluntary euthanasia. The central argument of the book is that pain should not be regarded as God's will and that a case can be made for euthanasia in firmly defined circumstances. Walter Jens provides an excellent and insightful survey of dying scenes in literature and discusses the myth that modern medicine can alleviate all suffering. A doctor and lawyer add their perspectives to provide a comprehensive view of the issues in this area. In an epilogue written especially for this edition, Hans Küng launches a spirited critique of *Evangelium vitae*, the most recent papal encyclical on moral issues. Christians from all churches have a great deal to reflect on as they explore how their churches engage in moral thinking.

Any good piece of writing stimulates further thought and reflection. Two thoughts emerge from my engagement with the text. First, part of the problem of dying, from my perspective as a hospital chaplain, is the dominance of medical power and the medical model of health. Perhaps we need to empower ourselves to assert what we want from others, especially doctors, in our dying. There is a kind of security and arrogance in all professionalism. Some of this, in the case of doctors, is fed by our expectations of them and their knowledge base.

Second, I suspect that part of the challenge of embracing dying as a condition of living is the profound marginalization of the spiritual in our modern world. Some may die in pain because they have no language in which to articulate their pain, purpose and experience. Theology has failed to provide them with a framework in which living is understood and explored, and therefore dying celebrated and connected with. Put another way, we fail to appreciate what an alien language theology can be. If we embrace death and dying with courage and realism then there must be an attempt to recover the spiritual dimension of life.

James Woodward
Middleton, Warwickshire