

**'GOING FORTH: A practical and spiritual approach to dying and death'**, Bill Kirkpatrick, £10.95, D.L.T. 1997.

Parish life has many joys and difficulties. One of them is my monthly participation in the local crematorium duty rota! Part of the challenge of doing funerals with minimum contact with families is the desire to meet people's needs around death and bereavement. This is a privilege and an opportunity not altogether helped by the Anglican funeral liturgy. As a tool for pastoral care and creative connecting with where people are at, it fails. It is not surprising that many people are going elsewhere for their death ritual.

Bill Kirkpatrick is a wise and trusted guide in this area of our spiritual and emotional geography. He has produced a manual or resource book for anyone interested in thinking a little deeper about the meaning of death and life. It falls into three parts. The first is an exploration of the meaning of life and death and gives guidance on understanding the experiences of people from a very wide variety of backgrounds. The second is a substantial anthology of prayers, readings, blessings and songs that could be used to shape a funeral liturgy. The third is a directory of addresses for further information. While firmly rooted within the Christian tradition it also draws upon the spiritual wisdom of other faiths and world views. I am convinced that this book will change both thinking and practice in this crucial area of our feelings and experience.

One issue continues to puzzle and challenge me. All of this assumes a degree of competency in the articulation of experiences and feelings with words. It also rather assumes that certain types of language continue to have meaning and power in today's world. I believe that handling these to increasingly problematic areas of pastoral engagement, are some of the major challenges facing the relevance and power of communicating faith and hope in a world where there is so much fragmentation and spiritual pain. This book is an invaluable resource for such conversations into life and death that we need to dig a little deeper into the nature of those conversations at every possible level of our experience.

James Woodward  
Diocese of Birmingham