

study could be found wanting because of its limited locality, and the absence of faiths other than Christianity. Nevertheless their study supports the old adage that sometimes less is more. By focusing on one place, a huge amount of data is revealed that when compared with national and international surveys does indeed support the evidence from these wider fields. By embracing the holistic 'New Age' phenomenon, they offer insights of particular interest to those involved in healthcare – whether conventional or complementary. Whether these so-called holistic therapies are as spiritual as they are often perceived to be could have been explored a little more. The 'subjective turn' as it impacts upon conventional healthcare is also touched on – for example the difficulty of doctors and nurses who are themselves seeking the subjective approach. In a culture that demands more patient-centred care (itself a marker of the subjective turn), stresses and strains occur as they try to make this real in a healthcare system that is a bureaucratic 'iron cage'. This is a thoroughly insightful, informative and at times challenging read. Highly recommended.

Stephen Wright

Editor

10.1002/shi.13

God is Dead – Secularization in the West

By S Bruce

Oxford: Blackwell, 2002

ISBN 0 631 23275 3, £15.99

Books by sociologists about religion and spirituality can often be hard going for the non-sociologist. The language is sometimes impenetrable and the tendency to stand remote from the subject can create a lofty, indifferent stance that can be quite alienating. Bruce writes well and accessibly, although

there is still that tendency to examine the subject as if under a microscope – interesting but small and set apart from reality. In this book Bruce reveals little about his own spirituality, and there were times when I felt, 'yes, this is interesting, but spirituality is not just a theory, it is a practice'. I wonder if sociologists would sometimes produce deeper texts if they had plunged themselves into the subject matter more directly – not just observing for example a shamanic journey or prayer group, but actually experiencing. This reservation aside the book as a jolly good read. Bruce explores and holds to his basic paradigm that liberal, secular societies ultimately produce the decay of religion. Curiously, he is disinclined to judge or apportion blame although a chapter on New Age spirituality is particularly scathing, not to say savage. (I feel here that his reduction of New Age spirituality to self-development, crystals, aromatherapy and so on does not do justice to the theme. I agree that this is much of what the New Age has boiled down to in the popular mind, but there are deeper underpinnings – see for example David Spangler's writings on this theme.) He also writes of the 'Easternization' of the West as a factor – the influence of Eastern philosophies on Western religions – but I feel his analysis, based on Campbell's comparisons of Eastern and Western philosophies, is flawed. For example, the idea of the personal God who is over humans is not unique to the West, and the notions of the oneness of all, or of meditation as a tool to enlightenment, are not products of the East. There is little comfort here for the religionists, and despite the tendency to blame the decline of religion on New Ageisms, secularism, science or whatever, he comes down to the simple conclusion that people are simply becoming indifferent to it. It quite literally ceases to matter very much in their world, and increasing secularization is irreversible as the established religions and those who follow them die out – providing, as

the author says at the end, egalitarianism and diversity remain deeply embedded, 'where states remain sufficiently prosperous and stable'. These are quite heavy provisos; meanwhile, the spiritual and religious transformation of our culture continues apace, quite unknown to us in its destination, and perhaps to sociologists too. This book is challenging, informative, eminently readable and highly recommended to those with an interest in this subject.

Stephen Wright

Editor

10.1002/shi.12

Attending to the Fact — Staying with Dying

By Hilary Elfick and David Head

London: Jessica Kingsley, 2004

ISBN 1 84310 247 1, £9.95

This is an interesting book, written in poetry form. This form of writing can often be inspiring, but it can also make it difficult for the reader to interpret what is actually being said. I have to admit to being one of these people.

All the poems are based around the hospice environment, those in palliative care and the supposed taboo of death. The emphasis is on how the individuals who are the focus of the poems cope with these facts — impending death and the effect on their loved ones — as well as

discussing personal memories of the deceased from the authors' perspective.

Both authors have vast experience in the workings of the hospice — as a trustee and as a hospice chaplain working internationally in Death, Dying and Bereavement groups. They draw from their work and their memories, which are obviously very personal to them. Some of the work is very intimate, which could strike a chord with some readers, but may leave others wondering if they are intruding or cloud the actual meaning of the poem, because the nuances of the individual are alien to them. Maybe this is the general idea, to make the reader think about death and dying but not in a personal, intrusive way.

The poems are not supposed to put you in the comfort zone, indeed it seems they are penned to prise you out of this. Some are brutally honest, some soft and serene. The desperation of the subject matter is often evident.

Personally I found this very difficult to read and interpret, but I would generally not choose to pick up a poetry book. If poetry is your thing and you are willing to place yourself in the shoes of the authors and be taken on a ride that encompasses the whole emotional spectrum, then this book is an excellent read.

Babs Allton

Nurse Specialist Gynaecology Oncology

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To fall into spirituality is to fall into a larger pattern of reality, over which we have no control, and before which we stand astonished, mystified and even disorientated. However, we do not fall into nothingness or emptiness; we fall into relationship with a secret or invisible other.

David Tacey

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