

Book Reviews

Dignity and Dying: A Christian Appeal

John F. Kilner, Arlene B. Miller, and
Edmund D. Pellegrino, eds.

Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI,
1996, 256 pp., \$19

RECENT MEDICAL STUDIES SHOW THAT patients who have a strong spiritual view of life face sickness and death with greater peace and equanimity than those with no religious beliefs. Many believe these patients often experience reduced symptoms and even healing partly because of their spiritual values. And yet, public discourse about the controversial topics of death, dying, and euthanasia is characterized more by polemics, name-calling, and legal posturing than by serious reflection on faith, theology, and ethical principles. *Dignity and Dying* brings a much-needed religious perspective to one of the most contentious debates in healthcare.

Discussions that are too academic, removed from reality, or religiously or professionally narrow frequently limit moral discourse about euthanasia. This book has none of these limitations. Editors Kilner, Miller, and Pellegrino have gathered essays from Christian women and men committed to both the sanctity of life and the compassionate care of patients. The contributors include nurses, pastors, philosophers, and theologians from various Christian denominations.

Although the authors argue from a sound intellectual perspective, they use human experience as the basis of their thinking, having spent many years caring for sick and dying persons. An unapologetic Christian appraisal, this collection is "catholic" in the "all-inclusive" meaning of the word. Arguments presented and solutions proposed will be credible to and respected by non-Christians as well as the Christian audience for whom the book is intended.

Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner believed that true theological analysis must begin with one's experience of God, and likewise this book begins with reflections of a physician, nurse, and pastor caring for dying patients. Part 1 shows how contemporary notions of human rights and autonomy can lead to the erroneous belief that dying is a "right." The excellent essays include nurse-theologian Marsha Fowler's "Suffering" and Reformed theologian Allen Verhey's "Faithfulness in the Face of Death," which emphasizes a commitment to Christian virtue even in the face of life's most pressing exigencies.

Part 2 presents the ethical challenges that dying persons and their caregivers encounter. The authors use the best current scholarly resources to discuss such divisive topics as definition of death, forgoing treatment, and medical futility. In "Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide," Pellegrino recognizes that Christians may be at odds with popular opinion on this topic. A careful scholar, he declares that his response is philosophical rather than theological. He crafts a solid argument against euthanasia addressed to the Jack Kevoorkians of this world and to the persons who confront suffering and dying. Pellegrino eloquently argues for the need for Christians to assume a leading role in the public discourse on legalization of euthanasia.

Because the American debate about death and dying is within a broader world context, part 3 examines Nazi Germany's role in medicalized murder, analyzes Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, and explores the failure of the Dutch experience in attempting to regulate euthanasia. In "North American Law and Public Policy," Arthur Dyck contends that Christian beliefs are relevant, appropriate, and necessary to the shaping of American public policy.

In its final section the book goes beyond the philosophical arguments for or against euthanasia or clinical delin-

ation on when to forgo treatment. The Christian faith, it proposes, calls us to care for dying persons, reverencing each life until the moment of entry into new life. Examining alternatives (e.g., hospice, long-term care), parish nursing, and patient advocacy, the experienced contributors suggest compassionate, concrete options that dying persons, their families, and caregivers will find compelling, reassuring, and filled with hope.

Dignity and Dying is both accessible and scholarly. Researchers will find each chapter's well-documented endnotes invaluable as they explore the vast field of literature. The book will serve as an excellent resource for medical or nursing students as well as in theology or philosophy courses. Ethics committees will find its experienced-based arguments helpful for their continued educational development.

Religious persons must continue to bring their faith, intellectual tradition, and lived communal experience to influence the public debate on the moral issues surrounding end-of-life decisions. *Dignity and Dying* is a significant contribution to that discourse and deserves careful reading by those who confront these challenging issues daily.

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Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal

Rachel Naomi Remen

Riverhead Books, New York City, 1996,
378 pp., \$22.95

"IT IS ACTUALLY DIFFICULT TO EDIT life." With this comment, Rachel Naomi Remen makes it clear that in *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal* she is not attempting to compile an edited collection that logically reflects life. Her

purpose is to make readers live the stories she tells, whether they cry, laugh, or simply nod their heads at the real-life suffering and triumph they have felt in their own experience.

The book is organized into the sec-

tions of "Life Force," "Judgement," "Traps," "Freedom," "Opening the Heart," "Embracing Life," "Live and Help Live," "Knowing God," and finally "Mystery and Awe." Each of these spiritually focused themes is

explored through the powerful short stories. The presentation encourages the reader to approach and reflect on the book one story at a time, making it ideal for the busy professional. Each story in its own way helps call to mind the meaning behind the events that incrementally shape our lives. Each one connects us with one another, and each connection links us back to the human community.

In the foreword to this book, Dean Ornish captures Remen's main theme, that "life is not broken and does not need to be fixed; it needs to be savored and celebrated." As physician, philosopher, woman, and patient, the author teaches that life itself heals, that living is a blessing, and that each experience—however inexplicable, painful, or even hilarious—is woven into the tapestry of our lives. Remen indeed shows that telling stories can be a healing experience and that listening to them can be a unique source of healing as well.

Remen views life from many perspectives in her stories as she assumes the role of spiritual teacher. She takes a counselor's point of view, then that of an accomplished, well-trained physician. We learn much about the spirit and healing as we see life through the eyes of a patient with Crohn's disease, a chronic and often painful illness. Her varied viewpoints help us learn what makes us similar and what connects us.

This book can be appreciated by a wide audience, but it should be "must reading" for healthcare providers and others whose work involves them in the most significant events people face in life. Remen's stories will reconnect them to the human beings they serve. The book also will humble and inspire them in today's world, where both humility and inspiration are in short supply.

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BOOK BRIEFS

The Physician's Guide to Disease Management

James B. Couch, ed., Aspen Publishers, Inc., Gaithersburg, MD, 1997, 320 pp., \$49 (paperback)

Written for physicians, physician executives, managed care executives, and disease management executives, this volume covers both the concepts and practical applications of disease management. Discussions of disease management's framework—its knowledge base, practice guidelines, outcomes management, and information infrastructure—are followed by examples of its application in integrated delivery systems, managed care organizations, and pharmaceutical firms. Chapters also consider purchasers' perspectives and disease management as patient-centered care.

The Blues: A History of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield System

Robert Cunningham III and Robert M. Cunningham Jr., Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, IL, 1997, 328 pp., \$36

This first complete history of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield system tells the story of America's largest and oldest health insurer, from its beginnings in 1929—when an official at Baylor University in Texas introduced to teachers a plan to cover up to 21 days of hospital care for \$6 a year—to the

turbulent 1990s. Drawing on extensive company archives, the authors trace the development of the Blues' system and show how its management has pursued the goal of healthcare coverage over seven decades of dramatic social and economic change.

Change Drivers

Roy Ziegler, ed., American Hospital Publishing, Inc., Chicago, 1998, 240 pp., \$45

The contributors explain how information technology accelerates the transition to managed care and how it affects clinical and operational performance in the managed care environment. The emphasis is on business and clinical issues, flow analyses of managed care transactions, and applications systems planning and implementation. A case study of Mercy Healthcare Sacramento, a part of Catholic Healthcare West, shows how business success and dedication to service can be combined.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Choosing Life: A Dialogue on Evangelium Vitae, Kevin Wm. Wildes and Alan C. Mitchell, eds., Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 1997

Organ Procurement and Preservation for Transplantation, Luis H. Toledo-Pereyra, Landes Bioscience, Austin, TX, 1997