

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Children and Spirituality Searching For Meaning and Connectedness**

**Hyde, Brendan 2008**

**ISBN 978 1 84310 589 3**

**Jessica Kingsley Publishers London and Philadelphia**

**192 pages**

The area of children's spirituality is one of growing interest to many professionals. It is still a relatively 'young' topic with most of the available literature dating from the 1990's. Perhaps this is a reflection of changes made in the 1998 Education Reform Act which championed a holistic approach to a child's development which took into account not just their academic, but emotional, social and spiritual development, with a view to encouraging a more rounded individual.

Brendan Hyde, an Australian scholar, has identified the need for spiritual input and this is the area he discusses in his book 'Children and Spirituality'.

Hyde divides his book into two parts.

Part 1 'Preparing the Ground'

In the first part Hyde takes the reader through a grounding in work already done on Children's Spirituality. This includes 'Mapping the terrain', 'Research on the Spirituality of Childhood' and 'An approach to understanding the Expressions of Human Life'.

For anyone involved in the spiritual care of children much of the content will be familiar with no real surprises. For anyone just beginning in this area the content will be very useful indeed as it is a comprehensive overview, backed up with evidence of research to date. The section I found most useful and interesting was when Hyde details his research tools. Here we have details of how he asked questions, who he asked, how he used reflective journals and the credibility of his research. This section would be a helpful guide to anyone undertaking research.

Part 2 'The Characteristics of Children's Spirituality'

Here Hyde really begins to serve up the meat of his research.

Children use spirituality to help find out who they are, their place in the world and to empathise with others. To do these things we must allow them to use their own language, play, creativity and adults should be careful neither to 'lead them' nor 'correct' them.

Relating spirituality to their own experience gives each child a personal narrative which is a framework to make sense of the world.

Hyde defines these characteristics in the following terms:

- THE FELT SELF – based on the immediacy of experience
- INTEGRATING AWARENESS – attention to environment
- WEAVING THE THREADS OF MEANING
- SPIRITUAL QUESTING

These found together give the child a sense of self and place.

The author then goes on to look at what inhibits the development of Children's Spirituality, e.g. trivializing children's thoughts or feelings.

The final chapter looks at how the spiritual dimension of children's lives can be nurtured with practical ideas and actions.

Overall this is an interesting and well constructed consideration of the area of children's spirituality. As noted earlier the first part of the book would be most useful for those embarking on this work, the second part, of more interest to those already involved.

Hyde states at the outset that he intends to look at descriptions of, characteristics of and guidelines for

the spiritual development of children and he does seem to achieve these goals. In each section he summarises his thoughts 'in a nutshell' which is helpful to refer back to as the reader proceeds.

There are guidelines and practical suggestions for carers, parents, teachers and so on which are helpful and thought provoking.

Perhaps the major limitation is the small nature of the study group, 35 children over 3 locations, and the majority with Christian backgrounds. It may be a topic for his next study – to expand the faith base of the children and examine their reactions to spiritual dimensions. All in all an interesting read.

*Evelyn Cairns, Chaplain at Rachel House  
Children's Hospice, Kinross.*

**Speaking of Dying: a practical guide to using counselling skills in palliative care**

**Heyse-Moore L 2009**

**ISBN**

**Jessica Kingsley Publishers London and Philadelphia**

**192 pages**

The recently published SIGN 106 guideline on the control of pain in adults with cancer has a key section which highlights the importance of communication, relationship and spiritual issues. I am delighted about this because the longer I work within palliative care the more convinced I am that communication is at the heart of palliative care. Good communication enhances the therapeutic relationship and enables the delivery of quality spiritual care. This explains why if I were asked to draw together a reading list to introduce healthcare professionals to palliative care 'Speaking of Dying' would be one of the first books I would pencil in.

The motivation for the book comes from the author's lived experiences as a palliative care consultant and his awareness that communication, particularly around the time of death, is not something that everyone feels comfortable or confident about. As Colin Murray Parkes says in the foreword 'members of the caring profession need all the counselling skills that we can muster.'

Speaking of dying is a simple introductory guide to fundamental counselling skills. After a chapter outlining basic terminology Heyse-Moore explores

familiar issues such as meeting, attending, listening skills and psychological approaches to communication. Each chapter is brief yet has many triggers for reflection and is worth a read even for the most experienced practitioner. An example of this is how Heyse-Moore can break down essential elements to good listening to

- Focus
- Unhurriedness
- Interest
- Avoidance of judgement.

If every clinician were merely to start their day with this as a mantra then I am convinced the level of care would be enhanced.

There follows individual chapters which explore basic palliative care issues such as breaking bad news, working with emotions, euthanasia, family matters, spiritual distress, the sick psyche and staff support. Once more while much of the content will be familiar to the experienced clinician Heyse-Moore has an ability to offer a slightly new angle on familiar territory.

I particularly enjoyed his chapter on spiritual distress in which he says 'spiritual distress is about estrangement from the essence of our being' and puts flesh on this with the concepts of meaninglessness, anguish, duality and inner darkness. What is helpful is his tentative exploration of how clinicians may address spiritual distress and here he highlights the importance of presence, and communication, before introducing thoughts on visualisation, ritual and meditation.

'Speaking of Dying' is on the surface an easy read and very accessible to all healthcare professionals. And yet in the simplicity lie great truths about humanity and the challenge is to be able to integrate them in one's everyday practice.

'Speaking of Dying' is a task that many healthcare professionals are faced with, day in day out; many find this task challenging but after reading this book they will end up feeling less helpless, more confident and more skilled to communicate sensitively and wisely and be better companions on the way.

*Ian Stirling, Chaplain, Ayrshire Hospice, Ayr*

**Passionate Supervision**

**Edited by Robin Shohet 2008**

**ISBN 9781843105565**

**Jessica Kingsley Publishers London and Philadelphia**

**222 pages**

The authors of the ten essays in *Passionate Supervision* are all experienced supervisors from a variety of fields: social work, psychotherapy, dramatherapy, youth work, education and the like. The spiritual ethos of the Findhorn Foundation is woven throughout the contributions and the editor, Robin Shohet, lives in Findhorn. The writers are convinced, as are Healthcare Chaplains, of the importance of supervision and frame it as educative, mutual, open and creative: "an opportunity to keep growing, to feel listened to and understood, and challenged when we discover, as we must, our blind spots." (p13)

The contributors each reflect upon their supervisory practise through a lens that they are passionate about: for example, the 'Ah Ha' moment of transformation, the 'here and now' of mindfulness, psychodrama and fear and love in and beyond supervision. Some of the language and methodology was familiar to me from the work I do with my own supervisor but at other times I felt on foreign territory until I realised that psychotherapy was imbuing the practise of many of the writers. The essay I warmed to most was that by Joe Wilmot called 'The Born Again Supervisor.' He is new to the work of supervision and writes with a freshness and an honesty I liked: "I worry that I might be saying too much or too little; I worry that I'm telling stories because I like the sound of my own voice. I certainly worry about how much to share of myself since if I do share then who am I doing it for?" (p126)

This book will be of interest to anyone involved in supervision and reflective practise. In addition, because of its emphasis on the interaction of one person with another and the creative process of engagement at a significant level, it throws light on the nature of spiritual care and is relevant to all healthcare chaplains.

*Blair Robertson, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde*

**The Spiritual Dimension of Childhood**

**Kate Adams, Brendan Hyde and Richard Woolley 2008**

**ISBN 9781843106029**

**Jessica Kingsley Publishers London and Philadelphia**

**160 pages**

The authors argue that spirituality is an integral aspect of children's lives and one which adults often fail to recognise. They offer this book as a guide and resource for parents and professionals. The Introduction covers familiar ground to anyone working in healthcare chaplaincy – what is spirituality? A comprehensive overview of current thinking from the disciplines of psychology, biology and neurophysiology is given along with insights from mystic traditions and Eastern philosophies. It is an excellent introduction for those new to the subject and a valuable summary of the literature in this ever-expanding field of research.

The book is divided into three clear sections: Children's Voices; Children's Worlds; and Children's Lives. Every chapter concludes with a number of recommendations for recognising and nurturing children's spirituality.

Starting with the international legislation concerning hearing the child's voice the authors note that children's spirituality is mostly hidden in Western societies. Stories and examples are provided to illustrate how adults can recognise the spiritual experiences of children and create spaces for children to express these experiences if they wish to.

This book goes on to discuss how children can be encouraged to engage with and make sense of difficult and controversial issues; how they can be helped to develop respect for themselves and others. The spiritual experiences of children and the influences adults exert on children relating to death and dying, HIV/AIDS, and risk-taking behaviour are discussed. The authors ask "Do we avoid discussing complex issues [with children] in order to protect our own sensibilities or hide our lack of knowledge?"

This is a provocative book which challenges adults to think about the way we live our lives, our value systems, our economic, political, health and education systems, and the impact all of these have on

children's spirituality. Do we create and provide safe environments for children's spirituality to deepen and flourish. Do we deliberately or inadvertently diminish opportunities where children might express their spiritual experiences? What are the hidden messages in the ways we relate to children and young people in our homes, in schools and in our society?

This book concludes that children need to be affirmed, respected and listened to as spiritual people. They need safe spaces and opportunities in which to express and explore the spiritual dimension of their lives and it is up to the adults to create such spaces and opportunities, through their relationships with children at school, in hospital, at home and in the world at large. "Often children do not necessarily seek an answer when describing an experience which may be considered spiritual....Instead they often seek to be heard."

Whilst much of what is presented in this book will be familiar to healthcare chaplains, the stories, and illustrations of how to recognise children's spiritual experiences make it an invaluable resource for anyone working with children.

*Revd Carrie Upton, NHS Lothian*

**Silent Grief, Living in the Wake of Suicide**  
**Christopher Lukas and Henry M Seiden 2007**  
**ISBN 9781843108474**  
**Jessica Kingsley Publishers London and Philadelphia, 2nd Edition,**  
**220 pages**

This is a new edition of Lukas and Seiden's book using updated statistics and reflecting on the new climate in which some of the taboos of talking about suicide have been broken. In Scotland today the See Me Campaign, Choose Life and the HEAT targets have all raised awareness of the issue of suicide and suicide prevention.

For anyone working within mental health frontline services this book gives a valuable insight into the impact that suicide has on the friends, relatives and loved ones of those who die by their own hand. These stories form the first section of the book. In the second, the authors describe the way in which survivors deal with suicide as 'bargains' methods survivors have to carry on living, which are more

or less damaging to the survivor but each of which has the intention of making the pain more bearable.

The following bargains are identified; scapegoating, saying goodbye, guilt as punishment, cutting off, suicide, and running. From the statistics of how many relatives of suicides go on to take their own life it is clear that there is a higher risk of suicide amongst the family members and not necessarily directly at the time of the first death. It can be years later that a survivor fulfils their own 'script' to complete the same act.

The third section of the book is about more positive responses survivors choose to make in the aftermath of a suicide. Rites and rituals fall in this section, having a public funeral or a memorial service can be difficult for suicide survivors but is often beneficial. Getting help for oneself through talking, whether in formal talking therapies or not, is emphasised, and this culminates in the idea of coming to a place where the survivor can help others, thus giving to society. Finally there is hope, in the words of one contributor:

*I went through an awful lot of stages. I became very religious. I went to many different churches. I really looked hard to find a religion that pleased me. I think probably the Friends were the most meaningful for me, and it was not that I was going to them looking for some solace or meaning for his life and his death. It was more trying to find a way of life I guess and an ethical ethos by which to live... I think we've had a very, very happy life.*

*Janet Foggie, Mental Healthcare Chaplain, Dundee*

**Ageing, Disability and Spirituality : addressing the Challenge of Disability in Later Life**  
**Elizabeth MacKinlay (Ed) 2008**  
**Jessica Kingsley Publications**  
**ISBN 978 1 84310 584 8**  
**271 pages**

This collection of essays began with the preparation for the third national conference on ageing and spirituality which was hosted by the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies based in Canberra, Australia. It comprises the presentations and associated workshops that took place during the confer-

ence. The essays are organised so that they start with the theological and ethical issues that arise around ageing and disability and then move to the more practical issues. Elizabeth MacKinlay, the editor of the series and Professor at the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral studies, intends the book to be a testament to the possibilities of wellbeing in old age despite disability. The essays take on this issue in one way or another. They are a mixed bunch in terms of style and content but the whole book works well and there is something for everyone in this book. The essays are on the whole clear and well written. Some are anecdotal and written in the first person describing personal experiences of disability, others are more academic and write in the "eye of God" third person looking at the issues around disability. The authors include some of the key contemporary writers in this area.

In the context of an ageing population we are likely to experience more chronic illness and disability and we are less likely to have formal structures of church and religion to draw on as part of our process of understanding our meaning. The work of pastoral and spiritual care for the ageing disabled becomes essential and compelling. Many of us would shy away from working with such groups because of our own fears and lack of knowledge about the effect of disability. Dementia is an obvious example. This book shows, through

its essays, that there are ways to care and minister to people with dementia which do not rely on passivity on the part of those with dementia. It also shows that it is possible to support and walk with people with life long learning disabilities and learn much from them along the way. I found it a refreshing and perceptive collection of essays certainly worth a read. The key issues of "who is the disabled one"; the importance of building relationships and the idea of trust, truth and time as central to relationship struck me very forcibly.

One particular phrase has stayed with me from the essay by Christopher Newell. In itself a very angry essay, the phrase that shouts out to be heard is a quote from Bill Williams in his book "Naked before God". He writes from the perspective of a disabled person about the burden that disability seems to cause *others*, particularly in terms of the anxiety it sets up in able bodied people and the marginalisation of the disabled as a consequence of fear. As he writes, engrave this upon your forehead, if you would wish to do good

*Ministry is a non anxious presence*

*Harriet Mowat, Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Spirituality, Disability and Health, University of Aberdeen.*