

## BOOK REVIEWS

Meaningful Funerals: Meeting the theological and pastoral challenge in a post-modern era

Ewan Kelly 2008

ISBN 978-1-906286-14-9

Mowbray, London

212 pages

Funerals are important, a vital tool in allowing hope and purpose to be offered to grieving people in the devastation of their loss. Meaningful funerals are even more important, as bereaved people find some patterns which will allow them to begin to cope with a death which destabilises their normality and threatens their future. Skilled, sensitive and experienced practitioners who will work with the theological and pastoral challenges of such issues in a post-modern era are an essential part of these processes. Ewan Kelly's book is a major contribution to this area of thought, and should be essential reading for any who seek to work with new tools in building helpful structures for those whose religious and human edifices have all but collapsed.

The book is rooted in practice, and arises out of Ewan Kelly's work as a hospital chaplain in the neo-natal unit of one of Edinburgh's main teaching hospitals. He sensitively utilises the bereavement experiences lived through by a small cohort of parents whose babies have died *in-utero* to inform his reflections. How are grieving parents expected to make sense of the death of a child? But more pressingly for practitioners, how are grieving parents to make sense of the death of a child when they have no language through which to express their loss, no images within which to find a glimmer of understanding, and no rituals around which to build any meaning, purpose and hope.

The book is neither a theological treatise nor a hand-book for practitioners. Instead it interweaves theology and practice, and draws the reader into a reflective practice often lacking in pastoral ministry. It ably investigates the post-modern context and the need for ritual following death. It explores how modern cultural expressions interact with the eternal and unchanging patterns of grief. It offers insights into the spiritual care of bereaved people and meaningful pointers into what Ewan Kelly de-

scribes as the 'co-constructing of funerals.' This is an informative expression, for it holds in one phrase the nature of the exploration, not the Church saying through its pastors, 'I know what to do for you', but a pastor offering the Church's care with the approach, 'I can help you with this and we can work on it together', with the essential underpinning of integrity and a clear theological understanding which inform their practice.

The book is full of rich wisdom, sensitive insights and thoughtful reflections. And, most importantly, it has many stories, movingly told and helpfully heard.

David Lyall writes: 'The request to conduct funerals where... the bereaved... have little or no contact with religion is common. While this book is about funerals it is much more. It is a practical and theological resource for pastoral ministry.' Using the resource Ewan Kelly offers will be crucial to all who seek to make funeral rituals as important and helpful in a post-modern context as they surely need to be.

*Rev Tom Gordon, writer and trainer, and former hospice chaplain in Edinburgh.*

Listening to the Other. A new approach to counselling and listening skills

Caroline Brazier 2009

ISBN 978-1-84694-191-7

O Books (John Hunt Publishing) Winchester UK & Washington USA

266 pages

Counselling often gets a bad press - either because it is looked on as an unnecessary and unwanted professional intrusion into situations that should and could be responded to within the parameters of normal human interaction; or because it is considered to be devoid of skills and techniques that can and should be learned - in the area of 'I could do that,' so why offer counselling? Both of these responses are unfortunate and misguided, for they fail to grasp the reality that good counselling may often be what is required in a therapeutic environment and/or relationship in order to allow a client both to understand and deal with life-changing events. In addition, a negative

approach to counselling fails to appreciate its professionalism and the range of skills which might be offered.

This book does much to 'demythologise' counselling and the approaches which are inherent in its style and techniques. It sets itself in the context of active listening –when listening is properly and skilfully offered in a supportive relationship. It begins, therefore, where any of us who has a basic concern for the human condition and for those who need our help should be – willing to listen, and allowing that willingness to be the beginning of much positive support which can follow.

The book is divided into twelve sections – including wanting to listen, contexts, story and sequence, relationships, a non-judgemental approach, grief and loss, addiction and issues of faith. These sections take the reader through a programme of insight and development in a sequence which builds from initial concepts to more sophisticated ideas and methods. These sections – or 'sessions', as the writer describes them - can be utilised in individual study or as the basis of a group programme. The expectation is that each 'session' will take two to three hours, with exercises to explore the issues raised in the session. While each of the sessions is useful of itself, the book is clearly intended to work as a whole, and the systematic approach will hold the reader in an understandable learning-framework.

The book is intended for anyone who listens and wants to see this most basic of human responses to be the foundation on which more understanding and clarity can be built. It is immensely accessible, assumes no prior knowledge and experience and seeks not to bombard the reader with jargon and 'psychobabble'. At the same time it will be useful to counsellors, therapists and the wider range of the caring professionals who already have a solid base of skills. Throughout the book there is the thread of self-help, with the meditations and reflective exercises offering a valuable and inspirational spiritual resource for those of us in chaplaincy, for example.

If counselling is to be better understood, more accepted as a therapeutic tool, and offered in a professional fashion, this book will be of great assistance, and is a welcome addition to the infor-

mation available to all who care and listen to the needs of 'the other'.

*Rev Tom Gordon, writer and trainer, and former hospice chaplain in Edinburgh.*

Personality Disorder: The Definitive Reader  
Gwen Adshead & Caroline Jacobs 2009  
ISBN 978-184310-640-1  
Jessica Kingsley, London.  
278 pages.

This book is divided into three parts, these being, Theory: Aetiology and Psychopathology; Clinical Implications and Treatment and Management. Sixteen papers in all that easily live up to the book title's claim as being The Definitive Reader. All of the papers included are of a high quality and each section contains seminal works that in turn continue to assert their relevance in this contemporary context. As such the development in theory and practice of this complex disorder is available, possibly for the first time, in this, at times dense, but very readable and accessible, single volume.

Interest in personality disorder is increasing and specialist services are currently being developed. It is however fair to say that individuals with a personality disorder can be extremely challenging and frustrating to work with. This volume highlights these challenges but in a manner that had me reflecting on the reality of working with these individuals and my own personal reactions and responses. This book manages, like no other I have read on the subject, to highlight the suffering that is often invisible or certainly obscured by the challenge of managing often-baffling behaviours. This book then is important in that it illuminates the complexities and suffering associated with this disorder and in so doing, presents a challenge to the persistent negative reactions that this diagnosis often generates in those who are providing care. I believe that this book will be invaluable in provoking critical discussion in clinical settings.

While this collection of papers is an extremely useful starting point for any mental health professional working with individuals with personality disorder, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that it will become essential reading for practitioners, researchers and scholars alike. I work in a multi-disciplinary commu-

nity mental health team and this publication is set to become essential reading across the team.

*Roddy McKenzie is a CPN working with NHS Highland.*

Recovery from Depression Using the Narrative Approach. A Guide for Doctors, Complementary Therapists and Mental Health Professionals.

Damien Ridge 2009

ISBN 978-184310-575-6

Jessica Kingsley, London.

208 Pages

This book is most welcome for two discrete but inter-related reasons.

First and foremost 'narrative' has been colonised by academy-based researchers. The literature on narrative research is growing fast, becoming increasingly dense and perhaps even over-elaborate.

In utilising narrative as a research method however, there is a danger of missing a fundamental aspect of narrative that lies at its core. To put it simply, prior to any research use narrative had a therapeutic pedigree. This book is, I believe, an important contribution precisely because it makes a significant impact in respect of establishing the therapeutic potential of narrative. Using first-hand accounts it establishes in a subtle fashion the means by which

healthcare professionals can alter their focus from being exclusively 'case-history' based – vital but narrow – to a more expansive and potentially liberating 'life-history' approach.

Second, at a time when health care practitioners are obliged to reconsider their practices in the context of models advocating recovery, this book provides significant signposts as to what that practice might contain. It does so in a balanced and considered manner including as it does established medical (and other) interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, while giving equal space and time to emerging practices such as mindfulness activities and of course, narrative. The focus may be on recovery from depression, but this book illustrates approaches that clearly have multi-use potential across a broad spectrum of mental health problems.

This book should have broad appeal. The text is scholarly without being jargon laden and in this respect makes it accessible to others beyond the target audience of Doctors, Complementary Therapists and Mental Health Professionals to include self-help initiatives. I would strongly recommend its inclusion in the libraries of health care establishments and it should become indicative reading for a number of healthcare education programmes.

*Roddy McKenzie is a CPN working with NHS Highland.*