

BOOK REVIEW

John Humphrys with Sarah Jarvis. *The Welcome Visitor*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009. 270 pp.

This is an excellent book written for the thinking and educated layperson. Humphrys is a BBC journalist and Jarvis a UK physician (GP) who specializes in aging and palliative care. The book is written from the perspective of the British health care system, but deals with a subject that is globally relevant.

The “Welcome Visitor” is the process of dying. Anyone who expects to end life by dying should read this book. The book’s theme is basically “how to die well,” answering the question, “What is a good death?” Humphrys writes out of the perspective of having lost his father and young brother to a not so good death. Jarvis brings all her medical expertise to study the theme, and she does it in down-to-earth, everyday language. It is not an erudite scholarly book, nevertheless, scholars, budding theology students, and pastors would do well to read it, not just to understand how they will one day need to handle their dying, but also to help them help others who are dying.

In the process of discussing “What is a good death?” the authors deal with: guilt; is death delayable?; is death a medical failure?; families dealing with death; facing up to the reality of death (in a materialistic age of hedonism, in which passing pleasures are more important than facing life’s realities, but which seek to drown out the dark side of life); hope and consolation; preparation for dying; euthanasia; assisted suicide; who decides what to do when a terminally ill patient is on life support systems and in unbearable pain?; and palliative care.

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