

Book Reviews

James Woodward

Befriending Death

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'By Death, our sister, praised be,
From whom no one alive can flee',
sang Francis as death approached.

In this short book James Woodward sets out to rob Sister Death of the various disguises with which, in our ignorance, fear, denial and confusion, we have clothed her. The book itself occupies 75 pages - the remaining 46 consist of appendices and bibliography.

Ch.1 explores the theme; the reader is invited to participate by means of pondering questions, and doing a simple exercise. Ch.2 relates spirituality and dying. Ch.3 is perhaps the heart of the book and is about listening. Ch.4 - Living while Dying - is for those who live with the knowledge that they are near death. Ch.5 deals with preparation for and facing death, and concludes with an exercise. Ch.6 - Resources from the Tradition, centres on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ch.7 is practical - preparing for one's own funeral, and Ch.8 gives conclusions

This book pulls no punches, it calls a spade a spade. At the same time it is written with sensitivity, and the overall effect is to provide light and reassurance. Particularly valuable are the appendices - 'What to do after a death', and 'Information and resources'.

On the back cover we read that 'This book is addressed to the Christian reader'...This should include the multitudes for whom 'Christianity' is a faded memory, or a deeply buried and general apprehension, rather than a living faith - for they, too, as death approaches, stand in need of the help which this writer offers.

Anselm SSF