

its medieval predecessor established. The author though is overambitious in her advocacy of the hospice movement and what it can achieve, a more objective appraisal is needed.

The working group (of the Standing Sub Committee on Cancer) report on *National Terminal Care Policy, DHSS 1980*, though clearly influenced by the hospice movement gives a more balanced and objective analysis of its role in terminal care than does Stoddard. The care of the dying is shared between the primary health care team, the general hospital and the hospice/special care unit. The report stresses that terminal care informed by hospice principles should be linked to the other sectors and not be seen as in opposition to them. Doctors should not see the death of a patient as a failure, nor the end of his responsibility. What is primarily needed is the provision of high quality terminal care. The techniques (pioneered by hospices) already exist: the solution is enlightened professional attitudes.

Unlike Stoddard, the report suggests that it is not possible to identify one place as providing the best care for all patients; it very much depends on the individual's wishes and needs and those of his family and the facilities available. A major disadvantage of autonomous hospices is the separation of terminal from other aspects of care, and the report highlights a concern lest a new terminal care service (based on hospices) develops to interpose between the established care teams and their patients.

The report is not in favour of increasing the present number of hospices. The way forward is to 'encourage the dissemination of the principles of terminal care throughout the health service and develop an integrated system of care emphasizing co-ordination between the three sectors.' To achieve this aim a major emphasis is placed on giving adequate training in terminal care to health care professionals. However, changing established professional ideologies and practices is a complex and far from easy task. The committee members producing the report take an over-optimistic view of the capacity of education to bring about such change.

G. SPARKS

Huddersfield Polytechnic

Age Concern, *Claim to be Heard*, Age Concern, Mitcham, 1980, 32 pp. 90p. ISBN 0904502 945.

This report of the Age Concern Working Party on the role of religious organizations in the welfare of the elderly raises rather more hopes than it fulfils. In the preface it draws attention to the existence in the elderly of non-material needs, related to attitudes and values, and to their need 'to retain a valued place in society'. Although it does return to both themes later it does so very briefly and thereby misses an opportunity to begin the exploration of an area that is surely among the most neglected in the field of gerontology. I say 'begin' because though there is a growing realization that the elderly do have spiritual and emotional needs little attempt has yet been made to examine them closely.

The bulk of the report, and the whole of its companion handbook, *What*

Can We Do?, is taken up with a discussion of the practical measures that parishes and religious bodies can take to help the aged, both in their own congregations and in the larger community. The main and welcome thrust of the argument is on the importance of planned and corporate activity if resources are to be used to the full and care maintained. One of the organizational strengths of the churches (and whilst the report is written from a Judaeo-Christian stance it recognizes the growing importance of other religions in our society) is that they have an established network of small units which should, theoretically, make an ideal base for the discovery and supply of local needs. They often have, too, resources of plant and motivated personnel whose beliefs should generate a sensitivity to needs and a drive to see that they are met. Whilst, as the report points out, the elderly cannot be the sole object of these activities there is a sense in which, because they are often in danger of becoming isolated from both congregation and society, they may be seen as a particular responsibility: the honouring of parents comes second only to the worshipping of God in the Decalogue.

The handbook elaborates on some of the suggestions for action in the report and stress is placed on the need to integrate the church community and to give the older members roles in which they can contribute as well as receive. At the same time attention is drawn to that abiding problem of so many church groups, the existence of an 'old guard', often in control of whatever resources there are, who resist the 'intrusion' of new helpers and so ensure continuity only at the price of stagnation. The widespread existence of such cliques says something, of course, about the failure of both individuals and congregations to reflect upon their motives and aims and it is precisely this failure, at least in respect to aims, that seems to bedevil this report.

Though it clearly does not want the churches to be seen as a mere complement to the other statutory and voluntary bodies caring for the elderly the final impression is that that is what they may well become if they follow the prescriptions laid down, because their distinctive role is not adequately explored. Little attempt is made to expand upon the non-material needs of the elderly and yet we know, for instance, that many aged people ask such questions as 'why am I spared?' and 'what is the point of my living?' or 'why doesn't God take me?': not necessarily expressions of despair or depression but of genuine puzzlement (one is reminded of Jung's comment that the problems of his patients over forty were all essentially religious problems). We know, too, that many who care for the elderly themselves face questions about the purpose of old age in a modern society. These are matters that, for the believer, require theological reflection and they are receiving very little of it. In fact the report comments: 'Quite obviously the charitable role (of the churches) is not dominant. Religious bodies also exist for religious purposes. They define these for themselves and it is not for us to discuss the role of the churches and synagogues from any theological point of view'. This seems a curious reticence in a document devoted to the role of religious organizations especially when it goes on a few pages later to talk about their prophetic role and their influence upon the 'basic attitudes and mores of society'. Moreover this section also ends on an odd note: 'We consider that religious bodies have no role more important than this: the reinforcement of

these instinctive values and supporting those who seek to uphold them and put them into practice'. Shouldn't worship get at least a mention?

To be fair it does get a mention, once, as does prayer, but in neither case with specific reference to the elderly. Yet we do know that elderly believers often complain about not being able to pray, about feeling estranged from God and, in the face of much recent doctrinal and liturgical development, of hardly knowing what is going on around them either in church or in the wider context. Such questions are not confined to the elderly but they may have different meanings for them, just as loneliness in old age may be a different sort of experience from that met with in earlier life. We know comparatively little about these areas though they must surely represent needs for which religious bodies have a special responsibility.

One need to which the report does draw attention is for counselling in the face of bereavement and of one's own approaching death and it admits that this is a need that frequently goes unmet even in members of religious groups. Possibly the most important recommendation made is for the assumption of responsibility and the provision of training in this area.

Perhaps it would have been stretching their brief too much but given that they were looking at the role of religious organizations it is a pity that the Working Party did not take the opportunity to look at religious communities and the ways in which they cope with the needs of their older members. Apart from anything else they are renowned for their longevity and their experience might give some pointers to the spiritual care of the aged in the wider society.

The report makes a distinction between care offered to those within a particular religious group and those outside it and rightly stresses that religious bodies cannot confine themselves to the former. While this is undeniably true it is also reasonable for a religious body, within a particular tradition, to give particular attention to the religious needs of its members. By so doing it may help to generate answers to questions which may be asked, in other terms, by members of different faiths or by non-believers. This is part of the prophetic role of the churches to which the report draws attention. In this way a contribution may also be made to wider gerontological theory. It would, for instance, be interesting to see the religious concept of 'detachment' explored, together with the psycho-social conditions under which it develops, and related to the concept of 'disengagement' in gerontology. Perhaps such explorations lay outside the scope of the Working Party but I think it would have been useful if they had, at least, identified such areas for further consideration: it would have given more balance to a report which, in conjunction with the handbook, is certainly likely to be of great practical help to religious organizations planning to initiate, review or coordinate their care for the elderly.

W. M. TIDMARSH

Department of Applied Social Studies,
Sheffield Polytechnic