

Karen Speerstra and Herbert Anderson, *The Divine Art of Dying: How to Live Well While Dying* (Studio City, CA: Divine Arts, 2014), 268 pp.

In my professional development as a chaplain, I have been acutely aware of my own aversion to death. So, when I was asked to review *The Divine Art of Dying*, I admit that my initial aversion to facing death was not far below the surface. As I opened the book for the first time, I was also aware of the hope that it might assist my process of making peace with my own mortality.

What I discovered in *The Divine Art of Dying* is an artful, intelligent, and practical companion for those seeking to live well while dying or anyone caring for those who face this reality. Speerstra and Anderson start out by saying that this is not another end-of-life book; in fact, it is a book about living fully until the very end of our life. In the forward, T. S. Eliot is credited with saying that there are two possibilities in every life situation: “what are we going to do about it” and “how shall we behave toward this situation” (p. xv). With wisdom, poetry, humor, and depth, *The Divine Art of Dying* offers empowering options for some of life’s most difficult decisions.

There are many remarkable features to this profound work that make it truly accessible to patient and care provider alike. The book has three sections: Taking the Turn Toward Death, Orienting Toward Death, and Living Until We Die. Each chapter includes excerpts from Speerstra’s hospice journal and gives voice to her experience as a patient throughout her dying process. This is not the kind of book one picks up lightly, but these journal entries alone provide solace and community and help us connect to the patient experience and to our own life choices. Another feature in each chapter includes case examples from Anderson’s years in pastoral care that help the reader make connections to real life stories. These features are illustrative and work well together, helping to bring the reader closer to the patient experience.

Another remarkable feature is the inclusion of sidebars that the authors call Our Divine Human Virtues—the really good parts of us that “can’t be taught but can be nurtured and named” (p. xvii). This was a delightful surprise with relevance for those seeking to provide spiritual support to patients with an understanding of their resiliency.

Each chapter ends with a section called From the Caregiver’s Guidebook, which is exactly that—a guidebook for caregivers with practical tips on how to companion and care for someone choosing to live fully as they are

dying. The guidebook takes the view that care is for the whole family system and offers guidance in this process. As I finished reading, I realized that my own aversion to death had been quietly replaced by reverence and gratitude for the gift of living and for this book in bearing the treasures of living well.

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