

Book review

Holy Innocents: Grieving for the Death of a Baby

Margaret Sparshott
Austin & Macauley, 2009
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£8.99, paperback



Holy Innocents is an absorbing and instructive book tackling a difficult and emotive subject, the death of a baby. It is written with great insight and compassion. Sparshott is well placed, as an experienced neonatal nurse, to explain in medical and philosophical terms exactly what a baby is, from embryo to person, articulating the unique and primal relationship between mothers and babies. The reader is then introduced to the unthinkable outcome of a pregnancy.

The death of a baby can occur at any stage of pregnancy or after birth. *Holy Innocents* dedicates several chapters to the different losses, from abortion to

miscarriage, to stillbirth and neonatal death, sensitively recognising the impact of these traumatic events not only on the bereaved parents and families, but also on the health professionals who care for them. I was very moved by the author's own account of the withdrawal of care from a baby who had developed NEC. We are given a true insight into the feelings and emotions associated with the death of a baby through some well chosen and moving accounts from parents and family members.

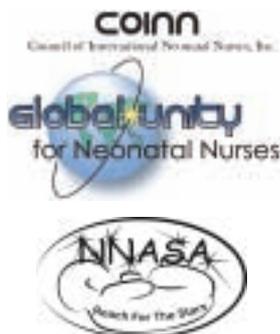
Sparshott has also dedicated two enlightening chapters to the spiritual aspects of life after death as practised by

the world religions. I am a befriender for bereaved parents in a multicultural city and I found these particularly illuminating. I know from experience that many parents who have suffered the trauma of the death of their baby derive much comfort from the rituals and ceremonies performed following their bereavement, even if they do not ally themselves to a particular religion.

Sparshott's extensive and comprehensive referencing serves to enhance this work and the appendices regarding care of a newborn baby are thorough and easily followed. Sparshott is an accomplished artist and has chosen some beautiful illustrations for this book. *Holy Innocents* would be an excellent addition to the academic library and a valuable resource for families affected by the death of a baby.

Julia Gray
Bereavement Support Team
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Death Society)

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