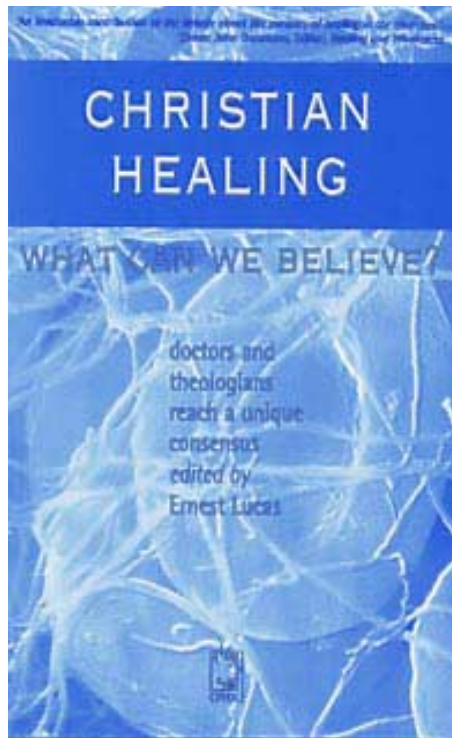


reviews:



Christian Healing - What Can We Believe?

Ed Ernest Lucas. SPCK, London. 1997. 202pp. £12.99 Pb.

There are many books on Christian healing. Most, alas, are superficial and unbalanced but this is more profound than most and addresses the fundamentals. It arose from meetings between Christian health professionals, pastoral workers, theologians and ethicists, coming from different traditions of the healing ministry.

Each chapter is written jointly by a doctor and a theologian and the headings give an idea of the book's scope: How are people healed to-day? - The relationship between the 'medical' and the 'spiritual' in healing. The Church's ministry of healing today. What is health? - Towards a Christian understanding. The significance of Jesus' healing ministry. Suffering. Psychiatry and religion. Growing old and dying.

In 'a Christian understanding' the authors emphasise that health is the gift of God and appropriate medical intervention, whether by drugs, surgery, vaccination or radiotherapy, simply improves the conditions for natural healing to occur. Several contributors deal with the important pastoral question: How should we pray for those who are ill? Services for prayer and healing are considered fully and helpfully.

The psychiatrist acknowledges the common Christian mistrust of psychiatry, and traces this to earlier psychiatrists' misunderstanding of religion, but gives evidence that the situation is

improving. He does not believe Christians should insist on seeing a Christian psychiatrist, and thinks any good psychiatrist should respect a patient's central religious belief.

Co-operation between health professionals and hospital chaplains is discussed, and in general, chaplains seem more open to it. The final chapter, on growing old and dying, is written jointly by a nurse who lectures in palliative care and a hospice chaplain, and expresses deep concern over the growing secularisation of care for the dying.

David Short

(Emeritus Professor of Clinical Medicine, Aberdeen University)

Treasures of Darkness - Facing the Problems of Personal Suffering

Jane Grayshon. Hodder and Stoughton, London. 1996. 150pp. £6.99 Pb.

'But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul' (Isaiah 38: 15). So speaks King Hezekiah after recovering from a near fatal illness over 2,500 years ago, and it seems Jane Grayshon's experience has been much the same. Following a ruptured appendix, she has since suffered repeated bouts of near fatal peritonitis, requiring numerous surgical interventions and several spells in ITU. She is a committed Christian, and like Hezekiah has had to face the truth that faith does not mean God will protect us from times of difficulty and pain. Often we speak of suffering as God's megaphone alerting unbelievers to his existence and their need of him. This book shows God using it to bring Christians to greater maturity, understanding and dependence on him.

Like Hezekiah, Jane can report that God 'has spoken to me' through experiences. Through poems, vivid descriptions of objects such as Epstein's sculpture of Jacob wrestling with the angel, and details from stories, she endeavours to share some of her insights. Being stripped of her independence by life-threatening illness left her with no option but to depend completely on God, clinging desperately to the truths that God is good, sovereign, and completely in control, even when circumstances would seem to scream the contrary. This has taught her to 'walk humbly' before the Lord, but she makes no attempts to glamorise the 'grim darkness' of her journey.

If you want something rigorous and scholarly on suffering, this is not the book for you. Nor would I recommend it to anyone unsure of the biblical truths of God's goodness and sovereignty, as Jane assumes belief in these. However, it does contain 'treasures' of illumination, both for Christians confronting suffering and for those who wish to avoid giving them glib answers.

Gill Matthews

(is a nurse and was a Cornhill Training Student at the time of writing this review)

Counselling in the Community - A Guide for the Local Church

Roger Altman, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne. 1996. 126pp. £6.99 Pb.

The author has worked in Social Services and in residential care for teenagers, setting up a residential retreat centre and latterly developing courses for training in Christian counselling. This extensive experience gives him ample authority to write this book.

It is informative and practical, with a list of do's and don't's and helpful examples of forms and processes. It is a must for anybody wishing to set up a Christian counselling centre or residential retreat - it is sobering that very few Christian groups who start with faith and vision are still going three years later with a good reputation within the church and the professions.

Chapters cover caring and counselling within the pastoral church setting and in the community, residential care, supervision, training, accreditation (including the role of the Association of Christian Counsellors), law and ethics, policies and procedures, and the place of feasibility studies and consultancies before projects begin. The book ends with a short summary and detailed appendices.

This is a very helpful tool for those wanting to set up counselling services in either pastoral or community settings. Although simple in its approach and fairly superficial, it gives a comprehensive grasp of what is involved. A good read which is easy to follow.

Mervyn Suffield

(Former GP, past Chairman of the Association of Christian Counsellors, and now Director of Trinity Care plc)

The Puzzle of Ethics

Peter Vardy & Paul Grosch. Fount paperbacks, London. 1994. 220pp. £7.99 Pb.

To attempt an overview of ethical puzzles in a short book is a major challenge. To encourage people to think for themselves, and understand and apply philosophical approaches to ethical decision-making is a greater challenge. The authors face these challenges and seek to involve people from the beginning with ethical statements that require justification, ranging from 'Sex before marriage is wrong' to 'Multinational companies that exploit tropical rain forests are evil'.

Asking Pilate's question 'What is truth?' they guide the reader through many different ethical answers, from Plato through Aquinas, Kant and Bentham to Macintyre. After briefly considering Buddhist ethics, they apply ethics to fields such as abortion, war and the environment. Each chapter encourages thought and ends with perceptive discussion questions.

The authors understand their field well, and are particularly good at exploring the views of Aquinas and at bringing to the fore the ideas of Alasdair Macintyre, but this reviewer felt

unsatisfied at the end. Perhaps this was the publisher's fault - expectations are raised inappropriately by statements on the back cover. Perhaps the chapters on different philosophers seemed to lack the coherence and development of other recent books. Perhaps it was because one is left asking why, of all approaches outside the Western tradition, Buddhism was chosen for special consideration: why not Islamic ethics or Hindu ethics?

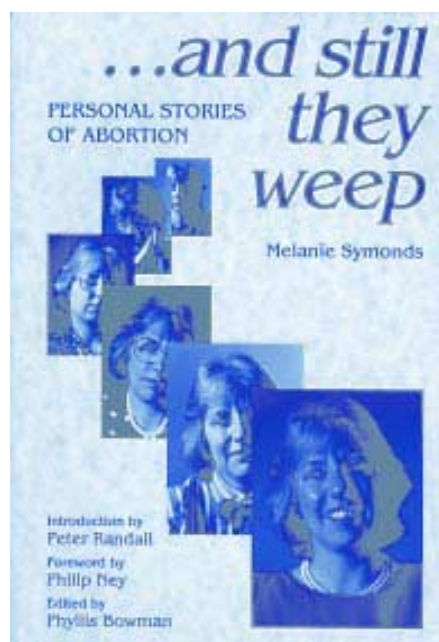
But perhaps most of all it was because of the apparent disjunction between theory and application. The 'theoretical' chapters do not really explore applications to specific issues, although there may be hints in the questions. The 'applied' chapters make some mention of earlier views but do not always tease out application or contrasts.

Health professionals in particular will be frustrated by the limited discussion of major medical issues, although the chapter on abortion does emphasise the 'personhood' debate.

The authors quote Macintyre that 'man (sic) is a teller of stories that aspire to truth'. Perhaps there is insufficient story-telling in this valiant attempt to get people thinking.

Carl Whitehouse

(Professor of Teaching Medicine in the Community, Manchester University)



'...and still they weep'

Melanie Symonds. SPUC Educational, London. 1996. 166pp. £8.99. Pb.

This powerful and moving book examines the effect that abortion can have on women and their families. Using 20 personal stories, it highlights some of the reasons women choose abortion, the psychological and physical consequences

of abortion, and possible effects on the lives of others. After 30 years of legalised abortion in the UK, women are beginning to speak out about the pain and emotional trauma that may have been hidden for a long time.

The personal stories are accompanied by poems and reflections written by the women themselves and there is a commentary on each situation from Philip Ney, a professor of psychiatry in Canada. He himself has concluded that 'abortion is the most deeply damaging trauma that can happen to any human'.

This book introduces us to 'Post Abortion Syndrome', and reveals the extent of the pain and distress experienced by post-abortion women from a variety of backgrounds and very different circumstances. A recent study published in the British Journal of Psychiatry estimated that 10% of women having abortions suffer PAS, and as we read these stories, a clear picture emerges of the huge emotional cost of abortion.

The book also outlines the painful process that leads to recovery and may be helpful therefore for those counselling post-abortion women. Whether closely involved or not, it is impossible not to be deeply moved by the stories in this book and it is difficult to disagree with the conclusion of Philip Ney.

Philip Clarke

(is a GP in Southampton and is active in CARE for Life)

Where do we go from here? The case for life beyond death

David Winter. Hodder & Stoughton, London. 1996. 112pp. £4.99 Pb.

This is my sort of book, not a theological or academic thesis, littered with footnotes or Bible references (though there are appendices), but undemanding, a book to be read rather than studied. Assuming some Christian knowledge, it is clearly developed, Bible based, and thought provoking.

How many of us can say we welcome death? As Christians we believe that in heaven there will be no more pain or suffering or tears, and we will be constantly in the presence of God. But there remains uneasiness, perhaps to do with fears of how we die and of bereavement, as well as with change and the unknown. Read this book. There is more evidence than you might have realised, and the prospect of heaven gets quite exciting!

Why do we exist? Is death the end? What is the soul? What about the resurrection of the body? There are the inevitable analogies with computer technology - hardware wearing out or becoming outdated, yet software going on forever - but helpfully blended with biblical truth and real life experiences. Scientific evidence may be lacking, but experience cannot be ignored. Bravely, Spiritualist experiences are mentioned (though seeking them is not encouraged), as are 'near-death' phenomena. A whole chapter is then devoted to the evidence for Christ's resurrection.

Who will get to heaven? Most religions believe the answer depends on divine choice and moral behaviour. For the Christian the key is our forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross. Only here did I find the author a little lenient, or maybe not . . .

What kind of body do we receive for our next existence? What is heaven like? No one knows, but 'the resurrection life has everything good from this earthly life, but without the things that make it earthbound, limited, and frustrating'. See you there!

Jean Maxwell

(Consultant in Palliative Medicine, St Francis Hospice, Romford)



readers' letters:

We intend all subsequent editions of *Triple Helix* to contain lively correspondence columns, and therefore welcome original letters for consideration for publication. They should have both Christian and healthcare content, should not normally exceed 250 words, and if accepted may have to be edited for length.

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