

## New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology

*Edited by David Atkinson and David Field*  
IVP 1995  
£32.00 Pb 918 pp  
ISBN 0 8308 1408 6

The trouble with ethics is that it has acquired a spurious shell of academic protection and an associated scholastic mystique. It is a subject supported by specialist journals, statutory committees, and an obligatory slot in the medical curriculum. We now have professional ethicists to advise us and teach our students. At one level this is right: we need every help we can in making decisions which affect the quality and even the existence of life for other people. But at another level, we are at risk of becoming mere body technicians, concerned with fabric maintenance or repair and passing on as many bucks as we can to other professionals.

In his 1994 Oxford Reader on Ethics, Peter Singer defines ethics as being 'about how we ought to live: what makes an action the right, rather than wrong, thing to do?' This immediately places ethics at the centre of all professional practice - indeed, of all life. When we shunt ethics into a speciality of its own, we are in danger of dehumanising medicine, of down-grading our role as healers and carers and making our 'ethical' decision-making a formalised procedure comparable to dealing with a biochemistry report. As doctors we divorce our ethics from who we are at our peril; we may be able to take appropriate decisions in terms of pathology and prognosis, but it endangers our role as the kind of doctors who treat patients as real people.

There are many good books on medical ethics in general, and on specific problems such as at the beginning and end of life, the difficulties of allocating resources, balancing the interests of the patient with those of his or her family and so on. Far be it from me to denigrate any of these books, but it was very good to welcome a book which firmly placed ethics (including most of the common problems which face doctors) in an explicit Christian rationale, so that, decision-making can develop within a coherent context.

The New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology has earned

an important place on the shelves of Christian doctors over the last few years - and not only of Christian doctors - since the issues raised in the Dictionary and their possible solutions are common to everyone, regardless of their beliefs. Put another way, the contents of the book are especially relevant to all those who acknowledge that we are more than mere naked apes. It is particularly helpful in extending its coverage to society, to relationships as well as those matters concerning the individual.

There is a vast amount of material in the 900 plus pages of this Dictionary. I was delighted when I first received a copy; I am no less delighted five years and many usages later.

*Sam Berry is Professor of Genetics, University College London, a former member of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (1990-6); former President of Christians in Science, of the Linnean Society, and of the British Ecological Society*

## The Doctor's Life Support

### Maintaining Christian vitality, daily devotional readings through the year

*Edited by Muriel Crouch and Ronald Winton*  
CMF/ICMDA 1986  
£8.00 Pb 378pp  
ISBN 0 906747 30 9

This book is written with the aim of maintaining Christian vitality in the newly qualified doctor. It is well recognised that the early days after qualification are very busy and the young doctor often lacks sleep and gets

exhausted. This may also be a time of separation from friends, family and normal sources of spiritual refreshment. The book is written mainly by doctors who have themselves been in this position.

The readings are set out one per day with some additional readings for Easter. There are a number of themes which run through the book: ambition, beatitudes, the cost of discipleship, friendship, sex, morality, the good shepherd, guidance, hopeless patients, money and possessions, physical stress and spiritual



resources. Once a month there is a section on spiritual discipline.

On 17 January the exhortation to pray continuously giving thanks in all circumstances is explored. The busy doctor is focused on the practicality prayer when working, travelling, eating and socialising. One sound bit of advice is that one's car can be a sanctuary and it is possible to snatch a few minutes to lift your heart to the Lord while travelling, as long as your eyes are kept on the road.

On 20 January the writer explores the frustration of the 'day off that never was'. Plans for an evening out, spoilt by a medical crisis, a situation so well known to all of us and we are reminded how often Jesus was pressurised by the crowds and how he dealt with this.

On 23 March we are reminded that whatever our task, we should work heartily serving the Lord and not man. There is a reminder that secular work is an avenue to serve the Lord, and not just our fellow humans. Many young doctors know what it is to feel exhausted beyond their endurance and this is addressed in 30 June's reading. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges the newly qualified doctor faces is dealing with a patient's death and their relatives. So in 28 August's reading we are reminded of the good news which we have to share that 'Our Redeemer liveth'.

This book, although aimed at the newly qualified doctor, may also be helpful to others including those reaching retirement. In the 23 December's reading we are reminded that the Lord will teach us to number our days 'so that in all stages of our life we should apply our heart to wisdom'.

In this brief review, I suspect I have only managed to whet your appetite about this remarkable little book. The preface states wisely that these readings are not designed to replace more comprehensive Bible study, but to give one thought from the Word of God, relevant to the reader's situation, and short enough to be maintained in the mind all day. It succeeds in this and I warmly recommend it to doctors working under pressure.

*Margaret Hodson is Professor of Respiratory Medicine and Head of the Department of Cystic Fibrosis at the National Heart & Lung Institute, Imperial College School of Medicine, London, and Honorary Consultant Physician to the Royal Brompton Hospital.*

## Cure for Life

Bernard Palmer  
Summit Publishing Ltd 1996  
£4.99 Pb 145pp  
ISBN 1 901074 07 2

Bernard Palmer has produced a most compact and readable account of the essentials of the Christian faith - even a slow reader will not take more than four or five hours.

The content is derived from a Christian basics course that the author and others have run over many years. There are three main parts: an excellent defence of the biblical account of Jesus Christ in history; why and how to become a Christian; and, some indications on how to live a Christian life. Such comprehensive cover is a tall order for such a slim pocket book, but it succeeds surprisingly well!

The section on the historical Jesus: his birth, life, death on the cross and resurrection is closely written and well argued. His medical background, comes through both in his tidy marshalling of facts, and in his detailed physiological knowledge. Having recently suffered from an acute pericardial effusion, I was interested in and convinced by his clinical argument that Jesus died from cardiac tamponade. This is based upon the account in John's gospel of the piercing spear bringing a sudden flow of blood and water; the possible medical explanation of which could be the presence of fibrinolysins in Jesus' blood ante-mortem following suffering on the cross, resulting in separation into unclotted red cells and serum post-mortem.

The middle section explains the need for accepting Jesus Christ personally and how this can be done. It starts with the big question: 'What was the purpose of Jesus' coming?', and assumes the level of knowledge of the current person in the street - more or less pagan with some atavistic Christian memories. Big and contentious concepts such as sin and redemption are dealt with honestly, clearly and in straightforward language.

The final section on the Christian life is perhaps somewhat limited by the context in which the book came to be



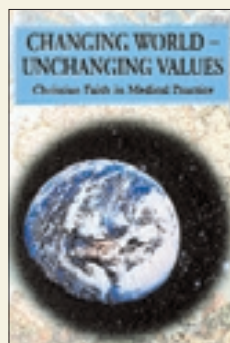
written - developed out of a discussion course on the basics of Christianity. It was slightly too constrained into one type and shape of Christian experience for my liking, but others may well disagree.

This is not a medical book or specifically related to the work of health professionals. However, their needs for secure and living faith in Jesus Christ and committed Christian practice are just as great as those of others. The test for this little book is how useful your friends will find it when you give it to them. In the three years since its publication there have certainly been many letters of appreciation, and I believe that it will have a valuable place in speaking to contemporary British society.

*Andrew Sims is Professor of Psychiatry, University of Leeds*

## Changing World - Unchanging Values Christian Faith in Medical Practice

Edited by Janet Goodall & Keith Sanders  
ICMDA 1998  
£7.50 Pb 397pp  
ISBN 0 9532690 0 0



'Change is the only certainty' is a popular but erroneous catch phrase. The changes in medicine over the last century have indeed been dramatic, but what has actually changed? We

frequently change the organisation of the UK National Health Service (and sometimes appear to be going round in circles) and we can treat far more conditions more effectively than ever before. However, we hardly ever cure anybody's disease and the maximum length of life has not increased since the days of Noah: physical death always wins in the end, as it has done since the beginning of time.

Our ethical dilemmas, although more complex and pressing, are still about the same issues as they have always been - the value of the human person, fairness in allocation of resources, patients' autonomy and confidentiality. The challenge to all in the medical world is to distinguish temporary changes and cultural differences from eternal unchanging values and to apply these

values in the very varying situations around the world.

That is why this book is so important at this time. The International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) links groups of Christian doctors and dentists in many countries throughout the world and this volume is a selection of addresses given at the ten world conferences and fifty regional conferences which have been held over the last thirty five years. The editors have done a magnificent job in selecting from a huge amount of material and then grouping and correlating the different contributions.

There are 61 authors from more than 20 countries and they range from those in western academic practice, to pioneer missionaries and rural practice in developing counties, to theologians and experts in palliative care.

The contributions are grouped under five sections: The Firm Foundation, Relationships, Ethical Principles, Christian Practice, Responsibilities. Where there has not been room to print a whole talk, a short summary has been included and this whets the appetite for more!

The Firm Foundation contains a most lucid, succinct and comprehensive account of the unchanging Christ, given by Arnold Aldis - a surgeon - in 1978. Many household names of the Christian world appear in the other sections: Denis Burkitt, John Stott, Paul Brand, Stanley Browne, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Paul Tournier. But some of the most challenging contributions are by less well-known people, with special experiences.

It is always difficult to pick out one or two from such a fine collection but the pair entitled 'Medical excellence in poverty' and 'Medical excellence in affluence' from rural Uganda and urban Germany respectively are particularly relevant to our own 'excellence culture'. How can there be excellence in poverty? one might ask. Here it is defined as 'God-centred commitment to service'.

There is a wide range of topics including families, sexuality, lifestyle, suffering and the drug problem. The subject index enables one theme to be traced through different chapters and studied from different angles. Throughout, the book shows how Christian values, aims and motivation can be applied to every aspect of medical and dental practice. The final chapter entitled 'The sickness of man - the solution' by Martyn Lloyd-Jones leaves the reader in no doubt that the

fundamental human need is spiritual renewal, not just physical health.

This collection is a gold mine of wisdom, advice, challenge, reassurance and encouragement and can be dipped into again and again. One is profoundly grateful that these talks are no longer hidden in conference reports but are now available in such an attractive and readable form.

*Alan Johnson is Professor of Surgery, University of Sheffield and Chairman of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA)*

## Christian Choices in Healthcare

*Edited by Dominic Beer  
CMF/IVP 1995  
£9.99 Pb 320pp  
ISBN 0 85111 144 0*



Christian Choices in Healthcare is an outstanding collection of essays by senior Christian doctors, that has been widely distributed. Divided into two parts, Christian Vocation in

Healthcare and Medical Ethics, the essays are solidly written and most are deeply grounded in Scripture.

Surgeon Alan Johnson writes an open letter from a professor to a medical student. What am I doing at medical school? Where do I get extra stamina from? I'm scared of making contact with patients. What of the future? All these issues are addressed very well. John Wyatt, a paediatrician, tackles the issue of maintaining priorities as a Christian medical student and asks, 'Are you a spiritual schizophrenic?' Michael Jones writes about being a stressed doctor in a stressed society. I found his observation that even the Apostle Paul suffered from stress (2 Corinthians 11: 28-29) very amusing.

Medical students need career advice but few medical schools are good at providing it. In medical careers, Michael Webb-Pebloe, cardiologist, discusses how the role of doctor within society is changing. He also proposes some useful criteria for choosing a specialty. It is vital to seek God's guidance through prayer

and reading the Bible.

He concludes: 'Neglect of time spent in the presence of God (either alone or in the company of other Christians) lies at the root of many a spiritual shipwreck in early professional life.' Susan Clarke, nuclear medicine consultant, writes about women in medicine: a Christian perspective. She looks at the immense value of women in medicine and gives advice about the training years in women's careers.

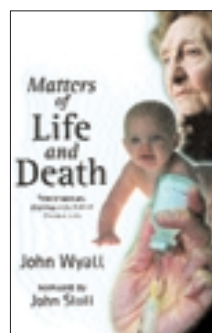
Peter Saunders, now General Secretary of the Christian Medical Fellowship, opens up the second part of the book with a valuable discussion on making ethical decisions in medicine. What are medical ethics? Where do they come from? There are different bases for making such decisions and these are examined: gut feeling, reason, conscience, consensus, consequences, relativism and authority. How do you know God's will? What should you do when Christians disagree?

There then follows comprehensive discussions on issues of early life, abortion, human genetics and sexuality. Peter Lewis, pastor of Cornerstone Evangelical Church, Nottingham, writes a very clear essay on hope, healing and the charismatic movement. Andrew Fergusson, former CMF General Secretary, grapples with euthanasia and alternative medicine (subjects on which he is a considerable authority). Roger Moss, a psychiatrist, writes on demons. Finally, other issues at the end of life such as growing old and bereavement are discussed by George Chalmers who, very appropriately, is a geriatrician.

*Rachael Pickering is a SHO in Orthopaedics, London, and a past member of the Nucleus editorial committee.*

## Matters of Life and Death

*John Wyatt  
CMF/IVP 1998  
£9.99 Pb 256pp  
ISBN 0 85111 588 8*



Fetal screening, abortion, reproductive technology, genetics, infanticide, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Today's healthcare

dilemmas raise fundamental questions about what it is to be human. This thoroughly researched book comes at a crucial time in the fast-changing climate of contemporary medicine. John Wyatt presents a credible and challenging Christian response to the ethical minefields that face us.

He begins with an exposition of the most important current influences on bioethical thinking, including scientific reductionism, biotechnology and ethical diversity. These are contrasted with the biblical worldview of humanity and health. Profound insights combine with personal anecdotes as Professor Wyatt looks to the Bible for a way forward. The strength of the books lies in the author's experiences as a neonatal paediatrician, daily engaged in matters of life and death. He writes:

'suffering in another human being is a call to the rest of us to stand in community. It is a call to be there. Suffering is not a question that demands an answer, it is not a problem which requires a solution, it is a mystery which demands a presence.'

John Wyatt excels in the art of clearly expounding complex theological and scientific concepts. He also writes imaginatively, describing God as an artist and human beings as his 'flawed masterpieces'. This unique analogy is developed through the book. Here is a taster:

'The original masterpiece, created with such love and embodying such artistry, has become flawed, defaced, contaminated and is decaying from age. The reflection of God's character is distorted and partially obscured. But through the imperfections, we can still see the outlines of the original masterpiece. It still inspires a sense of wonder at the underlying design... Our duties (as healthcare professionals) are to protect masterpieces from further harm, and attempt to restore them in line with the artist's original intentions.'

Based on the 1997 London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity of the same title, it also contains a large amount of new material. This book is not a short read, but your time will be well spent.

'At the heart of Christian caring is Christ. We are called to see Christ in those for whom we care. We are called to be Christ to those for whom we care.'

*Caroline Ashby is a medical student at University College London, Editor of Nucleus and CMF Editorial Scholar*