

Dutch Courage - In sickness and in health

Dirk van Zuylan

Alpha 1999

£5.99 Pb 225 pp

ISBN 1 89893 868 7



This small and easy to read autobiography of Dirk van Zuylan is an eye-opener for those caring for patients with long term illnesses, and more specifically those who have renal failure.

The book follows his life through his childhood of moving to Canada and then back to Holland. It is there that he becomes a Christian and starts his work in the Navigators, an organisation that reaches and disciples students for Christ. His work brings him to England where he falls in love with Sandra and they marry and have children.

Early in their marriage, Dirk discovers that he has renal failure. He goes onto dialysis but eventually requires two kidney transplants. Later, he is diagnosed as having cancer. Dirk talks frankly about the physical, emotional and spiritual struggles of being ill, and the effect these have on those who love him. He doesn't duck the enormous questions that arise but rather walks us through them from his perspective in a honest and frank manner. In the last chapter he asks the question, 'How does God feel about all the suffering in the world?'. He concludes that the only way of finding out is to look to Jesus, for in Jesus we see compassion and love demonstrated to the point of dying for us so that we can be restored to God.

By the end of the book, Dirk is enjoying better health but is honest about the scars. He has become a different man; he is more sensitive and feels others pain more deeply. In one of his concluding paragraphs, he talks of his confusion about God's delay in answering his prayers, but balances this with the truth that God is always his anchor in the storm.

This book does not offer a deep understanding of the theology of suffering but rather describes the

personal experiences of a man who, after suffering for many years, it is continuing to work out the huge questions that arise such as God's sovereignty and his own self-worth. If I have any concern, it is his lack of emphasis on God's sovereignty.

This book can help people in different ways: firstly, it gives insight into the difficulties of living with a chronic disease such as renal failure; secondly, it challenges the Christian to think about suffering in this context; and thirdly, it introduces the non-Christian to Christian truths in a way that is unthreatening and easy to understand.

Annie Leggett is an oncology nurse and past UCCF staffworker to student nurses.

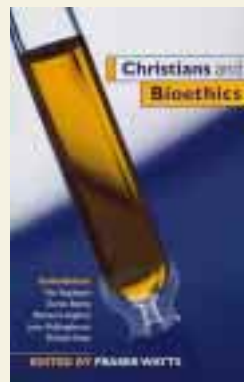
Christians and Bioethics

Edited by Fraser Watts

SPCK 2000

£7.99 Pb 84pp

ISBN 0 281 05194 1



This book began as a series of lectures in Cambridge. Its six chapters are of interest as much as for their authors as for their subjects.

They include: 'Cloning: After Dolly', by Rev Dr John

Polkinghorne, a member of the Donaldson Committee, an expert advisory group on therapeutic cloning; 'Genetic Engineering of Food', by Professor Derek Burke CBE, who chaired the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes; 'Reproductive Medicine', by Rev Dr Tim Appleton, a biology teacher, Anglican priest and a founder member of the ethics committee at Bourne Hall Clinic run by Steptoe and Edwards, the test tube baby pioneers. Transplantation ethics and euthanasia are also discussed.

The strong points of this book are the brief history of biotechnology, which includes discussion of legislation and ethical dilemmas in this area, and helpful suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter. Michael Rees' insistence that God has revealed his truth to us in the Christian message, absolute truth that speaks about what it means to be human, is welcome.

Despite some Bible references, the book lacks commitment to the Bible as our ultimate authority. Certain relevant biblical truths such as God as creator, the perfection of God's original creation, the uniqueness of man as made in the image of God, the historicity of the fall bringing about disease, suffering and death to the world are muted, ignored or even implicitly denied. There is no mention of the sixth commandment nor of the incarnation of Christ who, conceived by the Holy Ghost, shared our humanity from conception and thereby gave dignity to human life from the time of fertilisation. Indeed, Fraser Watts espouses an evolutionary world view and states that: 'To assume that an individual comes about immediately after fertilisation is taking too simplistic a point of view'.

Those seeking a specifically Christian response to biotechnology will be disappointed. The latest edition of *Ethics and Medicine* (2000;16:2) is more helpful.

Stephen Browne is a General Practitioner in Birmingham

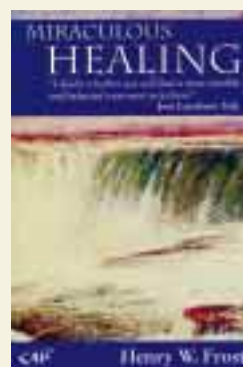
Miraculous Healing

Henry W Frost

OMF 1999 (First published 1931)

£5.99 125pp

ISBN 1 85792 530 0



This classic book on healing, described by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones as the best he had ever read on the subject, was first published in 1931 and has recently been reprinted for a

new generation of readers. The author, Henry Frost, worked for the China Inland Mission (now OMF International). He had a wide experience of Christian ministry and was friends with many Christian leaders of his day. The book springs from his personal experiences but always seeks to measure that experience against scripture.

The strength of the book lies in its balance. The main text starts with two chapters describing five notable healings known to the author, followed by five notable 'failures'. The author demonstrates that issues such as the faith

of the patient and the energy or godliness of those praying do not determine whether healing occurs.

I was deeply attracted to the humility and transparent godliness of the author. He believes in healing but his trust is in God. The high point of the book is his chapter on Christ's sovereignty. This preaches no easy evangelical triumphalism but rather explores the mystery of those multitudes alive in Palestine at the time of Christ, and yet whom Christ did not heal.

There are many things one could criticise if one wished. The style and form are, naturally, old fashioned and occasionally tedious to the post-modern brain. Medical terminology is often used to establish the credibility of the anecdotes. Much of this terminology and the disease models that go with it now seem archaic. (This should of course alert us to the transience of medical truths.) As ever, the problem arises as to whether a miraculous recovery from 'illness' actually denotes a miraculous recovery from 'disease'.

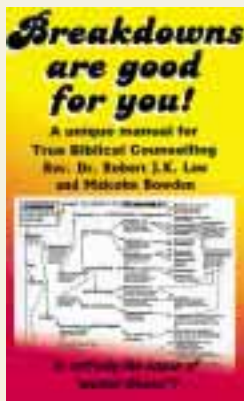
What can a book published in 1931 say to us, the children of the new millennium? Firstly, if the language were updated, the book would immediately contribute to our contemporary debates. Frost is a voice calling from the centre, urging us to look to Jesus, to trust in him alone and to support and pray for our fellow believers. Secondly, I could not help being struck by the way Frost chose to structure the book. It starts and finishes with Frost's testimony of sickness and of healing within his own family. There is no hint of superior triumphalism as Frost wrestles, like we all do, with his failure to see prayers for healing answered. Within the book there is both a reverence for the mystery of God's will and a persistent call to look to Jesus, whatever happens. As long as we can match Frost's attitude of trust, we will not be found far from Jesus, whatever our stand in the debate on healing.

I'm glad I read this book. In the midst of controversy it led me to consider Jesus. I think you might be glad to read it too.

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Breakdowns are good for you!

Rev Dr RJK Law & M Bowden
Sovereign Publications 1999
£9.95 270pp
ISBN 0 95060 425 9



This is an extreme book. The authors, one of whom worked as a doctor in psychiatric hospitals for four years before entering the Anglican ministry, believe that self pity is at the root of all

'mental illness'. Breakdowns are considered good because the patient comes to a moral realisation that they are responsible for their illness. The authors argue that schizophrenia and depression are not mental illnesses at all, 'schizophrenia is almost entirely due to bad (ie self-pitying) behaviour'. This book reminds me of Thomas Szasz' famous book, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, where he too argues that all non-organically proven conditions like schizophrenia are not mental illnesses. According to Szasz, it is wrong to exculpate criminal behaviour on the basis of 'non-illnesses' like schizophrenia. Likewise, Law and Bowden state that schizophrenic patients are 'crooked' and schizophrenia is not considered to be an organic disease. 'Environmental and genetic predispositions do not control our activity - they can always be over-ridden'.

This is a simplistic, albeit imaginative, attempt to classify all mental disorders under one large explanatory theory. They are all here - anorexia nervosa, alcoholism, multiple personality disorder, narcolepsy, personality disorder, mania, depression, schizophrenia.

According to Law and Bowden 'True Biblical Counselling' is made up of three propositions:

1. All problems that can be dealt with and solved in counselling sessions are always due to the pride, self-centredness and self-pity of the counsellee.

2. Medical (ie organic) illnesses do not make us sin.

3. Where there is said to be a medical problem, whether it is true or not, or where they have been classified as 'mentally ill', self-pitying counsellees invariably use this to excuse their behaviour.

The authors advocate 'true biblical counselling' for case examples such as, 'Anne's moody husband', 'Bill has a problem with his new manager', 'Fred's anger'. In treating Fred's anger and self-pity, there is useful biblical material in the approach taken by the authors when they go through 'The 5R's: Responsibility, Repentance, Reconciliation, Restitution, and Rebuilding on Christ'.

The problem arises when the authors use the same approach for schizophrenia and depression, neither of which they consider to be mental illnesses. They cite a *Weekend Telegraph* columnist, Cressida Connolly, 'as an independent confirmation of our basic argument which is that depression, irrespective of medical aspects originates within the depressives themselves'. Theirs is a rigid view of depression.

In the case of schizophrenia, the authors write that symptoms appear in early adulthood because of the 'high level of achievement expected of young people'. This is where the book is very difficult to get along with, because of the lack of genuine evidence. Moreover the evidence which is cited comes from William Glasser's book *Reality Therapy*. Glasser quotes his teacher Dr GL Harrington, who in 1962 had taken over the care of 206 schizophrenic in-patients and managed to discharge many of them by increasing their freedom to take more responsibility for their activities, so gaining self-worth. The philosophy was one where 'mental illness was not accepted'. To reject all biological theories of schizophrenia on the basis of this one non-randomised un-controlled trial is unscientific.

The authors have some useful advice on, 'How the Christian should deal with life's problems', 'How the Christian should handle personal problems', 'Living the full Christian life'. But, while the authors' wide use of scripture seems impressive, it is not matched by reasoned understanding of mental health issues.

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