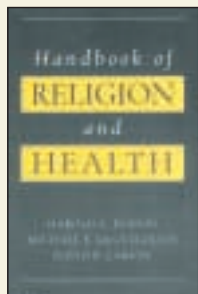


BOOKS

Handbook of religion and health



Koenig, McCullough and Larson
Oxford University Press
2001
£52.50 Hb 700 pp
ISBN 0195118669

Is religious belief bad for your health? Many

Triple Helix readers may be interested in the answer to this question, and happily it is a question that can be answered from the results of a large volume of good research. The evidence for the effects of religious belief, or spirituality, upon health and disease is collected in this book. At over 700 pages and weighing 1.5kg, this volume will probably prove to be a classic.

The *Handbook of Religion and Health* is a superb example of American thoroughness and completeness. In presenting the evidence for the effect of religion on health, disease and recovery from illness, it reviews and discusses research that has examined the relationships between the patient's religious beliefs and a variety of mental and physical health conditions. It covers the whole of medicine and is based on 1,200 research studies and 400 reviews. These papers from the world literature are collected, summarised and assessed according to their scientific reliability and validity. The two biggest sections of the book, each ten chapters long, are *Research on Religion and Mental Health* and *Research on Religion and Physical Disorders*.

Does the patient's religious belief have any relevance for their health, prognosis and response to treatment? Is this true for both physical and mental illnesses? These are questions, amongst others, to which the *Handbook of Religion and Health* seeks to give answers. Psychiatry and mental health receive comprehensive cover and the authors have been fair-minded, including all relevant studies whether the result are positive or negative.

Under *Research and Mental Health* are discussed: religion and well-being, depression, suicide, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and other psychoses, alcohol and drug use, delinquency, marital instability, personality, and a summarising chapter on understanding religion's effects upon mental

health. The authors are extremely cautious in drawing conclusions but the results are overwhelming. If the factor being studied were something less emotive than faith and religion, the media would have taken these findings up as front-page news. To quote: 'In the majority of studies, religious involvement is correlated with:

- Well-being, happiness and life satisfaction
- Hope and optimism
- Purpose and meaning in life
- Higher self-esteem
- Adaptation to bereavement
- Greater social support and less loneliness
- Lower rates of depression and faster recovery from depression
- Lower rates of suicide and fewer positive attitudes towards suicide
- Less anxiety
- Less psychosis and fewer psychotic tendencies
- Lower rates of alcohol and drug use and abuse
- Less delinquency and criminal activity
- Greater marital stability and satisfaction...

We concluded that, for the vast majority of people, the apparent benefit of devout religious belief and practice probably outweigh the risks'.

Correlations between religious belief and greater well-being 'typically equal or exceed correlations between well-being and other psychosocial variables, such as social support'. That is a massive assertion, comprehensively attested to by a large volume of evidence. In George Brown's studies on the social origins of depression,¹ various types of social support were the most powerful protective factors against depression.

The factors that correlate with religious belief and practice and tend towards better health outcome are all measured and assessed epidemiologically. To give some examples from those listed above, 80% or more of the studies reported an association between 'religiousness' and greater hope or optimism about the future. 15 out of 16 studies reported a statistically significant association between 'greater religious involvement' and a greater sense of purpose or meaning in life. 19 out of 20 studies reported at least one statistically significant relationship between a religious variable and greater social support. Of 93 cross-sectional or prospective studies of the relationship between religious involvement and depression, 60 (65%) reported a

significant positive relationship between a measure of religious involvement and lower rates of depression; 13 studies reported no association; 4 reported greater depression among the more religious; and 16 studies gave mixed findings. And so on, with all the 13 factors, religious belief proved beneficial in more than 80% of studies. This is despite very few of these studies having been initially designed to examine the effect of religious involvement on health.

The authors develop a model for how and why religious belief and practice might influence mental health. There are direct beneficial effects upon mental health, such as better cognitive appraisal and coping behaviour in response to stressful life experiences. There are also indirect effects, such as developmental factors and even genetic and biological factors.

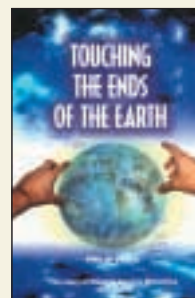
Most of the studies were carried out in the USA and are based upon Christian or Jewish belief. There is some work from other countries and other religions, and the results are the same. In this review I have only commented upon the mental health studies; the findings for physical illness point just as clearly to the benefits of religion for patients. It is a great pity that this important book is not better known and noticed but I suppose our secular and largely anti-Christian press has a vested interest in not acknowledging it. Emphatically, religious belief is not bad but very good for your mental and physical health.

Andrew Sims is Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry in Leeds

1. Brown GW, Harris TO. *Social Origins of Depression*. London: Tavistock, 1978

Touching the ends of the Earth

The story of Medical Service Ministries 1903 – 2003



Phillip Price
MSM 2003
£9.99 Pb 168 pp
ISBN 0 95090 973 4

Founded in 1903 as the Missionary School of Medicine, this book gives a history of the

BOOKS

work of the organisation over the past 100 years. Its title comes from words spoken by one of its early Presidents to students each year, as they were commissioned.

The school was established to provide a basic medical training for missionaries from a non medical background. Students were required to agree never to assume or accept the title of doctor or to practise in the UK. The threefold aims of the school were: to enable missionaries to look after their own health; to enable them to nurse and treat one another on the mission field when ill and far from medical aid; and to enable them to start dispensaries for the local people, so as to open a door for the Gospel.

Over the years, many hundreds of missionaries attended their courses. The early courses lasted nine months and were residential. Linked to the Royal Homeopathic Hospital and always including a grounding in Homeopathic Medicine, the school came in for some criticism from evangelical circles. It would seem that many of its students went on to do much more than just 'dispensary' work with some involved in cataract and other operative surgery. This is a testament, perhaps, to the practical nature of the teaching that was given and the boldness of pioneers when no alternative medical help was available.

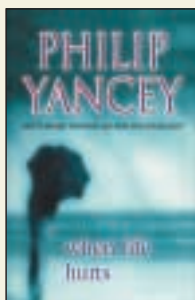
Following the Second World War and the School's 50th Jubilee, expectations were high but student numbers began to decline. Shorter courses were introduced and in the 1970s, students were allowed to attend on a part time basis. A change of name and direction followed, and a Scholarship Fund was launched in 1993. The school finally closed its doors in 1996. MSM functions today as a continuing resource to Medical Mission. Grants are offered to Christian workers and accredited missionaries seeking further training in the area of personal health and community care.

The book is full of stories and personal

anecdotes from past students and staff, in addition to details of the milestones in the organisation's history. It provides a fitting testament to those who pioneered and carried through a much needed and appreciated work in preparing missionaries for overseas assignments in the days when many were going to isolated areas where there was no doctor or other medical help available.

Peter Armon is CMF Overseas Support Secretary

When life hurts



*Philip Yancey
Hodder 2004
£5.99 Hb 59pp
ISBN 0 340 8629 0*

This little book, which takes less than an hour to read, is designed to help those

who are distressed by questions about suffering and are in need of comfort. Yancey, well-known for his popular book *What's so Amazing about Grace?*, looks at questions like 'Why does God allow the innocent to suffer?' and 'How can I be sure God cares for me personally?' Drawing particularly from the Psalms, Job and the Gospel accounts of Jesus' suffering, and using illustrations from his personal experience, the author gently opens a way back to God for the questioning sufferer.

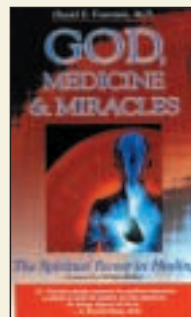
In the final chapter, we are inspired and challenged by the true story of a doubting twenty-six year old woman who suffered terribly from a fatal illness, but finally encountered the love of Christ through the remarkable caring of Christian neighbours in her last few weeks.

It may well be worthwhile getting a copy

and keeping it on your bookshelf to lend to anyone you know personally for whom wrestling with suffering becomes an issue. It could be particularly useful as something to leave in the hands of someone with whom you have already had a conversation. I think the style of this book makes it more suitable for someone with a Christian background who is in a place of struggle, or someone who wants to know what the Bible says, rather than for the complete outsider.

Kevin Vaughan is CMF Associate General Secretary

God, medicine and miracles *The spiritual factor in healing*



*Daniel E Fountain MD
Shaw Books 2000
£7.25 Pb 272 pp
ISBN 0 87788 321 1*

Dan Fountain is a member of the ICMDA and a long-term missionary medic who

worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has received numerous awards for his contribution to Community Health and is a firm advocate of whole person healthcare.

This is not a book about 'faith healing' but about how Christian faith contributes to human wholeness. Early on, he distinguishes between disease, which he defines as 'a particular condition that upsets a person's well-functioning equilibrium', and illness which 'has to do with the person and the uncomfortable disturbing things that happen to and within that person when a disease is present'. He goes on to draw a line between cure, which relates to disease, and healing which relates to illness.

These distinctions are not just those of a pedantic physician but essential to our

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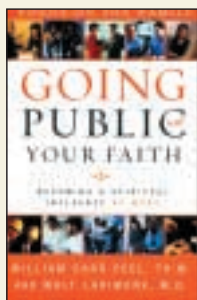


understanding of patients' needs and our response to their situation. Much emphasis is placed on the role of the Christian counsellor as a member of the healing team, the need to listen (really listen) to our patients and the place of a spiritual understanding of what is going on in the patient's life.

He deals with questions of sin, the chemistry of emotions and their effects on the immune system and our response to disease. Consideration is given to the nature of addiction, sexuality and depression. He illustrates the power of forgiveness and confession both from personal experience and from scripture. Finally, he explores the resources that Christians have at their disposal as they face up to the challenge of ill health. Do we see disease as a tragedy or a challenge? Our perspective will influence the outcome. In his final chapter, he looks squarely at issues of death and considers ways of finding hope in dark places. There is a useful appendix on a team approach to healing. This is a challenging and provocative yet helpful book. It is well worth reading.

Peter Armon is CMF Overseas Support Secretary

Going public with your faith *Becoming a spiritual influence at work*



*William Carr Peel THM and Walt Larimore MD
Zondervan 2003
£9.99 Pb 215
ISBN 0 310 24609 1*

I have heard it said that there is one thing that Christians and non-Christians have in common: they both hate evangelism. At first it might seem a strange thing to say, but on reflection many of us will agree with this. Have you ever felt uncomfortable about how to witness, or felt that people are trying to get you involved in evangelistic efforts that make you cringe inwardly, but you daren't say anything for fear of being considered a second class Christian? If so, there is hope for you in this book.

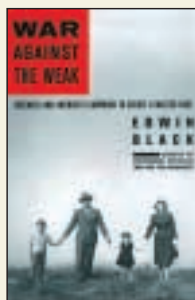
From a biblical perspective and illustrated with many stories from their own and others' experience, Bill Peel (pastor and theologian) and Walt Larimore (a doctor now working with 'Focus on the Family') demonstrate that evangelism is a process, not an event. They go on to show that not only can we get involved without feeling like a square peg in a round hole, but that there is an essential role for each one of us. The church's goal should not only be to get the community into church but to get the church into the community and that's where the ordinary working day comes in.

Taking a farming illustration that Jesus used, they help us to see that a prolonged but essential period of cultivating and then sowing may be needed, before the season for harvesting comes in a person's life. Little by little as we get to know people in our daily work and as we pray for them, we can see what God is doing in their lives and be able to help them to take the next step towards a relationship with God.

This book is readable, full of biblical teaching, and will encourage you to believe that God can use you. Much of its practical application for Christian doctors and healthcare workers is found in the *Saline Solution* conferences that CMF is taking around Britain, but *Going Public with your Faith* is for all Christians in every walk of life and I plan to give several copies away as presents this year.

Kevin Vaughan is CMF Associate General Secretary

War against the weak *Eugenics and America's campaign to create a master race*



*Edwin Black
Four Walls Eight
Windows: New
York/London 2003
£10.99 Pb 552pp
ISBN 1 56858 321 4*

Edwin Black painstakingly traces the development of eugenic ideology, from its early days in British academia to the take over by well-funded American institutions, and its later disgrace in Hitler's Third Reich. Eugenic

ideals about the superior white 'Nordic' race were so unquestioningly accepted in governmental and 'society' circles, that I was frequently astounded. The strong relationship forged between American and German eugenicists, and the jealous respect held for Nazi scientists as they enacted eugenic policies also appals.

At some 550 pages of dense text this does not make easy reading, but Black's journalistic talent and eye for a good angle have resulted in a very engaging book. The content is expansive, with 'More than fifty researchers in fifteen countries at more than one hundred institutions, some 50,000 documents, together with hundreds of pages of translation', making an impressive case against eugenics, but also causing some repetition. This is partly due to the book's construction, which is not purely chronological. Rather, the author traces eugenic trends through the pre-war years from a variety of perspectives. While this makes the book more accessible, allowing a personal angle and character development, it may not appeal to those who prefer a clear time-line of events.

For those who like modern history and investigations of the human condition, it's a must-read. It makes an interesting addition to other explorations of the development and decline of Nazi Germany. There are also lessons: the thinking behind the concentration camps didn't solely come from the mind of one dictator. Rather, a philosophy under discussion between academics and physicians in Europe and America was played out to extreme ends in one country. Perhaps we should be more careful about what we are prepared to discuss within the confines of academic walls.

Current proponents of genetic developments or euthanasia are keen to distance themselves from the old eugenics movement. In the final chapters Black looks to the future of 'newgenics' - the explosion of genetic science that enables us to pursue certain eugenic goals under a more sanitised banner. Whilst supporting the health benefits on offer, he warns that we need to guard against discrimination if we are to avoid the same trap that the first eugenicists fell into.

Jacky Engel is CMF Publications and Research Assistant