



Health, Healing and the Church's Mission: Biblical Perspectives and Moral Priorities, By Willard M. Swartley, IVP Academic, 2012

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This interesting book is an update of current thoughts, trends, and ideas in the broader issues of health, healing, and the church's mission. The biblical and moral perspectives related to these words, themes, and ideas are also discussed. Willard Swartley is not medically trained, although he has written other books in the health care genre. He brings both personal health issues and also those of his close family and associates to the discussion. However, these elements enhance the contents and are not a negative emotional distraction. The author brings a good balance of academic rigor and pastoral experience. He possesses a Ph.D. from Princeton, is a professor of New Testament studies and dean and president of a seminary, but also has personal physical afflictions and is involved pastorally as an ordained minister in his church.

His personal spiritual heritage is in the Anabaptist tradition, i.e., the Mennonite Church, which he leans on and draws heavily from in both his personal and academic experiences. This is both a strength and a weakness. He demonstrates a historical understanding of the Mennonite church in health care from its inception until now. He also offers keen insights in how the Mennonite church in the United States currently understands, articulates, and applies its beliefs in health care reform and in helping those in need of health care. The strength of the Mennonite tradition is strong

biblical exegesis and application to contemporary social concerns.

While the book extensively draws on the Mennonite tradition, it does not mention many other past, present and future faith understandings for the United States health care system except for a few mentions of the Roman Catholic Church.

The book is divided into three sections with a total of twelve chapters. The first section is "Healing," the second section is "Health Care," and the third section is "Toward New Paradigms." The "Healing" section is related to one of the book's subtitles, i.e., "Biblical Perspectives." This reflects both his academic background and theological rigor. He draws well from the concepts of healing in the Old Testament (especially the Psalms), the life of Jesus in the gospel, the life of Paul, especially from the book of Acts, and the writings of John (gospel and the epistles). He repeats these four sources of Scripture throughout the book.

In the first section, "Healing," he brings up the idea that healing is part of the Trinity. Then he has "Seven Theses," which are themes for the whole book. These are as follows:

- God intends shalom and community for humans and all creation, but sin and Satan play adversarial roles against us and God's intention for us.
- God is God and we are weak mortal frail creatures.

- Illness puts us into a quandary before God, for it interrupts and challenges God's good world in personal experience.
- Suffering means not divine absence but testing.
- Jesus is Healer-Savior and leads us in faith and prayer.
- The Spirit is Healer and is the divine pledge of complete healing.
- The church is called to be God's face of healing in this world

He brings out significantly, in this first section, the concept of *shalom*. In a concise way, he shows that this is related to the concept of community, health, peace, and our relationship to God. It is the fracturing of this *shalom* relationship with God that not only fractures individual but corporate relations. He does not believe that Isaiah 53.4-5 means that we can expect healing for all who claim it today.

In Part Two, Professor Swartley discusses health care more in its "Moral Perspective" containing historical background, which though broad is helpful. The historical aspect of health care in the church is used to support the Biblical concept of *shalom* as God's will and desire for all people. He also emphasizes justice, caring for the poor and marginalized, sharing material resources, and caring for those outside the church. He writes of the concept of "mutual aid" such as when Paul took his offering to Jerusalem. He contrasts the existing model of Quality-Cost-Access triangle with the preferred Community-Mutual Sharing-Justice/ Compassion model. He also has an entire chapter on a Christian approach to disability.

What is weak in this section though is that he contrasts the lack of "equal access" in the United States with the "equal access" people had to Jesus in the gospels for healing. I am not sure that Jesus' purpose was to provide equal access and not sure the two circumstances are comparable. Yet, on the whole, this section is

good in addressing "moral perspectives," especially as relates to "mutual aid," in which the church can and does participate.

The final section, "Toward New Paradigms" is the weakest. It essentially deals with the current United States health care system and its problems of the high cost of care, the uninsured, and what can be done about it. He suggests some important correctives to systemic problems like *shalom* and community, justice, service, stewardship, and vision-driven vs. funding-driven health systems. There are thoughts as well on work as worship, prayer, and healing. He has some useful ideas, but the whole section did not seem to fit with his first section on Biblical healing. There are lots of facts and ideas but trying to distill his thinking is as difficult as trying to understand what his solutions are. However, it is clear he is a hardy proponent of universal health care. He tries to equate "universal access" with "equal access" with basic health care. The three are not the same, and he really doesn't clarify the differences.

Overall, this book presents some comprehensive biblical foundations that can be corrective to a broken health care system. The first section is well worth the read in understanding "Biblical healing." The second section on "Moral Perspectives" is worth the read to equip the church for healing action and justice in healthcare, though weaker than section one. The third section is worth the read in its application to the current United States health care system reform. It also has application for developing countries that may follow the same mistake of relying on technology, physicians, and funding to address health issues — instead of the Christian "wider, deeper theological and moral perspectives" based on community, mutual aid, the poor, justice, and service — which can be corrective toward greater health for all. In the summary, he discusses Christian voices in public debates, and volunteerism for



needy patients, which gives a call to practical healing of the nations.
action for the church – God’s instrument for the

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