

Spirituality, Healing and Medicine: Return to the Silence, David Aldridge, Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2000 (1-85302-554-2), pp. viii 224, pbk £14.95

It is a commonly held belief that spirituality is becoming more popular, perhaps, at the expense of church and religion. Certainly in the area of health and healing the spiritual dimension is increasingly acknowledged, as our definition of what constitutes health has expanded beyond the purely reductionist and bio-medical. As much of modern medicine has embraced a broader social model of health, anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists have all reflected on the non-physical dimension of the human experience which enables us to embrace well-being.

However, spirituality remains somewhat elusive both in definition and practice. There is some debate about how spiritual needs relate to religious needs and, indeed, some have argued that spirituality is a post-modern version of religion. It may also be true to assert that in the delivery of modern medicine to the patient there is a widespread failure to take spiritual factors associated with healing into account.

David Aldridge presents a unified, comprehensive and stimulating approach to spirituality. He evaluates the existing literature from across the disciplines to ascertain just how effective and influential spiritual healing may be on the patient's physical and psychological well-being. He encourages us to redefine treatment strategies and the ways in which we understand health. He argues that the spiritual elements of experience help the individual to find purpose, meaning and hope in the face of sickness. It is in the understanding of suffering and the need for deliverance from it, he suggests, that the traditions and aims of medicine and spirituality meet.

This is an excellent book which has the rare quality of combining a solid academic research base and sensitivity to the richness and complexity of illness. It should become recommended reading for all medical students, ordinands and those involved in understanding the nature and practice of pastoral theology.

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