

***Transforming Care: A Christian Vision of Nursing Practice*, by Mary Molewyk Doornbos, Ruth E. Groenhout, and Kendra G. Holtz. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005. 220 pages. Bibliography. Index.**

The history of Christianity is marked by healing and attention to suffering. There are more than twenty stories of healing by Christ and his disciples in the New Testament canon. As modern medicine developed, Christian churches were in the forefront, with the building of hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and extensive health-care networks as well as the service of individual Christians as nurses and other health-care professionals. With increasing secularization and the many social, personal, and technological crises that have occurred in the health care system in recent years, the strong connection between the Christian mission and the healing of physical suffering through nursing practice has often been overshadowed. In *Transforming Care: A Christian Vision of Nursing Practice*, Mary Doornbos, Ruth Groenhout, Kendra Holtz, and others from Calvin College address this concern and turn to the rich Christian tradition to support and strengthen a sense of identity for today's Christian nurse.

As a book written by and for nurses, *Transforming Care* attempts to offer an accessible synthesis of contemporary Christian theology and the practical realities of nursing. Part 1, titled "Christian Faith and Nursing Theory," examines key theological concepts, such as personhood, health, environment, justice, and care, in the specific context of Christian nursing in the Ameri-

can health-care system. Throughout the four chapters that make up this part of the book, the authors describe nursing as both a profession and a ministry, emphasizing the dual scientific and ministerial roles of nurses and recognizing that they are educated professionals with specialized proficiencies:

Professionalism and ministry are not mutually exclusive. Instead, nursing as a Christian ministry requires professional preparation. Christian nurses engage in a scientific, evidence-based practice, a practice that is an act of ministry, and a ministry that could not exist without professional education. It is in and through the everyday aspects of our work that we encounter and respond faithfully to the God who has called us to this particular aspect of ministry. (20–21)

The chapter titled "How Christian Faith Shapes Nursing Values: Care and Justice" is the crux of the book's theoretical vision. Here the authors look at nursing as a fundamentally social profession. Nursing—Christian nursing in particular—requires advocacy. In the name of justice, nurses advocate for equity and fairness on behalf of all patients, particularly the most vulnerable; and in the name of care, they advocate for individual patients:

Care encourages us to see ... needs and vulnerabilities and to respond to them. But other questions need to be asked, such as how these needs and vulnerabilities arose, and why. ... When we begin to ask ourselves why [people] are vulnerable or needy in those particular ways, we sometimes begin to see that there are issues of power and the abuse of power that contribute to the brokenness of our world. (102)

Nurses, then, constantly struggle with a system which often overlooks the poorest and most needy patients, even as they do battle daily with the physical suffering and illness of individual patients.

In describing nursing from a theological perspective, the authors focus on the dual consciousness of nurses, which arises from "the experience of goodness and brokenness" (20). They describe this in terms of the goodness of creation, on the one hand, and the shadow cast by sin and tragedy on the other:

In the nurse's double consciousness, the awareness of the goodness of creation and of its Creator takes priority over the awareness of tragedy. It is only because of the expectation of goodness and the assumption that the world is well and beautifully made that the recognition of tragedy and the protest of the lament make sense. (23)

The authors describe with great care the deep moral distress felt by many nurses as they deal with unrelenting suffering and tragedy:

Nurses care for people who are fearful, in pain, lonely, confused, and vulnerable. And it is not simply individual human suffering that affects the nurse. The inadequacies of our health care system, which asks health care providers to do too much with too little, the social structures that make that health care inaccessible to a significant portion of the population, the hierarchical mindset that can relegate the nurse to the status of mere servant—all are cause for lament. (37)

Struggling to provide care and justice, many nurses place extraordinary demands on themselves, which often cannot be met in environments marked by technological emphases, nursing shortages, and other constraints.

Nowhere is this struggle clearer than in the particular cases offered in Part 2, "Christian Faith and Nursing Practice." Here the authors highlight psychiatric and mental health nursing, community-health nursing, and acute-care nursing. Each chapter presents case studies that illustrate particular practical concerns

in these different types of nursing, in an attempt to show the diversity of nursing practices. Particular challenges in mental health nursing include, for example, struggles with stigma, with patients' resistance to treatment, and with disparities in insurance coverage, while in community health nursing the challenges often involve cultural differences and funding issues.

The last chapter, on acute-care nursing, most directly engages the moral framework and dilemmas set forth earlier in the book, in the chapter on care and justice. Acute-care nursing "tends to be the sort of nursing most people think of when they think of the nurse's role" (167); acute-care nurses "provide the face of care in the hospital setting" (171). Acute-care nursing also sharply illustrates the effects of technology, the emergence of advanced nursing professions (e.g., nurse practitioners), and the combined art and science of providing nursing care. Many nurses find it "enormously rewarding":

For the Christian acute care nurse, it is natural to see much of the day-to-day routine of work as a natural ministry of service to the suffering, hurting, and dying. Nurses rejoice with clients when they are healed; they mourn with clients and their families when they are not healed, or when they confront death; and in all of these roles the nurse can both bring God's care and peace to others and reach out to others in recognition of the image of God that they bear. (171)

What this chapter (and the book as a whole) does not adequately address is the impact and reality of the nursing shortage, which the authors acknowledge but do not examine in any depth:

Because the acute care setting is fast-paced and exciting, it is also stressful and exhausting. ... Hospitals resort to minimal staffing levels as a way to keeping down costs; more of the clients admitted to hospitals have serious conditions and the length of their stays is shorter because of insurance regula-

tions; and acute care can be enormously tiring and demanding. In that context nurses may find that they are unable to respond to clients in ethically and religiously appropriate ways. (171–172)

The moral distress felt by nurses as they struggle to provide just and compassionate care to patients in an understaffed hospital often leads to burn out, and many nurses who have seen acute-care service as their vocation have left or are leaving the profession because of these pressures. Given the authors' focus on the sense of identity of individual nurses and their individual responses to systemic or structural injustices in the health-care system, however, the nursing shortage—perhaps the greatest threat to the nursing profession as a whole—is addressed here only tangentially.

Transforming Care is an ambitious project, which succeeds in showing the deeply religious motivations of Christian nurses. In their attempt to synthesize contemporary theology and nursing identity, the authors examine the biblical traditions associated with health and nursing—the Biblical portrait of Jesus as healer as well as the strong tradition of lament. The believer, out of faith, cries out in lament to God and against suffering:

Nurses know better than almost anyone the depth of sadness and tragedy caused by the lack of health in our world and our need for lament in the face of that sadness. But lament is not despair. (77)

Overall, *Transforming Care: A Christian Vision of Nursing Practice* is a valuable resource for nurses seeking to deepen their own understanding of the connection between their faith and their profession. Beginning from the deep conviction that nursing is a vocation to serve, the book validates the practice of nursing as both a legitimately scientific and skilled profession and a particular ministry, which cannot be subsumed by doctors or other health-care workers.

Jesus' emphasis was not on the Christ-like character of the one offering food,

clothing, or shelter, but on the Christ-mediating presence of the one receiving care. (28)

To be a nurse is to serve, and to be a Christian nurse is to be a servant of Christ and to see in the one's patients the presence of grace.

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***The Theology of the Body Made Simple*, by Rev. Anthony Percy, with a foreword by Kenneth Schmitz. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006. 104 pages.**

This little book is a gem. Father Percy is an Australian priest who received his doctorate in sacred theology from the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America. In this beautifully written book he presents accurately, engagingly, and persuasively the master ideas developed by Pope John Paul II that are at the heart of the Holy Father's entire series of Wednesday audiences given between September 5, 1979, and November 28, 1984. This brief but thoughtful and thought-provoking book shows how magnificently John Paul II's thought helps us to come to a new, profound, and rich understanding of the human body and human sexuality, human relationships, marriage, and celibacy.

In Chapter 1, Percy brilliantly summarizes John Paul's teaching on the "original human experiences" of solitude, unity, nakedness, and sin. All of us have the experience of "original" sin. How else can we account for the experience common to all of us so poignantly described by St. Paul in Romans 7:15: "I cannot even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do but what