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Book Review: Christian paths to health and wellness (2nd ed.), by John Byl and Peter Walters

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BOOK REVIEW

Christian paths to health and wellness (2nd ed.), by John Byl and Peter Walters, Windsor, ON, Human Kinetics, 2013, 328 pp., CND \$48.95/UK £29.68 (hardback), ISBN13:978-1-4504-2454-7

What do you really treasure? Where is your heart? You are created to do good. Do the things you treasure encourage you to do good. Don't just pay lip service to these questions, because they form the basis of your life and of this textbook. If your heart is focused on acquiring more and more things, you won't take the time to take care of your body. If your heart is focused on pleasing God, you will take the appropriate time to care for your physical health because you are in the image of God. (Byl, p. 16)

This surprising and significant textbook challenges the world of kinesiology and is addressed towards students and academicians in North American postsecondary institutions with a Christian-faith orientation. Firstly, this resource is well designed for any person interested in health and wellness issues. Throughout reading it, we realize that men and women have adopted a sedentary lifestyle which amplifies problems of obesity, eating disorders, heart disease, hypertension, bad cholesterol, sleep disorders, emotional difficulties, and which complicates negatively their self-images of body, soul and spirit. In fact, we learn that exercise and equilibrium in diet are the main factors for good health and longevity. They prevent at the same time a culture of vanity. The authors affirm that the whole body is a priority for God's righteousness:

Do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20)

In this sense, this textbook is biblically well-rooted. However, we also notice that there are many repetitions of some verses in the text, which some might perceive as excessive, or to counteract the post-secular spirit. Nevertheless, they produce the effect that the authors want to build up because the repeated Bible verses help to reinforce the authors' main message by recreating a high degree of synergy for health and wellness purposes because:

[a]lthough the way they go about trying to alter their bodies may look different, the goal for men and women is the same: to try to control feelings by controlling the body and physical appearance; to gain approval and acceptance from others; and to cope with or manage stress, anxiety, and heavy emotions. (Strong & Byl, p. 47)

The authors succeed in revealing a high degree of motivation discourses which helps to explore deeper and appreciate profoundly the Christian adventure pathways within the parameters of physical activities and sports. In that perspective, the authors' Christian faith allows the liberty for day-to-day salvation insights.

The textbook is structured as follow: Preface, Acknowledgments, Credits, **Part I — Understanding Your Wellness and Mission** (*Chapter 1: Valuing Wellness*, by John Byl;

Chapter 2: God's Purpose and Your Life's Mission, by John Byl and Dianne E. Moroz); **Part II — Accepting and Caring for Your Body** (*Chapter 3: Examining Body Image and Eating Disorders in Women and Men*, by Heather Strong and John Byl; *Chapter 4: Weight Control*, by John Byl); **Part III — Moving Your Body** (*Chapter 5: Cardiorespiratory Assessment and Training*, by Diane E. Moroz; *Chapter 6: Muscular Strength Assessment and Training*, by Peter Walters; *Chapter 7: Flexibility Assessment and Training*, by Peter Walters); **Part IV — Understanding Your Behaviors** (*Chapter 8: Nutritional Health and Wellness*, by Peter Walters; *Chapter 9: Emotional Health and Wellness*, by Peter Walters, Doug Needham, and Bud Williams; *Chapter 10: Sleep Habits and Wellness*, by Peter Walters; *Chapter 11: Personal Relationships and Wellness*, by Peter Walters); and **Part V — Conclusion** (*Chapter 12: Offering Your Life as a Living Sacrifice*, by John Byl). Each chapter is divided with the corpus of the text, the key terms, some review questions, the application activities, the references, the suggested readings and the suggested websites.

One concern that we may have, at first glance, is that, even if the textbook is scientifically grounded, the Christian worldview does not necessarily prevent illness and physical difficulties. This aspect opens a real and ongoing debate on which different personalities will have different views. It is sometimes difficult to make a firm statement or a factual scientific assessment about the relationship between Christianity and physical health and wellness. Some may say that the relationship is not clear, but we must sincerely emphasize that more and more people are saying prayers, exercising meditations, listening to music, reading the Bible and attending church. These ways of creating a relationship with God really help them to overcome adversity and any obstacles that they may encounter. Furthermore, their experiences of God and their spoken testimonies are for themselves proven factors that religiosity is effective and a guarantee for global health and spiritual growth. In this sense, the practice of Christianity certainly gives them courage to pass through any barriers and confirm from day to day their overall Christian identities.

This textbook is outstanding, accessible and well structured. A picture is worth a thousand words, and each chapter is beautifully illustrated with colorful images, models, questionnaires and charts which are appropriate for the subject matter. Those academicians who teach health and wellness will find a textbook cleverly and scientifically written, especially those chapters composed by Walters who teaches the kinesiology background, while Byl generously covers the theological and the philosophical sides of this important academic field. Finally, as this work is for the benefit of health and wellness courses, students will find precious information such as training programs and various assessments for the improvement of their knowledge in a Christian vision, and for the improvement of their physical fitness, wellness and spiritual health, in order that they might be happier with their own lives in this present social world in the post-secular spiritual era.

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