

# **'Reflections on Spirituality and Health'**

**Professor Stephen G Wright**

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Reviewed by Dr. Andrew Powell

I don't hesitate to recommend this book, which brings together a good deal of Stephen Wright's publications over the years, much of it from his regular column in *Nursing Standard*. But many people outside of nursing will have come to know Stephen Wright first and foremost through his pioneering work at the Sacred Space Foundation, the charity he founded in Cumbria for rest, retreat and recuperation facilities to carers who have become exhausted and burned out in their work, and which is part funded by the Journal he edits, 'Spirituality and Health International' (formerly known as 'Sacred Space').

The book is written with a delightful mix of good-humour, common-sense, apt anecdotes and snippets of personal biography but all securely underpinned by a deep concern for the workings of spirit as it manifests both in relationships and in healing of mind and body.

The chapter titles in themselves tell a lively story: 'In the spirit of good health', 'Soul works – the relevance of spirituality to a healthy workplace', 'Faith and the donkey stone – the death of credibility', 'Thank God for burnout', 'On empty tigers and a roaring sea – intention, prayer and getting out of the way', 'Deep listening – getting out of the way even more', 'If God is all – does that include measles? Reflections on dualism and oneness', etc. etc.

Professor Wright is academically well-informed, as the references cited throughout the book testify, but his greatest strength, to my mind, is his down-to-earth wisdom. He eschews theological argument, is not the least bit interested in fruitless intellectual debate for its own sake and is bold enough to see through the emperor's new clothes, and say so. He moves from the social and political to meditation and prayer, and on to consider the great existential concerns, not least death, without taking pause for breath, and it works because he is consistently coming from his own place of wholeness. This was not given to him on a plate, (indeed, is it ever?), and we glimpse the young Stephen from childhood on growing into a man who, while retaining a sense of fun, confronts the material realism and consumerism of the modern world head-on. He does so not out of any conceit but because of his concern with the harm inflicted on the soul by a post-modern world in which everything is measured by its cost rather than its value.

This book is for therapists and non-therapists alike. It makes as good reading for the bedside table as it would in any teaching module in nursing, medicine or the allied professions. Do go and buy it. It is not often I write that there is something here for everyone, but in this case I believe it to be so, and that entitles me to say, 'you will not be disappointed'.