

MINISTRY WITH PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND THEIR FAMILIES. Edited by Robert H. Albers, et. al. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012. 245 pages. Paper. \$29.00.

The worthy task of this book is to provide some basic information to religious professionals concerning mental illness. It does that very well using a wholistic perspective that brings behavioral scientists and theologians together topic by topic.

Included in the topics are depression, autism, acquired brain injury, and dementia as well as disorders of anxiety, psychosis, personality, substance-use, and eating. Each chapter includes information about the mental illness itself, systemic affects (such as within the family or on caregivers), and theological/pastoral reflection.

The reader can count on a fairly consistent organization of each chapter. First comes a psychiatric approach to

the mental illness with special emphasis on both symptoms and dynamics of the illness. Then comes a pastoral theological response and engagement with what constitutes the illness and the person with the illness, where the resources of the particular theologian's faith traditions come into play. The faith traditions represented seem to be mainline protestant, with Lutheran (ELCA), United Methodist, and United Church of Christ being foremost. This consistency of organization gives this book more of a sense of unity than is sometimes achieved by other edited volumes. At the same time the contributions of the authors still resonate in their own voices.

A deepening of the pastoral theologian's responses occurred in many of the chapters as they spoke from their personal experience with an illness or with a family member who experienced an illness. This personal experience tone in the chapters often brought the nature of our humanness forward and, clearly, moved the chapter from a discussion about an illness and people with the illness to a sharing of a personal walk. I am grateful that this approach was taken so that the pastoral theologians could also have, and speak with, their very personal voice.

As editor Albers states in his introduction:

If one is to be 'wholistic' in one's approach to these illnesses, then it is imperative that referrals and conversation flow both ways between medical and religious caregivers, so as to provide the best possible opportunity for all those who provide care to do so in an effective and efficient manner. (5)

It is in this area that the book is most helpful and, frankly, is a model for other books about counseling and care directed to a ministry audience. We are, I believe, past the days when one author can cover the entire waterfront of counseling perspectives for those in ministry. In this volume, clear summaries of some of the very latest information on various mental illnesses are provided by people who specialize in the assessment and treatment of those illnesses. This approach is especially efficient and valuable. In most chapters, a robust bibliography is provided for ministers who want to dig deeper into the literature.

Equally valuable are the very practical suggestions made by most of the pastoral theologians, in addition to the already mentioned sharing of personal experience. William Pray's reflections concerning acquired brain injury, in this particular case stroke, are illustrative:

We must turn from the language of loss to the language of life. Something is happening in that brain that is in the midst of reordering the world ... We find ourselves taking to heart and living through the first lines of Genesis... The language of creation replaces, and transcends, the language of loss, just as it does in life. Our question is not, "What have you lost?" but "What's it like?" and "What's happening?" It saddens me that in my experience this most theological of all questions is rarely asked by clergy. They want to be sympathetic and supportive, but they tend not to be very curious. Many are afraid. (189-190)

Pray himself experienced a stroke.

Every once in a while I read something in a book that makes the whole reading worthwhile and changes my thoughts and, I hope, my behaviors. This is one of those “ah ha” readings and moments. There are other very important insights in this book. Among these, but not limited to, is Joretta Marshall’s call for a public theology (78–80) where we educate about mental illness, challenge its stigma, talk openly to break the shame and silence often involved, and be in what she calls the “public conversation” about these issues in health care and in our communities is well-presented.

Christie Cozad Neuger’s seven suggestions for pastors and congregations (54–56) is a comprehensive listing that I hope every religious community will implement.

Some readers from the more conservative churches will, rightly, lament the lack of focus on Christ or on weaving the redemptive aspects of Christ’s work more directly into the responses of the pastoral theologians. It might be too simplistic to encourage those of us from a more conservative tradition to build on the work of this book, but use it well still. I risk that accusation. Use this book well for what it masterfully offers. Engage your theological lens with the material as the writers have done. Implement many of their suggestions, as well as the methodology of their approach.

Bruce Hartung