

Review

Dr. Adrian Treloar, *Depression: Caring for Yourself and Others*. Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2017, 61 pp. (Pbk). ISBN: 9780852315033.

Reviewed by: Rev. Canon Anne Edwards, Wrightington, Wigan & Leigh NHS Foundation Trust, Wigan Lane, Wigan, UK.
Email: anne.j.edwards@wwl.nhs.uk

Keywords: depression, spirituality, Christianity

The author, a Consultant and Senior Lecturer in Old Age Psychiatry, draws on both his extensive clinical knowledge covering almost 30 years and his Catholic faith in this relatively short text, which sits alongside others in the Pastoral Outreach Series. The primary aim of this book is “to help people who suffer with depression as well as Christians of all denominations who seek to provide practical and spiritual care for people with depression,” but would be good introductory reading for anyone beginning to explore the subject.

The book is divided into eight sections, with the first sections being far more substantial than the latter ones. Treloar begins writing by describing “The challenge” of depression in Chapter 1. This chapter is by far the largest at two-fifths of the book. Here he lays out what depression is and what it is not, the biochemistry, and the clinical features and effects of depression, making good use of tables and case studies. He also covers suicide and self harm. Depression in relationship to faith, culture and the law is considered.

In Chapter 2, Treloar looks at the “Treatments for depression,” covering areas such as effective psychological and supportive treatments for depression as well as medical treatment. Toward the end of this chapter he considers spiritual support working alongside other appropriate medical care and therapy and addresses the Sacraments, in particular Holy Communion and Reconciliation.

Chapter 3 is written “For those who suffer” and Chapter 4 “For those who care.” The former looks at the experience of being depressed, hopelessness,

inability to work and to cope, and the need for support. The latter looks at supporting people with depression and the burden of caring.

The remaining four chapters are far shorter and explore briefly “Depression and sin,” “Some mistakes we make,” “Prayers and reflections,” and “Resources and references.”

Overall, this is a good short introductory text to depressive illness, exploring the condition from both a clinical and a spiritual perspective. At only 60 well-spaced pages, it is a book that can be read very quickly in one sitting or dipped in and out of. I appreciated that right from the start Treloar highlights the prevalence of depression and distinguishes it from other reactions such as bereavement and other life events. All too often these can be pathologized as depression as opposed to normal reactions which can, at times, lead into depression. The style of writing is easily accessible by a wide variety of people from those with no knowledge of depression to those with some existing experience. It seeks to reduce the stigma sometimes still attached to mental illness, that also exists both overtly and in terms of unconscious bias.

Good use is made of case studies alongside more descriptive text, especially as these are often accompanied by the learning points that the Treloar wants the reader to take away. However, I question whether the balance of case studies chosen gives an unintended emphasis towards more serious forms of depression: nine of the 13 case studies used are of people with severe depression and/or psychotic symptoms. While this is the reality for some people, the vast majority of people suffering from depression experience a less extreme form of the illness. Accordingly, those who come across depression are more often likely to come across mild to moderate depression. In such a slim volume, while severe depression should be referred to, it would be more helpful to have based the majority of case studies on milder or moderate forms of the illness.

Sadly, the section on suicide and self-harm uses the language of “commit suicide” which harks back to a time when taking one’s own life was a crime. Current advice is to avoid this term in favor of phrases such as “taken one’s own life” or “died by suicide,” which are less judgmental and stigmatizing.

Overall this is a very welcome book exploring the interaction between spirituality and depression; an area that is often overlooked by other authors. It is difficult in such a small text to do justice to the area and sometimes more explanation might have helped non-Christian people to understand parts. However, given Redemptorist Publications’ primary readership the approach is understandable. Similarly, greater coverage of a broader range of religious and non-religious expressions of spirituality and the complexity of relationships within the area of depression would be interesting, but that

is not the function of this text. Included in this book are both a fundamental understanding of depressive illness from the perspective of an experienced psychiatrist; some insights into how some aspects of religion can help or be potential obstacles to the recovery from depression; and some important nuggets of basic wisdom such as “spiritual support ... is an essential component of care for people who are depressed” (p. 33), “spiritual care must *only* ever be offered gently and carefully ... we must not impose faith or duty’ (p. 33), and “care, humility, kindness, charity and tact are absolutely essential” (p. 40).