

# New Books

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**Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and Their Families.** Eds. Robert H. Albers, William H. Meller and Steven D. Thurber  
Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Pp. 245. Price: \$29.00.

The purpose of this book is to develop an integrated and interrelated approach that honours the work of the specialists in psychiatry, psychology and theology. It presents this approach as a dialogue between the disciplines so that each in her or his own specialty might work in partnership and not at cross-purposes, as often has been the case in dealing with mentally ill people. The fact that representatives of both medical and religious disciplines are willing to engage in a mutual endeavour such as this is a blessing for all who are involved as we seek to articulate in clear fashion the realities that people face when dealing with mental illnesses.

It was not until the early twentieth century that significant research was devoted to studying the aetiology, symptoms and treatment of mental illnesses. Significant progress has been made in the medical area of psychiatry which treats these illnesses as biological phenomena, often exacerbated by environmental conditions.

Working for some years as a voluntary member of a Women's Group founded to help women in the area of marriage breakdown and the problems that went with that, left one open to the fact that there was another world behind closed doors where families lived out their daily tragedies, mostly in silence, and though initially it took us members some time to recover from some of the tragic stories we heard, our work to help reform Family Law was one constructive way to keep us from pondering on the sadness. And there was always one's home to return to at the end of our voluntary hours.

But this book brings home to the reader another world, a world where mental illness in its various manifestations, sheds its several cloaks of secrecy, stigma and fearfulness and emerges into the open, where the contributors (eighteen psychiatrists and pastoral theologians) come together 'in an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort to ensure accuracy of information concerning the medical dimensions of mental illness, interpret these illnesses from a faith perspective and make suggestions relative to effective ministry'.

The book covers a wide range of mental illnesses in articles from Depression to Dementia, and in between, Anxiety Disorders, Autism, Eating Disorders, Psychotic Disorders and other Mental Health Afflictions, all written by experts in their own particular field, so if a reader is interested in a particular subject he or she can look with confidence to this source for the information required. Not knowing what is

happening either to oneself or to a loved one, particularly in the mental illness area, can only add to a person's stress.

Some years ago a priest in my Church reminded the congregation when we were having a special Remembrance for all sick people, to pray also for people who were suffering from mental illness as sometimes they are forgotten. Now, he wanted to tell us that he suffered from depression some time after his mother died. He felt her death very much but thought he was coping well with his loss, but wondered why with the passing of time he was still feeling so low. He didn't tell anybody how he was feeling, but after some months a friend noticed there was something wrong. He got him to talk and then the friend said, 'I know somebody who can help'. An appointment was made with a psychiatrist and he didn't look back.

This is where a book like the one that is being reviewed would be invaluable in reducing the misery and pain that can precede the step that could ultimately lead to seeking professional help.

Unlike other disorders that have definitions that change over time, depression has been a constant, at least since the advent of written language. 'We do know that it runs in families and has a strong genetic component, yet we also know it can be associated with external stress, such as bereavement, or as a result of internal stress related to a stroke or heart attack. Therefore, there is a strong interaction between genetics and the environment. We also understand that affective disorders are disorders of the brain, with recent imaging studies defining abnormalities in brain areas associated with emotion, memory, and reward. Exactly why brain areas develop abnormalities and exactly how these abnormalities interact remain a mystery, but researchers continue to progress in understanding brain function. Although depression is, at its core, a brain disease, its effects in the body are far-reaching.'

Although some readers may think the wording 'General Principles of Caregiving for those Afflicted and Affected' need not concern them, we are asked to distinguish between the illness and the person. 'The diagnosis of the person afflicted with any mental illness does not become her or his identity. People suffer from a variety of mental illnesses, but they are first and foremost people, created in the image of God. The humanity of the person must be preserved at all costs. Labelling people as "depressive", "bipolar", or "schizophrenic" is lamentable. This is a person who suffers from an illness, and significant other people are affected by the illness.'

Denial of the illness is commonplace as the affected also are resistant to the diagnosis that is made. One hears phrases like, 'That can't be true, he has everything going for him', 'There must be some mistake; she is just a little down and will get over it.' The feeling of disgrace, shame, is exacerbated for the afflicted and the affected when the illness is labelled with pejorative terms like *crazy*, *nuts* or *loony* which usually results in everyone involved flatly denying the diagnosis. The sad reality is that sometimes people who require treatment do not receive it, as a result of familial denial, and this is where a book like *Ministry with Persons with Mental Illness and their Families* could be useful. If they could read in

## THE FURROW

the privacy of their own home the relevant information which they are seeking, but do not wish at this early stage of their worries to seek the help of a medical professional, it could possibly lead them to look for professional help.

I have read this book from start to finish. It has a wealth of information written in a readable style that will answer many of the unspoken questions of people concerned in the area of mental health, and who will 'learn how science and a faith tradition can not only coexist but work in tandem to alleviate the pain of the afflicted and affected.'

This book would be a useful addition in Secondary School Libraries and Public Libraries.

*Killiney, Co. Dublin*

BERNADETTE QUINN

**Why Catholics are Right.** Michael Cohen. England: Gracewing House. Pp.225. Price £12.99.

In *Why Catholics are Right*, Michael Cohen, a journalist, television host, author and a convert to Catholicism since 1985, presents an energetic defence against some of the most common attacks made on the Church today.

The work opens with a frank discussion on the abuse scandal and acknowledges the huge number of people who were damaged and broken. The situation demands an authentic and true account of everything that happened. This task is made difficult by the tabloid terminology and sensational headlines that were employed in so much of the media reporting – street conversations and pointless gossip being passed off as informed comment. The author refers to a wide range of media presentations and concludes that 'editing and the usual demands of self-restraint and honest reporting no longer applied when the Catholic Church was the subject' (p. 21). In this chapter also, Cohen argues robustly against the ordination of women, supporting the teaching of Pope John Paul II 'that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women' (p. 36). That, says the author, is 'the first as well as the last word.' This section of the book concludes with a defence of mandatory celibacy for priests.

The second chapter asserts that most of the attacks on Catholicism usually begin with either a misunderstanding or deliberate misinterpretation of the Church's history. To counter some of these, the truth about the Church's involvement in the Crusades, the Inquisition, the persecution of Galileo, and the Holocaust is clearly and succinctly articulated.

The third chapter entitled 'The Church and Theology' examines key issues in coming to understand the nature the Church. These include the role of the Papacy, the true meaning of infallibility, the place of the Bible, the Eucharist, the sacrament of reconciliation, the definition of sin, the role of the saints, Purgatory and devotion to Mary.

The whole area of life issues – abortion and pro-life, stem cell research, over-population, contraception, euthanasia – are all reflected upon in chapter 4.