

Disturbed by Mind and Spirit - Mental Health and Healing in Parish Ministry

Gavin and Joanna Knight

Mowbray Continuum: London p/b 149pp 2009

Book review by Dr. Jameel Hussein

This book, jointly authored, is a collaboration between husband and wife. Gavin Knight is an ordained Priest and Joanna Knight is a clinical psychologist. The book seeks to explore with the lay reader the landscape of mental health using the Christian faith as a guide.

It begins by defining mental health from the parish perspective: 'priests are increasingly aware of mental health issues... the challenge remains how to translate this into practice', going on to explore the biographies of the authors, each having a close and sometimes personal connection with mental illness. This serves to qualify the later chapters of the book when exploring 'how issues of mental health in parish ministry can be addressed through the dual perspectives of theology and clinical psychology'.

The chapters are structured uniquely. The first two are paired, first presenting the priest's perspective followed by that of the clinical psychologist. An integrative chapter follows, highlighting the practical implications, some questions for reflection and a prayer.

The mid-chapters explain the four phases of the Eucharist – the Preparation-Gathering, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Sacrament, and the Dismissal. This allows a parallel to be drawn with the framework used in clinical psychology, namely assessment, formulation, intervention and evaluation.

The latter chapters deal with each phase in detail – integrating theology and psychology, stage by stage. Numerous thoughtful examples are cited, giving the lay reader a personal feel to the text to enhance understanding.

In the case of the Preparation-Gathering and Psychological assessment, the material drawn on concerns the tragic death of the Revd. David Paget, the parish's previous incumbent, who had been murdered in the vicarage. His unnatural death leaves a broken communion, which serves as a metaphor for the pain of mental illness and the healing and restoration that needs to follow, not least the provision of a contained space, be in the psychologist's chair or in the Eucharistic service of the church.

The chapters on the Liturgy of the Word and psychological formulation speak of the need for listening and searching for meaning. The example given is of the Bible, '... a book of disturbance... desire, pain, loss, joy and hope', which reflects the rich tapestry of mental illness. The authors go on to say, 'The

Bible is not a book that answers all questions [but one] that keeps inspiring new questions, new insights, new conversion and a change of heart in us', reflecting evolving patterns of understanding and interpretation in a psychological setting. Various psychological concepts and techniques are introduced such as the biopsychosocial model and cognitive behavioural therapy.

The Liturgy of Sacrament and psychological formulations focus on transformations and the healing process. They promote a nurturing and collaborative approach rather than a didactic plan. This resonates with a psychological as well as a parish perspective.

The last chapters illustrate The Dismissal and psychological evaluation. Gavin Knight ends his ministry with this parish and reflects on his experiences with his congregation, allowing them to share and continue to heal. Joanna Knight reflects on the therapy with her patient, allowing strengths to be firmed up and enabling him to be mindful of his vulnerabilities. In essence they prepare in both setting for the process of 'letting go' - a process inherent to both priest and psychologist.

In summary, this is a thoughtful and emotional book that will resonate with all faiths and beliefs. Mental illness is a bridge that connects us all.