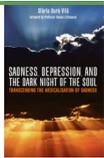


The encircling gloom

Anne Holmes considers when it is an illness or a spiritual experience

Sadness, Depression, and the Dark Night of the Soul: Transcending the medicalisation of sadness
Glòria Durà-Vilà

Jessica Kingsley £24.99
(978-1-78592-056-1)
Church Times Bookshop £22.50



THIS important book, written by a woman with a rare combination of skills and experience, challenges the over-medicalisation of deep sadness. A consultant psychiatrist, the author,

troubled by the official DSM-5 psychiatric classification of depression, which tends to medicalise all deep sadness, set up a research study to explore the conceptualisation of deep sadness and help-seeking behaviours within a highly religious sample of participants in Spain. This account of her qualitative research complements her earlier quantitative ethnographic research.

There were five aims to the study: to provide rich anthropological data on the participants and their contexts; to find out how religious people conceptualised and differentiated pathological sadness from normal but profound sadness; to investigate the participants' coping strategies and help-seeking behaviours for both types of sadness; to explore the clergy's understanding of the concepts and the care that they offer and the training that they may or may not have received, and their attitudes to mental-health professionals; and to propose a framework for distinguishing pathological from normal deep sadness.

The book is organised in three parts, each one built on the previous one. Part I features the origins of the study and places it in a literary and historical context. Part II reports on the participants' narratives of sadness and spiritual growth. In Part III, the key findings of the study are discussed in dialogue with existing literature. The final chapter offers a framework for distinguishing pathological from normal deep sadness in clinical practice.

A short review cannot do justice to this study and the key findings, but they include the reported experience that sadness has a cause, which might be secular or spiritual. A secular cause would include a bereavement, severe illness, or relationship breakdown,

whereas a spiritual cause could be a cooling of a religious vocation, concern about a relationship with God, or becoming disenchanted with aspects of the Church.

Such sadness might be described as the Dark Night of the Soul, as known in the mystical tradition of Christianity: something to work through with a spiritual companion. Sadness without an apparent cause would be more likely to be seen as depression, and professional help would be sought. Then medication might be prescribed as part of the treatment.

One of the more troubling findings was the paradox that clergy who knew that they needed training in mental health nevertheless thought that they could help with all kinds of sadness. The study revealed a mutual prejudice affecting the clergy and psychiatrists: each mistrusted the other's capacity to understand their specialism. Appropriate training for each practitioner would help to dispel prejudice and enable more collaboration.

The framework emphasised the need to consider the context in which the symptoms occur; their impact on the individual's capacity to function; and the level of risk to the person's safety.

The evidence of my own practice accords with the author's findings that there is an important discernment needed between deep sadness and inexplicable depression. Although some readers may get weary of the detail, this scholarly presentation of a well-researched study deserves to be read widely. I hope that it will help to change attitudes in a wide range of contexts.

The Revd Anne Holmes, a former NHS mental-health chaplain, works as a psychotherapist and SSM in the diocese of Oxford.

new titles just published

Reimagining Britain: Foundations for hope by Justin Welby (Bloomsbury, £16.99 (Church Times SPECIAL OFFER PRICE £12.99); 978-1-4729-4607-2).

Interrupting Silence: God's command to speak out by Walter Brueggemann (Hodder & Stoughton, £10.99 (£9.90); 978-1-473-68600-7).

Things That Make for Peace: A Christian peacemaker in a world of war by Peter B. Price (DLT, £12.99 (£11.70); 978-0-232-53346-0).

Paul: A biography by Tom Wright (SPCK, £19.99 (Church Times SPECIAL OFFER PRICE £16.99); 978-0-281-07875-2).

Raging with Compassion: Pastoral responses to the problem of evil by John Swinton (SCM Press, £19.99 (Church Times SPECIAL OFFER PRICE £15.99); 978-0-334-05638-6).

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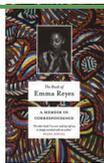
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Childhood recalled

Something is lost in this translation, says Alexander Lucie-Smith

The Book of Emma Reyes: A memoir in correspondence
Emma Reyes
Daniel Alarcón, translator

Weidenfeld & Nicolson
£16.99
(978-1-47460-659-2)
Church Times Bookshop £15.30



EMMA REYES was a Colombian painter who lived in Paris and died in 2003; this memoir consists of several letters that she wrote to a friend over thirty years, which recall her childhood.

Her earliest years were spent in a slum in Bogotá, with a woman who may or may not (it is never quite clear) have been her mother. Afterwards, she and her sister were abandoned by this woman and taken into a convent.

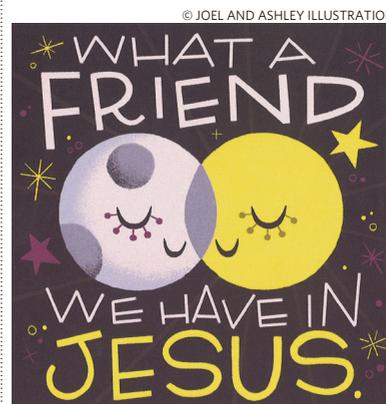
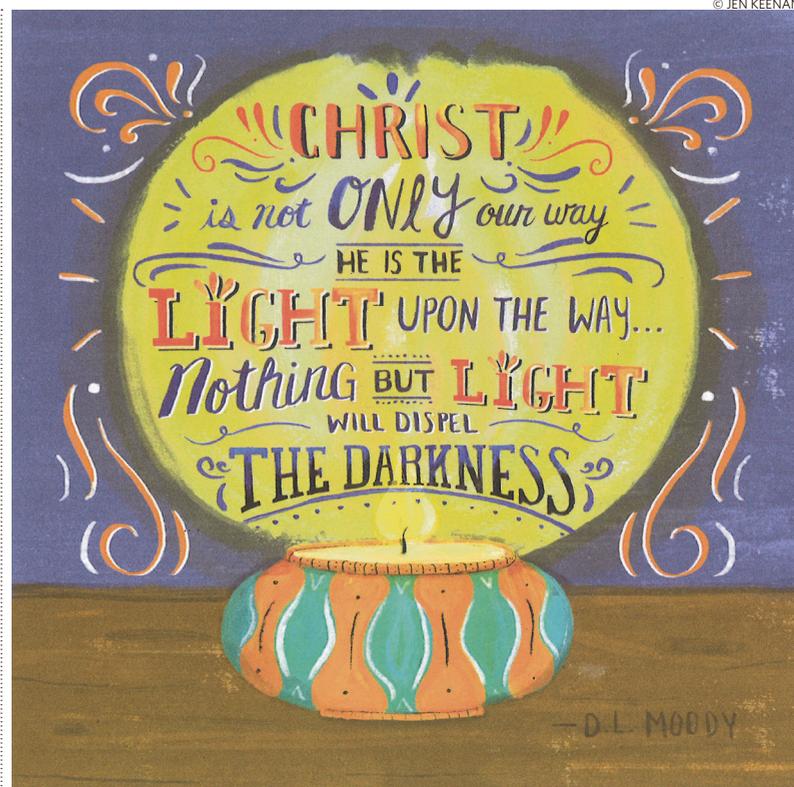
All is told from a child's perspective, but it seems that the convent was one of the institutions for training

children and young people set up by the Salesians of Don Bosco. This is not a misery memoir, thankfully, and, though life was tough and full of hard work, the convent was not a cruel place. The period was at some point in the 1930s, and children were on the whole lucky to be taken into such places. At the end of the book, Emma escapes from the convent to begin the world.

The book clearly aims at creating a magical atmosphere, and there is not much narrative tautness to the letters. One is meant to enjoy the journey rather than long for the destination. What really lets the book down is the translation into American English by a writer who has an ear for language which will not please all. His style, his choice of diction, and his grammar are full of infelicities, and some of the references to human excrement, which dominate the early pages, and which are perhaps meant to be charming, are anything but.

The translator's preface makes great claims for this book, but, sadly, it is the translator himself who lets the author down.

Fr Alexander Lucie-Smith is a Roman Catholic priest, doctor of moral theology and consulting editor of The Catholic Herald.



Lift up your hearts: two of the calligraphic designs bearing a comforting message from *We Are So Blessed: Illustrated reminders of God's grace* (Workman Publishing, £9.99 (£9); 978-1-5235-0117-5). The book showcases 25 artists' and illustrators' work: "Christ is . . . the Light upon the way" is by Jen Keenan, of Brooklyn, and "What a friend we have in Jesus" is from Joel and Ashley Illustration, Sanford, North Carolina. Longer biblical and other passages are printed alongside the images, and there is further information on the artists, including some website addresses

Pathway to joy

Lyle Dennen on self-examination to heal the 'Tristan wound'

Confession: The healing of the soul
Peter Tyler
Bloomsbury £14.99
(978-1-4729-3432-1)
Church Times Bookshop
£13.50



WHEN I read the title of Peter Tyler's book, *Confession: The healing of the soul*, I assumed in my innocence that it was another guide in the parade of wise, learned, and pious manuals to help you unburden your sins and failures and so receive the forgiveness of Christ. I was so wrong. It is an exciting exploration of what it is to be human and in search of wholeness and depth.

Tyler is both a professor of pastoral theology and spirituality, but also a practising psychotherapist. In this book, each of these disciplines throws light on the other.

With the first sentence, "We are strangers to ourselves," he is straight into an insightful analysis of our journey of self-discovery. He begins with a short history of confession, but that is not just about the Dark Box in a corner of the church, but the whole process of trying to find out who we are. Once in New York, I saw a Gauguin painting that portrays

beautiful Polynesian women with flowers in their hair, but the title is *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* The title of this painting for me helps see Tyler's fundamental point that confession consists in two aspects: first, who am I? where am I from? and what have I done? — the psychological axis; and, second, where am I going? what is the meaning of life? and how can I find the spiritual? — the transcendental axis.

These two were held together once, but have been broken apart. Tyler uses the myth of Tristan to open this out. Replacing the transcendental love of God and neighbour with the magic potion of romantic love profoundly wounds modern people.

The bulk of the book then looks with great depth at three remarkable confessors who, in quite different ways, try to find healing of this "Tristan wound", by recovering the transcendental. Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great philosopher of the word game, opened the door to the transcendental but would not step through it. Henri Le Saux, a reluctant Breton missionary to India "had found the Grail" as he fell into the abyss. Then St John of the Cross, through his poetry, enters the Grail Castle itself by declaring: "There is a certain I don't know what," which leads to the Divine. This is a book that through "confessions" looks at dark struggles that lead to great joy.

The Ven. Lyle Dennen is a former Archdeacon of Hackney.