

bibliography is extensive and each page includes many footnotes. What Arbuckle has achieved in this work is a practical guide that draws on his extensive anthropological and theological knowledge. While *The Pandemic and the People of God* may be directed to the general reader in the local parish, it should by no means be confined to that audience. Arbuckle's insights provide a compelling example for any Catholic theologian reflecting on the effects of the pandemic.

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Dust in the Blood: A Theology of Life with Depression. By Jessica Coblentz. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022. 248 pages. \$24.95.

By opening *Dust in the Blood* with an account of her own struggle with depression, Jessica Coblentz frames her critical and constructive theological study of depression with an eye to the book's very practical fundamental concern: how might Christians face the apparent meaninglessness of depressive suffering and yet remain hopeful in God?

The book's style and method reflect Coblentz's aptitude as a teacher, as well as her grace as a writer. She presumes little specialized knowledge of her readers but invites them to both a gradual engagement with complicated theology and philosophy, and a reflection on their own experiences of depression. Engaging the likes of Delores Williams, Karen Kilby, and Martin Heidegger, *Dust in the Blood* is certainly a work of erudite theology, yet it remains accessible to any academic reader willing to trust Coblentz's careful and compassionate guidance.

In the first part of the book, Coblentz surveys a broad range of approaches to depression, ranging from a clinical search for a "cause" to a phenomenological description of the experience of depression as "unhomelikeness." Alien and alienating, depression escapes clear definition and bewilders us in our responses. She then presents popular Christian theologies of depression, considering both their spiritual and theological sources and implications. Without dismissing what help they might be for some who suffer from depression (after all, sometimes we can call good and true whatever keeps hope alive in us through the darkest of days), Coblentz delicately analyzes limitations and potential distortions of theologies that present depression as either punishment for sin, the result of a lack of faith, or a furnace purifying one's faith and therefore, in some way, perhaps only mysteriously, good. She argues that not all who are depressed find the struggle to be sanctifying; far too often depression remains meaningless and destructive.

The second part of the book offers a theological approach to depression through the biblical image of “wilderness.” After touching on various types of wilderness experience in the Hebrew Scriptures, Coblenz settles on the story of Hagar in Genesis as a primary symbol. Inhospitable, isolating, and persistent, the wilderness Hagar experiences in Genesis 21 is never theologically defended by the text; it is not explained away. It is neither punishment nor an opportunity for Hagar to be tested and grow in her faith. While God does not justify or resolve Hagar’s experience of desolation in the wilderness, God is nevertheless present and responsive to her. The symbol of Hagar’s wilderness offers a direction for a theological response to depressive suffering: depression does not have to be meaningful in itself for us to hope that God remains with us even in the most barren of wildernesses.

Finally, Coblenz considers soteriological questions that might arise from such a wilderness experience and then turns to important (and too often overlooked) implications of this symbol for Christian discipleship. In these concluding chapters, the theological prudence borne of a recognition of God’s mystery echoes in Coblenz’s delicate navigation of the tension between faith in God’s saving activity and a hesitancy to describe any particular experience as sent by God for a clearly discernible reason. Coblenz follows this last point into soteriology, arguing that Christian hope in salvation does not mean that Christ necessarily saves us through suffering or from suffering, but that Christ saves amidst suffering.

While the book fosters reflection on one’s own experiences of spiritual wilderness, and may be of value to those trying to make sense of their own or their loved ones’ depressive suffering, it is not primarily a work of spirituality. Coblenz touches only lightly on the question of the “dark night” and does not engage the monastic tradition around *acedia*. The book’s focus is on theological questions of mystery, hope, theodicy, and soteriology. The great strength of the book is the way Coblenz orients sophisticated theology toward grounding pastoral and spiritual work, making it a fertile text for divinity programs and undergraduate degrees aimed at ministry. She nimbly connects theological nuances with their resonances in experience, keeping the book’s tight focus on the ultimate question of discipleship: how are we to be people of hope even here in such wilderness?

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