

John Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2020). 233 pp. RRP \$39.99 Paperback.

John Swinton, Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at the University of Aberdeen, has an extensive background in mental health nursing and chaplaincy. *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* is his latest work, where he draws from qualitative interviews with Christians diagnosed with depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. Here, Swinton aims not to merely explain mental health challenges, but to understand them. While he provides helpful scaffolding around the issues of description, this book ultimately focuses on how the lived experiences of others can inform our language and perceptions around mental health challenges, shaping pastoral care and what it means to live faithfully.

After an introductory chapter that sets out a clear roadmap, Swinton divides his work into five sections and a conclusion. In the first two sections, he reflects upon the current and often stigmatising descriptions of mental illness. Swinton argues that in western, individualised societies, our standardised diagnostic criteria tend to be too simplistic, lacking the contextual elements of a person's life that bring richness to the experience of mental health challenges. He considers the issues of reducing mental health to merely biological processes, and the dangers of turning spirituality into a consumeristic tool for self-improvement. In remedying this, he argues that we need to reengage a phenomenological mindset regarding mental health, which engages dialogue between various limited viewpoints (including the researcher, participants, and relevant fields of study). This will lead us to ask better questions of peoples' experiences and to a richer understanding benefitting all.

Building on this foundation, Swinton explores deeper redescriptions of depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder in the remaining three sections. In each section, Swinton is clearly guided by his interview participants, providing ample space for them to share their stories, while still managing to integrate relevant scholarly perspectives that speak to the broader issues being raised. Each chapter focuses on specific issues around the description of a diagnosis, and gently challenges common narratives that lead to dehumanisation.

Swinton begins by considering the biological, linguistic, and spiritual ways depression is unhelpfully simplified. He draws attention to the errors of conflating happiness with joy, and sadness with depression, while drawing attention to the inauthenticity that occurs when depressed persons try to worship in spaces that do not allow for negative emotions. Swinton deftly draws on the work of Walter Brueggemann and Richard Baxter, highlighting the role of the congregation in supporting and interceding for depressed people when they cannot respond in joy. He also ponders the spiritual significance of faithfully taking medication in the process of reorientation.

The next section on schizophrenia further unpacks the issue of generalised diagnoses for a broad range of experiences, while also considering the different ways cross-cultural values can shape this. He argues that diminishing or dismissing the knowledge of those with

schizophrenia has led to poor treatment outcomes – and consequently, addresses this by providing comparatively more space for interview participants to share their experiences. The result is a nuanced discussion on the experience of hearing voices in the Christian context.

In turning to consider bipolar disorder, Swinton utilises his interviews to tease out how one's biology contributes to spiritual experiences. He considers the role of others' responses in amplifying suffering, with a balanced critique of how Christians misappropriate the demonic – and how we might enact truth-telling in a way that minimises damage. He also explores what it means to live out one's Christian vocation when experiencing mental health challenges, acknowledging a tension between the spiritual highs of bipolar and the need for stability via medication.

With such a breadth of issues explored across three different conditions, one wonders how Swinton might draw the various discussions together in his concluding chapter. He successfully does so by carrying through the theme of redescription to a final consideration of what Christian healing looks like for those with mental health challenges. His discussion is nuanced, multi-faceted, and non-prescriptively practical, bearing in mind how the various elements of Christian practice and belief can be oriented to responses that help everyone increase their love of God and neighbour. Ultimately, Swinton's aim is that those with mental health challenges would be met with kindness. It is this value that drives us to be careful with our descriptions, and to more generously understand and value those going through experiences foreign to us.

In tackling mental health, *Finding Jesus in the Storm* has a wide appeal. Christians and non-believers alike working in mental health and chaplaincy are an obvious target demographic – but any person of faith involved in the care of others (at a professional or lay level) should find this relevant and thought-provoking. While some lay readers may find the technical discussions early in the book difficult to navigate, Swinton is a clear and engaging writer. This is best evidenced in the later sections, where he utilises interview data to ground his academic explorations in lived reality, creating dynamic discussions. As emphasised already, Swinton's methodology reflects well the aims of his book. This is indicative of Swinton's overall style, which in previous books has been used to effectively explore the experiences of dementia, time, and disability.

While Swinton does not specifically address Pentecostals in this book, many of the experiences shared or ideas explored intersect with the different ways we engage with the issues of mental health in our churches. Pentecostal theological statements regarding healing often have a reputation of over-simplifying or misidentifying explanations for chronic illness, leading to pastoral care that is ignorant at best and harmful at worst. In exploring the complicated narratives of mental health and faith, Pentecostals may be concerned that Swinton seeks to shame them. However, this is certainly not the case. Through this book, Swinton connects to Pentecostals by demonstrating a deep value of testimony and experiential spirituality. However, these core elements lead to careful discussions on various issues, such the demonic and healing, which may lead to much needed conviction or further thought. Either way, Swinton successfully provides a nuanced exploration of what it means

to experience Jesus and faith amid chronic challenges, and how we might create a more holistic and beneficial dialogue between all involved parties when it comes to pastoral care.

Greta Wells

Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, NSW, Australia