

who are theologically inclined. I heartily recommend it to anyone who wants to understand better what it means to be called to discipleship in and through the church today.

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*Dust in the Blood: A Theology of Life with Depression.* By Jessica Coblentz. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022. 236 pages. \$24.95 (paper).  
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In this beautiful book, Jessica Coblentz constructs a theology of depression as an experience of “unhomelikeness” (*Unheimlichkeit*). She argues that depression is an experience wholly unlike ordinary emotional life. Depression remakes the sufferer’s world into an uninhabitable place, a prison, a hell on Earth. While ordinary life is characterized by a feeling of at-home-ness (even sad or lonely at-home-ness)—where one can take for granted a basic sense of belonging and connectedness to the world—depression is phenomenologically a displacement to an alien landscape where the sufferer has no means of connection or agency. Sufferers of depression experience an additional form of displacement from their communities of meaning-making when these communities fail to acknowledge the ways in which depression can be an experience of meaningless suffering.

Her argument begins from an analysis of first-person narratives of English-speaking sufferers of depression. These sources reflect something important about Coblentz’s methodological interventions: she argues that individuals can make meaning of suffering only in the first person. Coblentz lays out two contemporary theologies of depression popular among US Christians: depression as a “self-imposed moral evil” and depression as “divine instruction.” Though Coblentz argues that both approaches to depression have serious theological drawbacks—namely, that depression is a punishment for sin or that depression advances personal holiness—she argues, persuasively, that to dismiss these popular approaches goes too far. Sufferers of depression might find meaning in thinking about their own experiences of depression as related to their own sinfulness or, perhaps more likely, producing some spiritual fruit. But pastors, theologians, or sufferers themselves cannot project this meaning onto others’ experiences. Drawing on the work of Karen Kilby, Coblentz argues for theological “restraint” in making meaning of the experiences of others. Sufferers have authority to interpret their own experiences in the first person.

Not seeking to police first-person theological language about depression, but instead to expand sufferers' theological options for making meaning of depression, Coblenz offers an interpretation of depression as a Hagaric wilderness experience. Although there are many kinds of wilderness experiences described in the Bible, the specific experience of Hagar in the wilderness offers resources to sufferers of depression that are not otherwise easily available. Drawing from the work of Delores Williams and others, Coblenz offers this interpretation of the experience of depression as a resource for sufferers to draw upon, if they choose to do so, to provide new options for framing depression as meaningless suffering within a Christian worldview. Coblenz reads the story of Hagar in Genesis as a tragedy in the classical sense—where suffering is senseless and serves no higher purpose—yet also highlights God's presence to Hagar in her unresolved suffering. Painting a portrait of divine presence in the midst of tragedy, Coblenz argues that God voluntarily dislocates Godself to be with sufferers. God's radical presence can present new possibilities for survival and improving quality of life. Yet, God's presence to the sufferer does not sanctify the experience of depression itself.

If God is the "One Who Sees" our suffering and is radically present to us, then Christian disciples imitate God in accompanying those who suffer. Drawing from the work of Rowan Williams, Coblenz argues that Christians need to cultivate a "tragic imagination" to strengthen their capacity to walk alongside depression sufferers. A tragic imagination can empower collective Christian action for improved mental health-care resources and collective resistance to mental health stigma.

Coblenz weaves reflection upon her own experiences of depression through the book, enlivening her theoretical discourse and highlighting her own commitments to first-person meaning-making. Upper-level undergraduate and graduate-level theology students will find this text theologically rich and approachable. Pastors and spiritual directors will find this text helpful for providing additional ways to accompany depression sufferers. And, of course, depression sufferers may find this text to be both illuminating and empowering. Yet, beyond the context of depression alone, *Dust in the Blood* makes helpful interventions into long-standing debates on theological method and experience. Coblenz skillfully brings together critiques of Enlightenment theodicies and popular Christian theologies of suffering while preserving the primacy of sufferers as the ultimate theological interpreters of their own lives.

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