

Ps: 45 “Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?”



2On the Threshold of Eternity, Vincent van Gogh. Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain)

Research Paper

"The Depressed Christian: What is an effective Christian response to a common problem"?

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Introduction

Depression is a widely spread “mental disorder”¹ with religious and “spiritual implications”². The Church, from its members to leaders, can all fall prey to “depression”³. Christians, “including missionaries”⁴ working in cross - cultural contexts and church leaders can find themselves spending years silently afflicted with this complaint often unable to ask for help because they feel somewhat guilty about it.⁵

Unfortunately, some Christians believe that depression is a “demonstration of lack of faith”⁶ and is therefore sinful, fearing that to be depressed means not to be a ‘good’ Christian. Depressed Christians may fear judgement from other Christians and from God. The lack of faith indicates that they may be questioning God’s sovereign power and love for them:

“As we have discovered, some depressions centre around a spiritually orientated knotty problem, such as whether God is there, how a loving God can send people to Hell, and so on. It’s a testing time, not just for the Christian as a person, but also for his beliefs, and sorting out just what he believes may be the key to getting rid of his depression⁷.”

This research paper proposes a study of the phenomenon known as ‘depression’ and critically analyses the church’s response to depression and to the depressed Christian,

¹ LaHaye, *How to Win Over depression*, 1977:19

² Minirth & Meier, *Happiness is a choice, A manual on the Symptoms, Causes, and Cures of Depression*, 1984:23

² Minirth & Meier, *Happiness is a choice, A manual on the Symptoms, Causes, and Cures of Depression*, 1984:23

³ Robert *Battles Christians face* 2007:72

⁴ Schubert, *What Missionaries need to know about Burnout and Depression*, 1993:9

⁵ Hizks, *What could I say?*, 2000:127

⁶ Lockley, *A Pratical Workbook For The Depressed Christian*, 2002:367

⁷ *Ibid.*, 364

including missionaries. This study does not attempt to be a clinical study of the nature of depression nor does it list the various therapies available to help those who are depressed.

Depression is a world-wide predicament which can potentially affect anyone. For the purpose of this Research Paper I will investigate the phenomenon of depression specifically in the Christian world and endeavour to find, in the words of Green -McCreight “a Christian response”⁸ to a problem which is common to many.

Today’s society and the Church face many cultural, ethnic and religious changes. Along with Wurth, I think that lots of churches do not reflect what a real Church should be:⁹ A community of people where each Christian feels loved and appreciated for who they are as opposed to feel lonely and abandoned. Feeling alone can be painful and contra productive for the depressed Christian who is seeking for help from the Church community:

“In our world and in our society there are many obstacles that imperil true community life. Their influence is also felt in the Church”¹⁰.

The aim of this Research is to learn how the Church can help depressed Christians. This Paper will be divided into a short introduction, five chapters a conclusion.

In the first chapter, I shall investigate the meaning of depression, the symptoms and the different type of depressions. The second chapter will look at the causes of depression paying particular attention to feelings of anger, low self esteem, loneliness, and also sin. In chapter three I will examine the Christian response to minister to the depressed person. Chapter four will look at the Church’s listening skill for the depressed Christian. The last chapter deals with how the Church can help to prevent depression through counselling prayers, and deliverances.

⁸ Green – Mc Creight *Darkness Is My Only Companion A Christian Response to Mental Illness* 2008 : 28

⁹ Wurth, *Christian Counseling in the light of Modern Psychology*,1962:117

¹⁰ Ibid,1962:117

Chapter 1

Depression

1. What we mean by 'Depression'?

According to the Wordsworth Encyclopaedia, depression is an “emotional state characterized by sadness, unhappy thoughts, apathy and dejection.”¹¹

Depression is a “common”¹² problem that disrupts the lives of countless people around the world. No one is immune from it. Everyone at some point in life can feel the sting of coming under the “dark night of the soul”¹³ which is how many people would describe depression. Depression is also known as the “common cold”¹⁴ of psychiatry.

According to Schubert some people are predisposed to be attacked by depression through genetic influences or great stress:

“Depression seems to occur in individuals who have either a genetic predisposition towards this illness, severe chronic stress, or a combination of both the hereditary factors and stress.”¹⁵

The word depression could be referring to lots of different meanings including to a specific type of weather or a “loss in the stock-market depending on what a person is referring to”.¹⁶

¹¹ *The Wordsworth Encyclopedia* 1995:631

¹² Collins, *Christian Counselling, A comprehensive Guide* 1988:104

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 105

¹⁵ Schubert *What Missionaries need to know about burnout and depression* 1993: 9

¹⁶ Gilbert *Overcoming depression A self help guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques* 2003:3

The term depression comes from the Latin “*premo*”¹⁷ meaning “depressed, oppress, oppression, oppressive, oppressor”. Depression is also referred to as ‘melancholy’¹⁸

As early as the seventeenth century Robert Burton 1621 wrote a book called the ‘*Anatomy of Melancholy*’: *What it is, with all the kinds, causes, symptoms, prognostickes and severall cures of it...Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically opened up and cut up*.¹⁹ The term melancholy in Burton’s book is the precursor of our modern terminology of depression.

Bringle when referring to Robert Burton’s writing declares that the author in his book describes feelings of despondency, sadness and low-moods as melancholy which is a disease of the body and of the soul:

“ He straddles the fence between theological and physiological explanation.. For Burton despair is related to melancholy.”²⁰ .

From the readings we can learn that depression is not just a modern malaise. Collins tells us that:

“Depression (previously called ‘melancholia’) has been recognized as a common problem for more than three thousand years”²¹

Today, depression is a much studied subject. It is believed by the medical profession to be an illness that can fully destroy and paralyze an individual making him not capable to

¹⁷ *Latin vocabulary and Derivatives* www.classicsunveiled.com/romevd/html/derivp.html 30 April 2009

¹⁸ White *The Mask of Melancholy A Christian psychiatrist looks at depression and suicide* (:198218)

¹⁹ Merkel *The history of Psychiatry PGY Lecture 9/8/03 -30 April 2009* (Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 3 volumes (New York :W.J. Widdleton, 1867) Vol.1

²⁰ Bringle : *Despair Sickness or Sin?* 1990:75

²¹ Collins *A Counseling A Comprehensive Guide*, 1988:105

function normally²². Depression is such a complicated issue, it can only be recognized by its symptoms and to diagnose it properly it needs the learned expertise of a medical doctor or a counsellor:

“Depression is so complicated that only professionals are equipped to diagnose it”²³.

2. Symptoms of depression.

Individuals who suffer with “clinical depression”²⁴ believe that the emotional pain that they feel is more severe than “any physical pain they may have felt beforehand”²⁵. They describe the pain as “excruciating and gradual”.²⁶

Minirth and Meier believe that there are five main categories of symptoms that points to the individual been depressed which consist of:²⁷

- **Sad Affect:** The person retains a sad face. He cries a lot. He looks exhausted all the times. He loses interest in his apparels.
- **Painful Thinking:** The depressed person is *introspective*. He reflects and ruminates on his past mistakes. He has negative views of himself.
- **Physical Symptoms:**

²² Lewis *Finding God Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression* 2002:3

²³ *Ibid.*, 2002:3

²⁴ Williams *Doorways of the Mind* 1986: 5

²⁵ Minirth & Meier *Happiness is a choice A manual on the Symptoms, Causes and Cures of Depression* 1984:24

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1984:23

²⁷ 1984: 24-28

- The medical terminology for these symptoms it is “physiological *concomitance of depression*’. During clinical depression there are biochemical changes in the brain resulting in different physical ailments.
- Anxiety or Agitation: The depressed person is anxious and finds difficult to be at peace and in harmony with his surroundings and those he comes into contact with.
- Delusional Thinking: The depressed individual becomes out of touch with reality. His delusions gives him *grandiose* thoughts (such he has some extraordinary gifts from God) or he entertains thoughts of *persecution* (everyone wants to hurt him).

3. Varieties of Depression: Reactive and Endogenous

The medical profession has classified that a depression can be either ‘Reactive’ or ‘Endogenous’²⁸. The reactive depression is also known as *exogenous or neurotic depression*, while the endogenous depression is also known as autonomous or psychotic depression.²⁹

Reactive depression, or “situational depression”³⁰ which is the most common form of depression, happens as a sudden reaction to unexpected stress or trauma. The person reacts against something painful or traumatic that has happened in its earlier period of his life or in the present:

“Reacting to something painful, either in the present, or in the past, is the most common kind of depression we encounter”.³¹

And again:

²⁸ Ross *Helping the depressed* 1990:41

²⁹ Collins: *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide*1988:105

³⁰ Lawson *Facing Depression* 1984:10

³¹Ibid 1984: 17

“Reactive depression can come from loss, stress, personal conflicts, anxiety, and other numbers of events that hurt us.”³²

Endogenous or “Clinical”³³ depression is one for which no apparent cause can be found. It can be either “‘Unipolar’ or ‘Bipolar’³⁴”; in the first case the mood swing in one direction while in the latter the depression swings between real high or very low moods. Doctors believe that this type of depression is caused by a chemical imbalance; hence the medical profession prefers to prescribe antidepressant pharmaceutical to replace the “missing chemicals”³⁵ in the brain:

“Biological changes take place in the brain, and these can lead us into downwards spirals.”³⁶

Conclusion

We can conclude this first chapter by summarizing that what we mean by depression is that “depression is an illness”³⁷; a common problem that can affect everywhere in the world, Christians and non Christians alike. In our first chapter we have seen that depression is a very painful illness; although much is known about it, it is very hard to define it and not simple to treat. In the next chapter we shall look at some of the causes which lead to Depression and how it affects their walk with God.

³² Lewis *Finding God Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression* 2002:11

³³ Ibid 2002: 12

³⁴ Collins: *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988: 105

³⁵ Williams *Doors of the Mind The Biblical perspective of Depression and Mental Illness* 1986:3

³⁶ Gilbert *Overcoming Depression A self – help guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques* 2000:27

³⁷ Lewis *Finding God Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression* 2002:2

Chapter 2

Causes of depression

The causes of depression are many but for the purpose of this Paper I will refer specifically to what I believe could be perceived to be the four principle causes of depression: a) *Anger*; b) *Low-self-esteem*; c) *Loneliness*; d) *Sin*.

1. Anger

Anger, according to Walters is an emotion that Christians try to hide and not to feel because they may believe that it is wrong for a Christian to be angry:

“The common pattern among Christians is to create resentment by denying the existence of angry feelings and pushing them down inside.”³⁸

I agree with Chave Jones who argues that anger is the opposite side of the coin of depression; people who are depressed often do not show that they are angry because they always seem quite weary and listless:

“Depressed people often seem too lethargic to show much anger”³⁹

³⁸ Walters *Anger What to do about it*. 1983:15

³⁹ Chave – Jones *Coping with depression* 1982:26

At times a person with depression is hiding anger and according to Collins, the anger “is often directed inwards against oneself.”⁴⁰ He goes on to say that when we deny that anger exists within us, it festers undercover and it may cause destructive and negative behaviour (self-harming or substance abuse) and a cover up for anger, rage, upset and “revengeful thoughts”.⁴¹

2. Low self esteem

Kuhatschek says that in post-modernity much emphasis is placed in encouraging people to make their own- self the number one priority and to believe themselves beautiful, brilliant, clever and able. Depression at times may occur if a person is not able to reach these standards; he may dislike himself, feel inferior to others who he perceives to be better than himself:

“Much of the recent emphasis on self – esteem reminds me of the story of Narcissus. People are encouraged to love themselves, to believe in themselves, to tell themselves that they are beautiful, wonderful, intelligent and capable.”⁴²

While sharing in Kuhatschek’ views on self – esteem I also go along with Collins in being critical of : Christians ,who condemn those who feel good about themselves”⁴³ because of the :“Godless humanistic view that we should have good self – esteem”⁴⁴ and“Worthless, sinful creatures who should abhor ourselves”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Collins *Christian Counselling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988 : 105

⁴¹ Ibid 1988:109

⁴² Kuhatschek *Self – Esteem See Ourselves as God See Us* 1997:9

⁴³ Collins *Christian Counselings A Comprehensive Guide* 1988: 313

⁴⁴ ibid

⁴⁵ ibid

At time when the depressed person is unable to function and to take part in everyday life, not only can he suffer with low self - esteem he may begin to feel a” loss of self – confidence and self – respect”⁴⁶.

3. Loneliness

According to Atkinson “loneliness”⁴⁷ is one of the worst things that the depressed feel; they feel totally cut off from everyone else:

“That devastating feeling of total alienation from every other living thing in the universe”⁴⁸

In my analysis of the effect of loneliness and depression on a Christian I side with Samuel who believes that when a Christian feels depressed and lonely also can feel the added pain of feeling rejected and cut off from God, making his state more distressful and frightening, plunging him into the “deepest of despair”⁴⁹

4. Sin.

Sin is a powerful force that urges the Christian to rebel against God. It is the opposite of everything that is wholesome and desire for the “total destruction of our life.”⁵⁰ Blocher suggests that all human sin is because of Adam⁵¹ :

“Before the law of Moses was promulgated, sin was imputed, therefore death reigned owing to the relationship of all humans to Adam, the natural

⁴⁶ Dominionian *Depression What is it? How do we cope?* 1976:29

⁴⁷ Atkinson *Climbing out of Depression* 2005:26

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Leith Samuel *There is an answer To Doubt-Suffering- Fear- Loneliness- Worry- Death- Depression* 1972: 87

⁵⁰ Walters *Anger What to do about it* 1983:30

⁵¹ Blocher *Original Sin Illuminating the riddle* 2004: 77

and legal head and mediator”⁵²

but then he proceeds to suggest that “God is merciful and understands our weakness”⁵³ and Jesus Christ, the new Adam, took on Himself the guilt that should be imputed on us because of our sins:

“Knowing no sin and yet truly joined together
to Adam’s posterity, he could freely take upon
Himself the communal guilt of his fellow human.”⁵⁴

I agree with Collins, that sadly many believers are overcome by sin, such as for example, pornography, cheating, or idle gossiping. Fearing “God’s judgment”⁵⁵ Christians often plunge in deep depression because they believe that they cannot be forgiven for their wrongdoings.

When depression set in, a Christian can begin to despair. It is very difficult for the depressed Christian to believe that God still loves him and that he can be forgiven through the redemptive work of the Cross:

“Whoever you are, whatever you have done,
whatever has happened to you, you are forbidden
to believe that you have passed outside the reach
of God’s sustaining love”⁵⁶

In my observation a depressed Christian can also feel “*guilt* because of his sin”⁵⁷. Sin, guilt and depression became a vicious circle from which the Christian can find difficult to extricate himself.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.,133

⁵⁴ Ibid.,132

⁵⁵ Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* (1988: 558)

⁵⁶ Bringle *Despair Sickness or Sin?* 1990: 146

⁵⁷ Roberts *Battles Christians face* 2007 :47

According to Wommack, sin is “conceived in the emotions”⁵⁸. He believes that If Christians would conceive “thoughts of depression as sin”⁵⁹ they would resist their depression. I disagree with Wommack’s views because I believe that depression is not a sin but a signal in our mind and body that tells us that something in ourselves, emotional, physical or spiritual is not functioning as it should be and we need to seek help for the condition.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at four factors that can possible cause a Christian to become depressed: 1) anger, 2) low self-esteem, 3) loneliness 4) sin.

We have looked at how it is that many Christians if unable to express their feelings in appropriate way or believe that they cannot be forgiven by God for their sins can develop a deep depression. When in depression, a Christian loses the impetus to do or achieve anything which leads to feelings of being a failure and low self – esteem. In the next chapter we shall look at the Christian response to depression.

⁵⁸ Wommack *Harnessing Your Emotions* 1999: 19

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Christian response to depression

1. How to identify a person with depression

At times, it may be difficult to identify when a person, is suffering with depression especially in a Christian or church context. For example, because depression often comes with the stigma of mental disease, a Pastor⁶⁰ may not want to admit to his congregation and to himself that he needs help.

In the same way many women can experience depression, after the birth of a child, “post-natal depression”⁶¹, or “postpartum depression following childbirth.”⁶²The depression may also go undetected because the new mother hides it under a false cheerfulness perhaps because she believes that admitting to the depression signifies admission that she is not happy or she is resenting her new child, a gift from God.

Unfortunately often it is only after the individual shows signs of deep distress and inability to cope with everyday life that a depressive state is diagnosed. I consider Collins’ view appropriate in believing also that some depressed Christians try to hide what they are feeling, “masked depression”⁶³ by pretending that all is well and that they do not need any help.

⁶⁰ Greene – McCreight *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to a Mental Illness*, 2008 :143

⁶¹ Sanders *Women and Depression* 1984: 95

⁶² Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988:107

⁶³Ibid.

Collins⁶⁴, Dominion⁶⁵ and Lewis⁶⁶ share the view that it is difficult to diagnose depression.

Collins⁶⁷ points out to certain signs that may help to identify a person with depression:

1. Unhappiness and a sad countenance leading to inability to enjoy life's blessings: the depressed often will not be able to rejoice or be happy because they feel miserable all the time.
2. Lack of interest and lethargy: not wanting to engage in any type of physical or mental activity.
3. Loss of appetite or overeating: often developing bad eating habits like "bulimia"⁶⁸ or compulsive eating. Many people, may under eat or over eat to fill the emptiness and the void which is their life.
4. Self – criticism and self – hate: often the depressed believes that they are unlovable and that cannot be loved or accepted by God. At time the depressed will inflict harm on themselves because of their own dislike, or because they are trying to cover up the pain that their self-loathing is causing them.
5. General fatigue and inability to concentrate: Depressed people may find difficult to maintain a job because they feel most of the time tired and listless.
6. Withdraw from other: Depressed people although needing love and acceptance at time they may found difficult socializing and be around people⁶⁹
7. Loss of spontaneity: The depressed loses the ability to act with spontaneity because of fear of losing control.

2. How Christian counselling differs from secular counselling.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 105

⁶⁵ Dominion *Depression What is it? How do we cope?* 1976: 148

⁶⁶ Lewis *Finding God Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression* 2002:2

⁶⁷ Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988: 105

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1988:512

⁶⁹ Anderson *Overcoming Depression* 2004:23

Wurth believes that the difference between Christian counselling or and secular counselling is that the first happens in a church the latter takes place in “the psychotherapist office, or in a doctor surgery”⁷⁰.

I disagree with Wurt’s claim that Christian counselling can only respond in a Church setting, because I agree with Inwood that Christian counselling may also includes” the informal chat over the washing-up”⁷¹ Christian counselling is not only for the Church but also for non-Christians. Society needs to hear the message of Christ, and a Christian counsellor finds himself in the privilege position to be able to respond to the cry for help by representing God’s love and forgiveness for the lost and the depressed Christians and non-Christians alike:

“Ultimately, the Christian hopes to help others became disciples of Christ and disciples of others”⁷²

I agree with Wurth and Inwood,⁷³ that Christian counselling must respond to the depressed by placing the emphasis first of all on God and then the depressed to understand that he is a sinner totally lost without God’s mercy:

“But his sin can be seen only in the light of
His forgiveness. In contradistinction to all
psychoanalysis and deep psychology, we
must always see grace behind the unveil of sin”⁷⁴

On the other hand Collins suggest that the primary difference between secular and Christian counselling is that the Christian counsellor must be Spirit led and not relying only on his empirical knowledge:

⁷⁰ Wurth *Christian Counseling In the Light of Modern Psychology* 1962:39

⁷¹ Inwood *Biblical Perspective on Counselling* 1980:5

⁷² Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988:20

⁷³ Inwood *Biblical Perspective on Counselling* 1980:5

⁷⁴ Wurt *Christian Counselig.*, 1962:39

“To be used by the Holy Spirit to touch lives,
to change them, and to bring others towards
both spiritual and psychological maturity”⁷⁵

3. A possible way forward in the Church community.

The Church has a very important role alongside therapists, counsellors and doctors in helping those who are suffering with depression, Christians and non Christians alike.

Wurth suggests that the Christian church has been called to care for the soul of people and to care for the “sick and the ailing”⁷⁶ but that it is Christ who has to be made the centre for caring because He is the great Shepherd who can help:

“He can truly take care of the soul, who can comfort and encourage.”⁷⁷

I believe that a possible way forward for the church to help and respond to the depressed and those who are suffering is that more emphasis should be placed on church community life and in establishing each member of the church as part of a “living community”⁷⁸

Wurt maintains that in order for the church to work harmoniously as a community of believers who help one another, it needs to do anything possible to heed the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 4:12, 13 teaching us to be an example to the believers in words, love, behaviour, purity of mind, body and spirit; always willing to read and study the Word, and helping and assisting those in needs. The Bible encourages Christian to be “lively stones”⁷⁹ in the spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:5, 6).

⁷⁵ Collins *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide.*, 1988:10

⁷⁶ Wurt *Christian Counseling* 1962:101

⁷⁷ *Ibid* 1962:102

⁷⁸ *Ibid* 117

⁷⁹ *Ibid* 117

Lockley⁸⁰ suggest that the Church must provide a safe place for the depressed and those who are sick. God accept and love us as we are. The church must not judge or criticize those that are in mental or physical need, the church has to be:

“Loving, warm, understanding, compassionate aura of friendship and acceptance⁸¹

I believe that the Church needs to become sensitive to the needs of depressed people and act accordingly; encouragement is very important when dealing with the depressed. The church must act graciously and lovingly towards those who are depressed.

I also think that one way forward for the Church is to set up training courses for those in the who wish to help the depressed. It is important also that the Church forges close bond with the medical profession and they are able to mutually assist one and another in helping the depressed.

Conclusion

In chapter three we have looked at how to identify a person with depression. We have also touched on the differences between Christian and secular counselling. Christian counselling must be led completely by the Holy Spirit, the real “comforter”, while secular counselling is depending on the human’ wisdom and knowledge of the counsellor. The church has to become a true community of believer where the depressed feels safe and appreciated for his individuality.

In the next chapter we shall look how to listen to a depressed person from a Pastor/ Church perspective.

⁸⁰ Lockley *A Practical Workbook for the Depressed Christian* 2002: 379

⁸¹ Ibid.

Chp.4

Listening to a depressed person from a Pastor/ Church perspective

According to Martin Lloyd-Jones depression is one of the main reasons why people seek “pastoral help from the Church”.⁸² The Church needs to know how to learn to listen to depressed Christians in order to be able to help, but I agree with Anderson that the Church often does not know how to deal “with the problem of depression.”⁸³ These views are also shared by Kramer.⁸⁴

When addressing the issue of depression the Pastor/Church has to listen to what the depressed is saying about his body, mind, emotions and spirit. It is important when dealing with depression to have a holistic programme in place but to always to remember that it is “Jesus Christ who is the true healer”.⁸⁵ As the Pastor listening to the depressed he also has to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

1. Dealing with the physiology

“Our emotional and psychological health is influenced by the function of our body”⁸⁶

When someone suffers with depression the person appetite is often affected, he will eat too little or too much. There is a loss of sexual drive. He may have diarrhoea or stomach trouble.

⁸² Lloyd-Jones *Spiritual Depression Its Causes & Cure* 1965:108

⁸³ Anderson *Overcoming Depression* 2004:9

⁸⁴ Kramer et al *Ministers' Perceptions of Depression: A Model to Understand and Improve Care* 2007:124

⁸⁵ Lloyd-Jones *Spiritual Depression Its Causes & Cures* 1965:251

⁸⁶ Berg&McCartney *Depression and the integrate life A Christian understanding of sadness and suffering* 1981:102

Often the depressed person will have heart palpitation. He will feel either be really cold or will have hot flushes with cold or will have hot flushes.

When someone is depressed he can often feel tired and fatigued. His sleeping patterns can alter, either he has to sleep a lot or he may suffer of insomnia or has a restless night.

2. The Emotional influences (affective)

Depression can be caused by emotional hurts and has the effect of bringing up lots of grief and heartache that may last for a very long time. I believe that many, because of childhood emotional scarring are unable to function as adults. The depressed Christian often suffers because they love the Lord but feel unable to serve and to fulfil God's plan for their life because of their illness. Emotional wounds cannot be seen but they are "certainly felt",⁸⁷ often hidden behind a mask of false smiles; Minirth and Meier call this the "smiling depression."⁸⁸

According to Lloyd-Jones although the Church has to be sympathetic to the feelings and emotions of someone asking for help, it is imperative that it should teach the depressed not to concentrate too much on negative feelings because then the person is doomed to be unhappy.

Although I agree with Lloyd-Jones that people should not pay too much attention to their negative feelings, I do not fully endorse his opinion because I believe that a depressed person lives under a dark cloud of despondency and sad emotions. One of the reason why the depressed ruminates on sad feelings is because he has lost hope, and "out of control"⁸⁹, therefore,not be able to detach himself from his emotion.

I believe that the Church has a lot to offer to the depressed but I also side with Lockley that:

⁸⁷ Hawkey *Healing Emotional Wounds* 1999:5

⁸⁸ Minirth and Meier *Happiness is a Choice A Manual on the Symptoms, Causes, and Cures of Depression* 1984:24

⁸⁹ Anderson *Overcoming Depression* 2004:57

“The church, *working correctly*, provides the best possible support for *anyone* with depression. Unfortunately, many churches don’t understand the real nature of depression and as result can make the life harder, not easier, for the sufferer.”⁹⁰

3. The Spiritual influences

Depression can be detrimental to the spiritual and religious life⁹¹. If it goes unnoticed or unchecked it can have a seriously debilitating effect on the relationship with God and it can cloud the ability to listen to what He has to say or the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Depressed people also are ridden with guilt and feel spiritually alone separated from God⁹². Depression according to some counsellors can also be an outcome of non confessed sin hence when guilt sets in, the depressed may feel rejected, empty⁹³, unworthy of love, negating unwittingly the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Lloyd-Jones believes that some Christians become depressed because they are not able to have a ‘transcendental’ spiritual experience. Often these people will begin to doubt if they are Christian at all⁹⁴, blocking God’s “avenue of grace and healing”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Lockley *A Practical Workbook For The Depressed Christian* 2002:14

⁹¹ Berg & McCartney *Depression and the integrate life A Christian understanding of sadness and suffering* 1981:79

⁹² *Ibid.*,1981:80

⁹³ *Ibid.*,83

⁹⁴ Lloyd-Jones *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes & Cure* 1965: 112

⁹⁵ Berg & McCartney *Depression and the integrate life A Christian understanding of sadness and suffering* 1981:87

According to Horrobin⁹⁶, and Lockley⁹⁷, when dealing with depression, the Church needs to look at the possibility of demonic influences and the possibility of deliverance ministry⁹⁸, although it is not that common.⁹⁹

4. Thinking and Perception (cognitive)

Thinking and perception can determine how a person feels. According to Collins¹⁰⁰ often if a person thinks in a negative way, sees life a succession of trouble, obstacles and defeat, has negative views of life and overlooks the positive aspects of life, then depression may become inevitable

Depression can cause an individual to become irrational in his thinking, often giving a distorted perception of people and events:

“The core of emotional disturbance lies in a set of irrational that people hold about themselves, other people and the world”¹⁰¹

Minirth & Meier¹⁰² believe that negative thinking brings the depressed to think *self-debasing* thoughts. He wants love and affection from others and from God but believes he is not worthy of love.

5. Incapacity to do things (motivation)

The depressed can experience a loss of concern and interest in most things and may find difficult to have a relationship with God, fellow Christians and the Church. He will indeed

⁹⁶ Horrobin *Healing through Deliverance* 2003:62

⁹⁷ Lockley *A Practical Workbook for the Depressed Christian* 2002:439

⁹⁸ Horrobin *Healing through Deliverance* 2003:62

⁹⁹ Lockley *A Practical Workbook for the Depressed Christian* 2002:440

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *Christian Counselling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988:108

¹⁰¹ Dryden, *Fundamentals of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy*,2002:1

¹⁰² Minirth & Meier *Happiness is a choice A manual on the Symptoms, Causes and Cures of Depression* 1984:24

feel as if he were 'walking through the darkest valley' (Psalm 23: 4). He may lack motivation, loses his sense of humour and can become indecisive.

The Church as a community of believers can have an important role in helping the depressed to achieve a new way of thinking and feeling. This can be done through imparting the love and acceptance that Jesus Christ, when on earth, always gave to those who were suffering, sad, distressed or depressed.

6. Environment

According to the writer Marshall the aetiology¹⁰³ or the causation of depression points not only to mental states but also to "social factors". He cites the study of Brown and Harris the "Social Origins of Depression" (1998) to confirm that negative and distressing circumstances in an individual who is feeling at a low point in his life can be attacked by a bout of melancholy which if it persists can send the individual in deep and prolonged depression which can also have a negative effect on his physical life¹⁰⁴.

Christians, also can feel pressure from the outside world to conform to unattainable social values, such as the accrual of material wealth for men and the pursuit of the perfect body for women. Most cannot achieve these standards. Left with feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth people can descend into depression.

7. Suicidal wishes/ tendency

According to Berg¹⁰⁵, depression can lead to suicide. Feelings of deprecation, loneliness, and hopelessness are so painful that can lead the person to lose all hopes of healing and restoration.

¹⁰³ Aetiology Dfinition *Definition of Aetiology ;MedicineNet.com*,Last Editorial Review 7/10/2000-22 April 2009

¹⁰⁴ Marshall. "*Depression.*" *A Dictionary of Sociology*. 1998. *Encyclopedia.com*. 22 Apr. 2009

¹⁰⁵ Berg & McCartney *Depression and the integrate life A Christian Understanding of Sadness and Inner Suffering* 1981: 8

White¹⁰⁶ lists age, the gender of the person, isolation, family history, drug and alcohol abuse as some of the causes of suicide.

Williams¹⁰⁷ suggest that depressed people at time are suffering because they are genetically predisposed to depression. The Christian counselling can help the depressed to forgive and to bring to the Cross the problem of the “parental inheritance pattern”¹⁰⁸ and ask Jesus’ deliverance and healing. I believe that William’s view is right and that in secular counselling although the depressed can be helped to forgive, he will not be able to receive the redemptive message of the Cross. Collins¹⁰⁹ suggests that both society and the Church are witnessing an unprecedented increase in people who are diagnosed as “depressed”¹¹⁰ with dire consequences leading to suicide:

“For there is no doubt that depression, long the leading mental illness ..., is now virtually epidemic –and suicide is its all too frequent outcome.”¹¹¹

Greene – McCreight when poignantly describing her fight against her depression and suicides attempts s writes:

“The weight of my very existing grinds the shards of grief deeper into my soul. When I am depressed, every breath, every conscious moment hurts...This escape from consciousness is at the heart of suicidal energy. It is *not* wanting to hurt the self. It is simply wanting *not to hurt*. When I am depressed, it seems that the only way not to hurt is to cease being a centre

¹⁰⁶ White J., *The Mask of Melancholy* A Christian psychiatrist looks at depression and suicide :172

¹⁰⁷ Williams *Doorways of the Mind* 1986:191

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁹ Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988: 108

¹¹⁰ Ibid.,1988:105

¹¹¹ LaHaye, *How to win over Depression* 1977: Introduction

of consciousness.¹¹²”

I believe that suicide tendency in depressed people is an attempt to ask for help and to stop hurting so much. According to Fairchild one of the most important tasks in looking after depressed peoples is to assess the suicide risk because the danger is always present and should be in the forefront of the Pastor, when meeting with depressed parishioners.¹¹³

¹¹² Greene – McCreight *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness* 2008:29

¹¹³ Fairchild, *Finding Hope Again A Guide To Counselling The Depressed* 1980: 95

Chapter 5

Preventing depression

According to Wommack depression not only can be prevented but also totally avoided if a person keeps his mind on the goodness and amazing love of God and all His works:

“If we really had our mind stayed on the awesome things God has done for us and prepared for us, it would be impossible for us to be depressed and defeated regardless of our present situation. There would be perfect peace”¹¹⁴

This view is also shared by Lloyd – Jones who believes that if a depressed Christian instead of worrying about his feeling and emotions thirst for the righteousness of God he will become truly happy and blessed and never depress.¹¹⁵

I would disagree with Wommack’ and Lloyd - Jones statement because I believe that what they say it is too simplistic and facile. Many people love God, are in faith, they seek His righteousness and still get depressed. On the other hand I agree with Collins that depression cannot completely be prevented especially if it happens because of biological reasons.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Wommack *Harnessing Your Emotions* 1999:37

¹¹⁵ Lloyd – Jones *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes & Cures* 1965:117

¹¹⁶ Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988:115

Some time life can become very difficult and anyone can fall into melancholy or deep depression. For a while an individual can become discouraged and unhappy, nevertheless Collins suggests that there are certain ways to, if not to prevent, at least to: “soften the blows of depression that the Christian counsellor can suggest to the depressed that may help and these are:”¹¹⁷

- 1) To *trust* in God in difficult times can help to prevent depression encouraging a sense of hope in all things.
- 2) To expect discouragement and ask for help
- 3) To be alert in depression-prone situations by anticipating the difficult times ahead or a possible difficult situation. Often it is possible to take the right precaution not to plunge into deep depression.
- 4) To learn how to handle resentment, guilt and anger by not dwelling on the past mistakes or offences and learn to forgive.
- 5) To challenge negative thinking by meditating of the word of God and thinking positive thoughts.
- 6) To learn coping technique to resist depression and try to be more emotionally controlled
- 7) To find emotional support in the Church or in the Community.
- 8) To reach out to others who are suffering the same type of illness can facilitate the healing process and depression may be lessened.
- 9) To encourage a healthy eating habits and life-style.

Although depression is a problem of world-wide proportions only half of those who have it seek help. I believe that the Church has an important role in helping to facilitate the understanding of the cure to prevent depression.¹¹⁸

Depression is an affliction that affects the body, mind, emotions and spirit and in order to help the depressed or to prevent depression before it becomes too severe,¹¹⁹ there needs to be a close working relationship between clergy and the mental health profession:¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 1988:115

¹¹⁸ Kramer et al *Ministers' Perceptions of Depression: A Model to Understand and Improve Care* 2007:123

“Most frequently, ministers expressed a desire to enhance linkages with mental health systems and professionals”¹²¹

According to Kramer *et al.*, Ministers working in Pastoral care need first of all to have an understanding of the genetic, biochemical, psychosomatic, cultural and spiritual aspects of depression so to have necessary tools to prevent it.¹²² Church intervention often must include psychological and spiritual components. The Church has to endeavour to encourage Christians to participate actively in the church community and how to help others who are struggling with the same illness.’¹²³

“Churches and other social institutions, can become therapeutic communities where people feel welcome and accepted.”¹²⁴

It is important that the Church becomes equipped to deal with those with depression because at times there may be a call to assess individuals for receiving formal medical help particularly for the severe depressed.¹²⁵

According to Roberts¹²⁶ depression affects every part of life and the Church can help to prevent depression by encouraging the reading of the Bible, prayers and meditations such as Psalms 42 and 43.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ Ibid.,2007:124

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ 135

¹²² 135

¹²³ Kramer 133

¹²⁴ Collins *Christian Counseling A Comprehensive Guide* 1988:117

¹²⁵ White *The Mask of Melancholy A Christian psychiatrist looks at depression and suicide* 1982:171

¹²⁶ Roberts *Battles Christians face* 2009:72

¹²⁷ Ibid., 2009:73

Conclusion

To conclude depression has some components of nature and nurture, of brain chemistry and the stresses of life.¹²⁸ Everyone can be become a victim of depression. The Church can help to alleviate the problem of depression through Pastoral counselling and personal care for the depressed.

From the study of this Paper we have seen that depression in a Christian can be worse because it raises many theological issues such the hiddenness of God in the face of suffering, and sin and grace”¹²⁹ It painful for a Christian to accept or understand a God of love that allows sufferings and anguish.

Greene – McCreight believes that the central question that a depressed Christian asks to himself is “What is God’s relationship to my pain?”¹³⁰ Like Job, many depressed people at time ask themselves why they are suffering; where is God when they need Him? The depressed can find very difficult to feel or believe that God cares or hears his cries for help:

“In the midst of an impenetrable depression, one is often unable to sense the presence of God at all. Sometimes all one can feel is the complete absence of God, one’s utter abandonment by God...

¹²⁸ Greene – McCreight *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness* 2008:43

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*,7

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130

this cuts to the heart of the Christian and challenges everything she believes.”¹³¹

The depressed will often ask “Why should God want me to go through this?”¹³²

To conclude, finally I would like to agree with Greene – McCreight ¹³³ that while the depressed non – Christian with the help of psychotherapy and a good counsellor can learn to love and accept himself more, a depressed Christian can “in the dark night of the soul”¹³⁴ begin to conceive depression as a blessing. It is when we suffer the most that we get closer and love God more; He will not reject and forsake us:

“ Depression is a painful spiritual condition out of which much growth can come”¹³⁵

I believe that the effective Christian response for the depressed person is to give support and to welcome him in the Church lovingly and without prejudice. The Pastor and the congregation must endeavour to encourage the depressed to share his frustration and anger with someone he can trust, perhaps a friend, another Christian or a professional counsellor who will help him to find hope; have a more positive outlook about himself and about life.

¹³¹ Ibid.,93

¹³² Lockley: *A Practical Workbook for the Depressed Christian* 2002:19

¹³³ Greene – McCreight *Darkness Is MY Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness* 2008:113

¹³⁴ Ibid.,2008:112.

¹³⁵ Fairchild *Finding Hope Again A Guide to Counseling the Depressed* 1980:viii

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