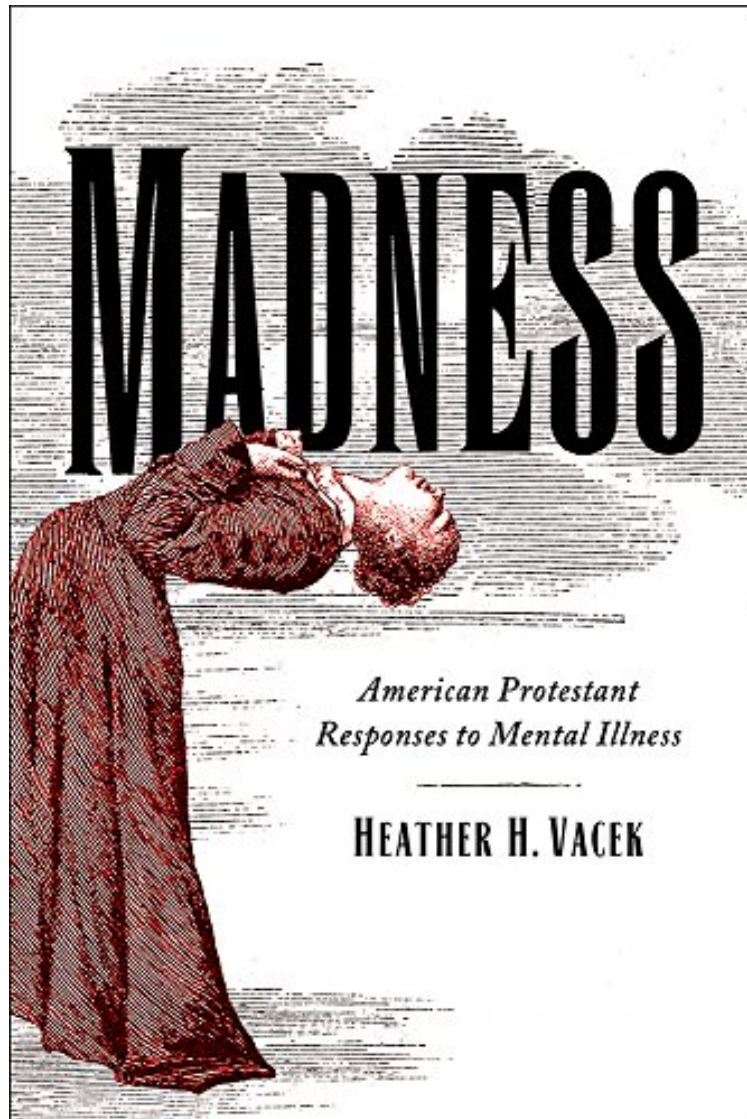


[Mobile book] Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness (Studies In Religion, Theology, and Disability)

Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness (Studies In Religion, Theology, and Disability)

Heather H. Vacek

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Heather H. Vacek : Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness (Studies In Religion, Theology, and Disability) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness (Studies In Religion, Theology, and Disability):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. great approach of the Christian influence of major American mental

...By Thomas H. great approach of the Christian influence of major American mental health advocacy and early development of the field. This is missing from the secular educational standard texts. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Reiner Smolinski Thank you! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Illuminates the bright spots in the church's mental health responses By Christine J. Guth *Madness: American Protestant Responses to Mental Illness*, by Heather Vacek (Baylor University Press, 2015), examines the history of American attitudes and responses toward mental illness over three centuries. It does this through examining five Protestant Christians who took an exceptional interest in those who lived with mental maladies. As Vacek examines the lives of Cotton Mather, Benjamin Rush, Dorothea Dix, Anton Boisen, and Karl Menninger, and the contexts in which they lived, she creates a portrait of pioneers who led the way in responding compassionately to people suffering from mental afflictions and the theological and practical obstacles they faced. This title caught my eye because I am painfully aware through personal and family experience that churches have too often contributed to the suffering of people with mental illness, rather than relieving it. Christians have suggested that people with mental illness are complicit with demons, do not deserve burial within Christian cemeteries, lack faith to be healed, and many other subtle and overt forms of blaming the wounded for their own anguish and excluding them from the community they need. The book's introduction offers a concise description of the failings of Protestant Christianity to respond with compassion to people with mental illness. In the main section of the book, however, Heather Vacek focuses on exceptional individuals who reflected on the mental suffering they witnessed and took positive public action to alleviate it, motivated by their Christian faith. Her portraits of these individuals take care to place the person within the historical context of the day. Through these biographies, she portrays changing societal attitudes toward mental illness and evolving approaches to treatment throughout the course of American history, from colonial times to the present. The final chapter *Conclusion: Suffering, Stigma, and Hospitality*, struck me as the heart of what the book has to offer to contemporary Christian communities. Here Vacek turns to consider how Christian congregations today can continue the legacy of the exemplary leaders she has described. She notes that although these influential individuals have truly had a lasting impact on mental health treatment in public life, their dedicated efforts failed to refashion congregational practice (172). Offering a way forward, Vacek calls congregations to practice Christian hospitality, a hospitality that draws together guests and hosts into relationships of mutuality with one another and with God in Christ (173). She outlines the role of stigma in intensifying suffering, noting that in the face of being stigmatized by association, congregations prove reluctant to risk care for those suffering from mental illness (168). When they withdraw from those who suffer, they lose coherence between a belief in Christian mercy and practice marked, instead, by indifference. Yet, Vacek asserts, Christians possess the resources and the power not only to reshape their practices but also to alter views of those around in their midst (169). Cognizant of the risks and consequences of resisting societal norms, Vacek outlines four acts that hospitality requires: welcome, compassion, incorporation, patience. With each of these acts, Vacek gives concrete examples and a theological vision for what these practices can accomplish. I recommend this book, and especially its final chapter, to pastors and church leaders who are seeking to reflect on and develop a congregations ministry among people with mental illnesses, whether they be church members or strangers. It will also appeal to readers with an interest in the history of American mental health attitudes and practices, or, more generally, the history of Christian influences on American society.

Madness is a sin. Those with emotional disabilities are shunned. Mental illness is not the church's problem. All three claims are wrong. In *Madness*, Heather H. Vacek traces the history of Protestant reactions to mental illness in America. She reveals how two distinct forces combined to thwart Christian care for the whole person. The professionalization of medicine worked to restrict the sphere of Christian authority to the private and spiritual realms, consigning healing and care both physical and mental to secular, medical specialists. Equally influential, a theological legacy that linked illness with sin deepened the social stigma surrounding people with a mental illness. The Protestant church, reluctant to engage sufferers lest it, too, be tainted by association, willingly abdicated care for people with a mental illness to secular professionals. While inattention formed the general rule, five historical exceptions to the pattern of benign neglect exemplify Protestant efforts to claim a distinctly Christian response. A close examination of the lives and work of colonial clergyman Cotton Mather, Revolutionary era physician Benjamin Rush, nineteenth-century activist Dorothea Dix, pastor and patient Anton Boisen, and psychiatrist Karl Menninger maps both the range and the progression of attentive Protestant care. Vacek chronicles Protestant attempts to make theological sense of sickness (Mather), to craft care as Christian vocation (Rush), to advocate for the helpless (Dix), to reclaim religious authority (Boisen), and to plead for people with a mental illness (Menninger). Vacek's historical narrative forms the basis for her theological reflection about contemporary Christian care of people with a mental illness and Christian understanding of mental illness. By demonstrating the gravity of what appeared and failed to appear on clerical and congregational agendas, Vacek explores how Christians should navigate the ever-shifting lines of cultural authority as they care for those who suffer.

"Madness offers a sensitive, in-depth treatment of the important and under-discussed subject of mental illness. Heather

Vacek makes a signal contribution to histories of mental illness, medicine, and religion, and her book should be of great interest to scholars in each of these fields as well as to general audiences seeking to understand and respond to mental illness."Candy Gunther Brown, Professor of Religious Studies, Indiana University"

Vacek's exquisitely researched and written book gives us an account of the Protestant response to mental illness from the beginning of the nation. Though this is history done at its best, Vacek's passion for her subject makes this a book of theological significance. I heartily recommend it."Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law, Duke Divinity School"

By telling the story of mental illness, faith, and ministry through and around the lives and stories of five prominent leaders since colonial times, *Madness* will help us recognize eternal questions and needs as well as the historical foundations on which new collaborations between ministry and medicine can be built for the sake of more holistic care in clinics, communities, and congregations."Bill Gaventa, Director, Summer Institute on Theology and Disability"

Vacek has written a scholarly jeremiad in which she has weighed her co-religionists' responses to mental illness in the moral balance and found them wanting. The organization of the book highlights what she persuasively argues is a perennial gap between belief and practice in her faith community...The prose is clear, the documentation thorough, and her stance heartfelt."Lawrence B. Goodheart, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*"

This timely and deeply moving study has garnered wide media attention. It shows how American Protestants have addressed and, more often, failed to address mental illness in their congregations."The Christian Century"

I recommend this book, and especially its final chapter, to pastors and church leaders who are seeking to reflect on and develop a congregation's ministry among people with mental illnesses, whether they be church members or strangers. It will also appeal to readers with an interest in the history of American mental health attitudes and practices, or, more generally, the history of Christian influences on American society."Christine Guth, Anabaptist Disabilities Network"

Vacek's book serves as an important reminder of how conceptions of mental illness and the structure of care for the mentally ill has a long and complicated history, shaped by everything from religious reformers, the emerging field of professionalized medicine, and the evolution of often grossly underfunded state institutions."David Eagle, *Sociology of Religion*"

In sum, Vacek combines top-notch historical inquiry with a concern for effective theological responses to mental suffering. She carefully contextualizes the lives of her subjects in relation to broad religious and medical trends, and her in-depth biographical studies facilitate insightful, comparative analysis. The book is accessible to a broad audience and represents an excellent addition to the growing scholarly literature addressing the intersection of religion, medicine, and healing."Joseph Williams, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*"

Madness is a fine accomplishment, weaving together a theological point with historical analysis."Sean Cosgrove, *Journal of Religious History*

From the Inside Flap

In "Madness," Heather H. Vacek traces the history of Protestant reactions to mental illness in America. She reveals how two distinct forces combined to thwart Christian care for the whole person. The professionalization of medicine worked to restrict the sphere of Christian authority to the private and spiritual realms, consigning healing and care both physical and mental to secular, medical specialists. Equally influential, a theological legacy that linked illness with sin deepened the social stigma surrounding the mentally ill. The Protestant church, reluctant to engage sufferers lest it, too, be tainted by association, willingly abdicated care for the mentally ill to secular professionals. While inattention formed the general rule, five historical exceptions to the pattern of benign neglect exemplify Protestant efforts to claim a distinctly Christian response. A close examination of the lives and work of colonial clergyman Cotton Mather, Revolutionary era physician Benjamin Rush, nineteenth-century activist Dorothea Dix, pastor and patient Anton Boisen, and psychiatrist Karl Menninger maps both the range and the progression of attentive Protestant care. By demonstrating the gravity of what appeared and failed to appear on clerical and congregational agendas, Vacek explores how Christians should navigate the ever-shifting lines of cultural authority as they care for those who suffer."About the Author

Heather H. Vacek is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Faculty, and Assistant Professor of Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.