

Eastern Christian Traumas: A Review Essay

Adam A.J. DeVille

R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac, eds., *Trauma and Lived Religion: Transcending the Ordinary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 258pp.

Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2019), 227pp.

Bernd Huppertz, ed., *Approaches to Psychic Trauma* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 524pp.

Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 464pp.

Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 336pp.

Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 256pp.

Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma* (London: SCM Press/Veritas, 2008), 188pp.

Jacob D. Lindy and Robert J. Lifton, eds., *Beyond Invisible Walls: The Psychological Legacy of Soviet Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 272pp.

Last year this reviewer was invited to prepare a keynote lecture for the 2020 congress of Russian Byzantine Catholics, building off the last such gathering in 2017.¹ The focus of the 2020 congress will be Eastern Christians living in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Gulag. The lecture was prepared last December as requested and sent to the organizers to be translated into Russian in anticipation of delivery at the congress, which had been scheduled for early June 2020. As of the time of writing, however, it is not clear if the congress will go ahead, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Indeed, this pandemic is already proving to be a traumatic event for many, perhaps most clearly in China and northern Italy, but increasingly everywhere. Whenever and however it ends, this pandemic will continue to mark the body politic around the world and the global body of Christ; each will bear wounds and losses for many years to come. In this light, paying attention to a burgeoning literature on trauma becomes more necessary than ever. This is an important task for theologians, bishops, pastors, seminarians, teachers, parish workers, clinicians, and others.

On sabbatical during 2018–2019, this reviewer spent part of his time on a fellowship at the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute, which introduced him to contemporary scholarship and clinical practice in the realm of trauma. Since then he has himself been pursuing further clinical training to work with traumatized populations, including those sexually abused in and by the Catholic Church. This research, together with the invitation to deliver the aforementioned lecture, opened up an opportunity for sustained reading and research into the realms of trauma and theology, the fruits of which can be shared in the following essay, even if this often consists only of too-brief remarks on the books mentioned above, offered in the hope that others will find them as useful as he has.

The eight volumes above are listed chronologically, but will be reviewed in a different order, starting with what is per-

¹ About which see my “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 59 (2018): 245–261; and “In Search of a Father,” *Catholic World Report*, June 18, 2017, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/06/18/in-search-of-a-father/>.

haps the best introduction for those who have no background at all in the study of trauma, Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*. Originally published in 1992, and since then translated into many languages and reprinted in 2015 with a new introduction, this justly popular international best-seller is a model of clinical writing: clear, cogent, accessible for the "lay" reader, and not at all drowning under turgid jargon that one so often finds in clinical works. It was a landmark book at the time and has remained so. Eastern Christians looking for an entry into this literature will find Herman, a Harvard clinician, a most profitable and trustworthy guide.

Equally profitable, though in different ways, is Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score*. It, too, has been an international best-seller and, like Herman, van der Kolk is also a Boston-based psychiatrist. He has written a book amassing forty years of clinical experience, which he condenses in very accessible ways, along with a description of the therapeutic methods he pioneered through trial and error during his career. This is a landmark book, and we shall briefly return to it later in this essay.

For readers who already have some clinical background, the collection edited by Bernd Huppertz, *Approaches to Psychic Traumas*, contains some outstanding and more specialized chapters. This includes his first three chapters on the historical development of the concept of trauma in the clinical world of the twentieth century, which give an invaluable introduction to clinical history. Much of that history goes back, like all contemporary psychology (however much it resists acknowledging this), to Freud and his initial, halting work with veterans of the Great War suffering from what was then variously called "shell shock" or "war neurosis." Some further work was done after the Second World War, but most historians agree that it was the return of American soldiers from Vietnam that forced American psychiatry to grapple with new, severe symptoms and increased rates of suicide in veterans. Thus, by the early 1980s, new diagnostic categories comprising what today is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder were introduced into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association. Huppertz's collection applies those