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PUBLISHING STATS

Bipolar Faith

*A Black Woman's Journey
with Depression and Faith*

Monica A. Coleman

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THEOLOGY
for the
PEOPLE

“They have no idea what is happening. They don't know that I am faking ministry. They don't know I am losing my ability to really talk to the God that made me want to be a minister. This may be the first glimpse of the only God I can believe in...”

BIPOLAR FAITH

A Black Woman's Journey
with Depression and Faith

MONICA A.
COLEMAN



SYNOPSIS

Monica A. Coleman, MDiv, PhD, is a Harvard graduate, an ordained minister, and the first African-American woman to be appointed full professor of theology at Claremont School of Theology (Claremont, CA). Her faith has repeatedly been undermined by the desperate lows of depression.

In a new memoir, Coleman reflects on the legacies of slavery, poverty, war, and alcoholism, and how these conditions can mask a history of mental illness. At once spiritual autobiography and memoir of madness, *Bipolar Faith* is the book Dr. Coleman was hoping to find when she was diagnosed with bipolar II, a mental illness. She could not find a single memoir written about living with bipolar II, which is characterized by periods of deep depressions balanced by periods of productivity and energy. Moreover, she found precious few memoirs that engage religion and faith in truly constructive ways.

While the taboo around depression in the African-American faith community is diminishing, “I think there are people suffering from depression and bipolar disease who are also striving to maintain their faith. There are few guides or safe places where they can discuss their feelings,” says Coleman. This book is for them and for their allies.

AUTHOR BIO

Monica A. Coleman, MDiv, PhD, teaches theology and African-American religions at Claremont School of Theology (CST), in Claremont, CA. At CST, she was recently promoted to the position of full professor—making her the first African-American woman full professor at CST. She is a theologian who works at the intersection of philosophy, faith and African American culture. Her writings cover the topics of sexual and domestic violence, mental health and religious pluralism.

Dr. Coleman is an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a sought-after speaker and preacher. In 2005, The African American Pulpit named Coleman one of the “Top 20 to Watch—The New Generation of Leading Clergy: Preachers under 40.” Dr. Coleman has been featured as an expert in religion and mental health on NPR, Beliefnet.com, PsychCentral.com, and Huffington Post Live. She blogs on faith and depression at www.beautifulmindblog.com.

EARLY PRAISE

“Monica Coleman writes with the artistry of a poetic storyteller, the intimacy of someone who has studied depression from the inside, and the courageous transparency of someone who knows the cost of silence. Weaving cultural truths with the reality of hope and despair, Coleman's latest book is a testimony that unmask psychological struggles, family discord, and the quest for wholeness. As a scholar and minister, Coleman has crafted a book that creates a safe space for people of faith to reflect on their journey toward truth, balance, and self acceptance.”

— Thema Bryant-Davis
Past President, Society for the
Psychology of Women, and
Co-Editor, *Womanist and
Mujerista Psychologies:
Voices of Fire,
Acts of Courage*

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR MONICA A. COLEMAN



1. How does *Bipolar Faith* fill the void in the genre of memoirs about depression among African-Americans?

There are few memoirs about any kind of depression written by African-Americans, and none on living with bipolar II. I really wanted to show how my cultural history made a difference in how my family understood and experienced depression.

2. What do you think we have overlooked about how black women in the United States live with and manage depression?

Many black women have continued to work and raise children in the midst of profound challenges, including depression. They often do so because they have to, not because they don't need help or treatment. I think black women are often judged by the standard of someone who always keeps things together no matter what the circumstances. So we don't get the help we need because we believe that doing so would be a sign of weakness. I also believe that black women are not taught about depression: the signs and symptoms of the disease, how to get help, or how to develop regular practices of self-care that can help manage depression.

3. Is the subject of mental health and faith becoming less taboo in the African-American community?

I think so. I've been really moved by the number of African-American celebrities willing to talk about their experiences with depression, and how they sought help. I think this makes a big difference in removing the stigma from depression.

African-Americans are gradually realizing that depression isn't something "for white people," and that we can talk about our mental health challenges in our communities. And, the increasing number of African-American therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists also makes a positive difference. These professionals can understand our cultural experiences and often offer people a greater sense of comfort and empathy in treatment.

4. You relate some very intimate details of your life, such as living with depression and also of being raped by a fellow seminarian. What have you learned about the process of being vulnerable in your writing?

I hope that sharing my challenges will help other people feel less alone in theirs. I also think that even if people know facts and statistics, they don't necessarily understand the depth of the experience of depression or rape or any other personal trauma. I hope I give readers more than a sense of what happens; I hope I convey a bit of how it feels.

5. Can you describe your current spiritual practice?

Since my late twenties, my spiritual practice has been much more grounded in physical activity than it was when I was younger. I find God in daily repetitive activities such as cooking, cycling and caring for my daughter. Vegan cooking allows me to express creativity while also offering hospitality to my family and friends. It's a kind of daily Eucharist, breaking bread together. Cycling produces endorphins (which help with depression) and a repetitive activity that calms my spirit. These practices connect me to my ancestors, my faith and the future.

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