Support in stepping to recovery

Penny Seabrook finds this personal account not to her taste

Addicted to Love: From rehab to heaven
Clare Catford
Darton, Longman & Todd £9.95 (978-0-281-039554-6)
Church Times Bookshop £8.95

At first glance, Clare Catford does not look like an addict. Like others who have trodden the same path, she knows how to present herself well, and her former career as a broadcast journalist successfully papered over the cracks in her life until they were prised apart when an early marriage failed.

At this stage, some people reach for the bottle, but it was bulimia that imprisoned Clare. This was interpreted with bouts of over-indulgent shopping, and affairs with married men. Yet nothing stopped the past from percolating through her emotions. Her blinding to any honest and constructive appraisal of the situation persisted.

It was only when she hit rock-bottom, and discovered a twelve-step support group, that she started to understand the link between addiction and fear, which was wrapped up for her, with childhood trauma, and a conditional idea of God’s love.

Although church had always played a central part in her life, she had never really believed she was good enough to be worthy of the comfort of denial when it comes to mental illness. She was practically married — a broadcasting journalist successfully papered over the cracks in her life until they were prised apart when an early marriage failed.

The Revd Penny Seabrook is to be Pastoral Care of People with Mental Health Problems
Marion L. S. Carson
SPCK £12.99 (978-0-281-05866-2)
Church Times Bookshop £11.70

This IS described as a “state of the art yet accessible book” for those who minister to people suffering from mental-health problems, or to those close to them — which, in one way or another, will include most of us at some time.

Marion Carson is Lecturer in New Testament and Pastoral Care at the International Christian College in Glasgow, having previously been a psychiatric nurse. In the prestigious SPCK New Library of Pastoral Care series, Carson opens up underst anding both about the pastoral responses that are appropriate for clergy and other churchpeople to make to mental health sufferers and their carers, and about the bound-ary between disciplines, and the extent to which pastors working alongside other professionals may need to refer and defer.

Using many pastoral illustrations and examples, Carson reflects on mood disorders such as depression and bi-polar disorder; on anxiety, phobias, and stress; as well as on schizophrenia, addiction, and dementia. There is a small section on reacting to suicidal people, and coping with the grief caused by a suicide.

She has a section specifically on clergy stress and burnout, as well as on eating disorders, and self-harm.

In a book of fewer than 200 pages, which includes much illustrative material, it is inevitable that the approach is more broad-brush than in-depth. The theological reflection is fairly thin. There is much valuable information, and there are good references and a bibliography, but I was surprised at — in a world of such rapidly changing understanding — the proportion of books quoted that are more than ten years old.

There is a too-brief nod at the “over-zealous” Christian carer. And the complex question of confiden-cy is noted, but not really addressed.

This classic work of information which Carson provides should go some way towards address- ing the prevailing ignorance of mental-health questions in many within our churches. As she says, “If we open ourselves up to our own and others’ vulnerabilities, if we are willing to take the risk, we will go some way to providing a safe place for sufferers and those closest to them.”

Dr David Atkinson is the Bishop of Thetford.

Bargain books: this browser at a bookstall is one of the illustrations in a pocket-sized book of black-and-white photographs, On Reading This classic by André Kertész was first published in 1971, and is reissued by W. W. Norton at £16.99 (£13.30, distributed by J. Wiley (978-0-393-06656-2). The pictures, all of readers, were taken between 1920 and 1970.