

Letter in the Church Times May 2016

Sir, – It was disappointing to read the twin articles on mental illness from the Revd Vic Van Den Bergh and Sarah Meyrick.

The former spent most of his article explaining how to get someone sectioned, with a tiny paragraph saying the best advice was to treat people with care, kindness, and understanding. The second article concerned itself with an unfortunate stabbing in a random situation by a 30-year-old with drug issues in which fortunately no one died.

For the past 24 years, I have been working on and off in this field, trying to help people in spiritual distress, and to help the Church to engage with compassion with such people. These are those that Jesus called, “the least of my brothers and sisters. . . what you do for them you do for me.”

Jean Vanier is wise when he tells us that, “if we come close rather than back off, if we meet rather than retreat. When we come close we will realise that our fears may be unfounded.” Absolutely, Jean: it is my contention that “mental illness” can also be understood as a trauma induced tussle with the Lord which can be better addressed by the Church than current psychiatric services. Indeed, outcomes are often better for people who avoid contact with psychiatric services entirely. The drugs don’t always work. Love always does.

It is sad that fear of the stranger persists in church circles. In medieval times, monasteries were the default mental asylums. Oh that the modern Church would take a more enlightened view of how to come alongside those with troubled minds.

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([PDF of published letter in the Church Times](#))