



Above: Rear of the reredos in Exeter Cathedral demonstrating a Jungian theme of needing to honour both light and shade to make the richest picture.

Below: Field Poppies Herald High Summer... Enjoy!



Being Alongside



Here's Lookin' at You, Kid!

No, not a pirated Rodin
So, who do you reckon this
'Thinker' is? And what, or
who, is the 'Pearl of Great
Price'?

Try mixing & matching the
following between 'Thinker'
and 'Pearl' in any
permutations you fancy.
Take your time.

God, Jesus, you, the
Gospel, your heart's
treasure, your partner, your
parent, your child, your
business, your client base,
your 'issue', your past, your
future, your pet., or create
your own metaphors.

Powerful, isn't it? Write in?

the Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the
**Association for
Pastoral
Care in
Mental
Health**

**July - August,
2007**

If you're going through Hell - keep going! (Churchill)

The Barnabas Drop-In Sessions

'Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son Of Encouragement)' Acts 4:36

St. Paul's Community Project in partnership with APCMH

Mondays 2pm - 5pm

August Outing – to be arranged
September Story Telling
October Poetry
November First Aid

Plus various activities: Table tennis, dominoes, scrabble, art / craft, poetry reading, tea / sandwiches / cakes and chat.

Wednesday 10am - 12pm

A more reflective discussion time with tea and biscuits, an opportunity to all share concerns or to receive one-to-one support (by appointment).

Free All Welcome. Venue: St Paul's Church Centre, 3 Rossmore Rd, NW1 (5 mins walk from Marylebone Station; buses 139 & 189 stop outside)

call: Captain Mark Dadds, or Sister Theresa: 0207 724 8517

'When he arrived and saw the wonderful things God was doing, he was filled with excitement & joy, and encouraged the believers to stay close to The Lord whatever the cost. Barnabas was a kindly person, full of the Holy Spirit & strong in faith. As a result large numbers of people were added to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-24)

Mental Health Support Group

St Andrew's, Frognaal, U R Church NW3

2nd and 4th Friday of each month

10.15am-12noon

Aiming to provide friendship and mutual support for those living with mental health concerns, both sufferers and carers, where matters may be explored and discussion encouraged.

contact: The Rev'd Jonathan Dean: 0207 435 5725
or Jean Marsham: 0208 455 1240

Junction of Frognaal Lane / West End Lane / Finchley Road;
near Finchley Rd. (Met / Jub); 113, 82, 13, 46, 268, 328, 139, C11 (West End Green); Finchley Rd / Frognaal (NL Metro), Hampstead (Northern); West Hampstead (1st Capital Direct)

The Who and What of APCMH

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APCMH is a Christian based, voluntary association of individual members and affiliated groups who recognise the importance of spiritual values and support in mental health. It has a network of supporters throughout the United Kingdom and it welcomes and encourages people whatever their own faith or belief system.

Governed by its National Committee, APCMH is primarily concerned to promote and encourage "being alongside" people experiencing mental or emotional distress

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*The views expressed in *Being Alongside* are not necessarily those of the Association.*

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NATIONAL SPIRITUALITY & MENTAL HEALTH FORUM

Monday the 2nd July 2.30 to 4.30

The Council Room
West London Synagogue, 33 Seymour Place, W1H 5AU
(off Upper Berkeley Street)
nearest Tube: Marble Arch; nearest NR: Paddington & Marylebone.)

THE QUEST FOR SPIRITUALITY

A DVD prompted discussion led by Martin Aaron.
(Richard Quest has been invited)

A record of visits by Richard Quest of CNN on his spirituality interviews with **Professor Richard Dawkins** the author of the recently published book *The God Delusion*, with **The Dalai Lama**, **Ravi Shankar**, **Goldie Hawn**, **Pastor Rick Warren** of the Saddleback Church, and the American Film Producer **David Lynch**. Come and be taken on an interesting trip, hear their opinions on spirituality, to be followed by a debate on the subject.

Please confirm your attendance: e-mail Spirituality4rum@aol.com

Last Words

- * Accept that some days you're the pigeon, some you're the statue.
- * Keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.
- * Drive carefully. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their maker.
- * If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.
- * If you lend £20 and never see the person again, it was probably worth it.
- * Never buy a car you can't push.
- * Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time, because then you won't have a leg to stand on.
- * Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and dance.
- * Since it's the early worm that gets eaten by the bird, sleep late.
- * The second mouse gets the cheese.
- * When everything's coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.
- * Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the longer you live.
- * You may be only one person in the world, but you may be the world to one person.
- * Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.

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Front Page

by Stephan Ball

New Signs of Growth and Hope for APCMH

When I agreed last year to write the front page for this month I had no idea then that I would be nominated and elected as the new chairperson of APCMH! Life is full of the unexpected, and I have every need of God's grace and your support in carrying out this privileged role. Suzanne has written an excellent chairman's report reflecting on the past year and thanked many people who have made all kinds of contributions to APCMH in the past year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Suzanne herself for all she has contributed particularly in her three years as chairperson. She has an openness, creativity and willingness to take risks and enter unknown territory which may not always be easy but is nonetheless healthy!

By way of briefly introducing myself to those of you who do not know me I have been on the committee of APCMH for about six years, part of that time as a Trustee. I have worked in mental health for the best part of 25 years, mostly in Community Mental Health Teams as a Community Mental Health Nurse (or CPN). I think I have survived the challenges of constant changes in the system and the work itself by having various breaks, for example to travel or garden! I currently work in a CMHT in Rugby and commute from Northampton where I live. My approach has always been broad, seeing each person as an individual with various needs in the context of family, friends and community. I have been interested in mental health and spirituality for a long time, both as a Quaker and ecumenical Christian.

One of the great strengths and attractions of APCMH is that it involves people who experience, or have experienced, mental distress; carers; pastoral workers; mental health professionals; and voluntary organisations. I know of no other organisation that takes such a holistic approach. The National Forum for Spirituality and Mental Health covers similar ground but in a more formal context. At its heart is a respect for every person no matter what her or his mental health struggles are with 'being alongside' one another – such a simple and sometimes costly, yet potentially healing, way which we all have need of in our lives. For me this is similar to the Quaker belief that there is that of God in everyone, a power and source of life for

A Carer's Perspective

Our daughter has been suffering from mental illness for 22 years; my wife and I have been, and continue to be, her carers. During her stay in hospital meetings were set up to help carers understand the nature of the illness and how to cope with their loved one. These meetings were chaired by a psychiatrist and assisted by a psychiatric nurses.

This was excellent. One learned not to speak with a raised voice to the user when upset by them. Never respond to them when they cause you to be angered. Rather sit down beside them later on and say perhaps, 'What you said earlier upset me. Please do not speak to me like that'. Never stand over them or shout.

During the years I met three psychiatrists, one psychologist and two co-ordinators who were excellent. During a meeting for carers a lady apologised for talking too much. The Psychologist responded, 'During my degree course, I was required to do some practical work. I soon learned to put the text book away and listen to the people who had the 24 / 7 care job.'

Who is most informed about the reality of the user's condition? The psychiatrist? The co-ordinator - if you are lucky enough to have one! - or the carer? When you live with a problem you get to know it inside out. Carers save the Exchequer millions of pounds by doing this work; they deserve more support.

Carers need to become well informed about the illness; the following may help:

- 1 Contact one of the national organisations in the field eg: **Re-Think**, (tel: 0845 456 0455; net: <http://www.rethink.org>), or **Mind** (tel: 020 8519 2122; net: <http://www.mind.org.uk>) who can refer you to the nearest branch.
- 2 There are many helpful books available.
- 3 Organisations often have regular meetings where issues can be raised.
- 4 Always remember God is on your side - the work you do is dear to his heart.

The contributor asked to remain anonymous, but is happy to receive correspondence addressed via the Editor.

When you are DOWN to nothing.... God is UP to something!

LOVE, HEALING AND HAPPINESS: SPIRITUAL WISDOM FOR SECULAR TIMES

LARRY CULLIFORD

What can be observed, measured and tested gives rise to *scientific* knowledge; there is also knowledge of how to be and behave how to grow and mature throughout life. This is wisdom, *spiritual* knowledge, quite as precious as science, but is mostly forgotten in these secular times.

Love, Healing and Happiness, weaves scientific knowledge, psychological insights and religious traditions from East and West into a special new wisdom for our age. Larry's words speak to people of all religious faiths and none.

In stories of patients who have taught him vital lessons about human values and healing following loss, and in episodes from his life, Larry gives an account of processes and stages of spiritual development. He identifies pitfalls and gives terrific encouragement by sharing wisdom and providing direction. He helps us face inevitable loss with hope for future joy and contentment. Our lives enriched, we automatically then benefit others.

Dr Larry Culliford works as a psychiatrist in Sussex. He has written several highly successful self-help books. He was a co-founder of the Royal College of Psychiatrists 'Spirituality and Psychiatry' Special Interest Group (www.rcpsych.ac.uk/spirit). Larry refers to himself as a 'universalist' Christian. A churchgoing Anglican, he is open to the teachings and practices of many world faith traditions. He has studied with Buddhist teachers and has meditated regularly for over 20 years. Larry often gives lectures and workshops, for example on '*Spiritual Values in Healthcare*'.

Larry Culliford is a born story-teller, and the stories told in this book capture the essence of what it is to be human; to be mentally and physically vulnerable and yet through the pain of adversity, to grow in wisdom and stature. This is a book of practical spirituality and one not to be missed.

Dr Andrew Powell Founding Chair of the "Spirituality and Psychiatry" Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London.

This is a wonderful book for those who are searching for 'life in all its fullness'. It draws on secular and religious wisdom to speak to men and women who are looking for a spirituality that meets them where they are.

Rt Rev Dominic Walker, Bishop of Monmouth.

good in spite of all the pain or hurt we may experience from other people or situations.

I know I do not live up to this as much as I would like and I pray that God – as well as any of you reading this! – will gently remind me and 'forgive my foolish ways' if I do not honour this. This is a journey for each of us towards wholeness, healing, community, life, love and hope and we have need of one another (and God!) along the way. New hope and new horizons beckon APCMH as we have new people on the committee and as trustees, a new newsletter editor and format, new affiliated or interested groups, as well as a growing recognition of the importance of mental health and spirituality in society, in mental health services and in faith communities. The Committee will be meeting at the end of August to take stock and reflect on the future of APCMH. We would like to encourage each of you to let us know what you think and what you would like to see happen. You can do this via the website, by contacting us by phone or writing to us at the address at the back, or through the pages of this newsletter. This is a real opportunity to make a difference to APCMH – come and join in the adventure!

Stephan Ball

Suzanne's Report Stephan refers to appears overleaf.

Stress Management

A lecturer, when explaining stress management to an audience, raised a glass of water and asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?" Answers called out ranged from 20g to 500g.

The lecturer replied, 'The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance.'

'In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes, and that's the way it is with stress management. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again.'

'When we're refreshed, we can carry on. Whatever burdens you're carrying now, let them down for a moment if you can. Relax; pick them up later after you've rested.'

Chairman's Report 2007

If I had to sum up in a few words my impression of the past twelve months for APCMH it would be these: 'Lost, and found again – alternate progress and impediment, and yet a growing prospect in the main' (Wordsworth: 'Home at Grasmere').

Earlier this year the general feeling was that as a body we were losing sight of our National vision – an identity crises that hindered potential progression. Whilst musing beneath the low hung reflective mists we were compelled into readdressing some very fundamental questions - Are we continuing to reflect the values expressed within our mission statement, aims & objectives? The mists gradually break up & recede as we continue to focus on our core values & re-evaluate what we realistically have to offer as a National Committee by pinpointing specific problematic areas & focussing upon our strengths. It became increasingly apparent that our aims had somehow outgrown our capacity to function without the aid of new Members/Trustees who could provide new energy and offer their commitment.

We said a sad farewell to John Rawson as Editor of the newsletter in December & welcomed Steve Press who has far surpassed all our expectations. The website continues to flourish, single-handedly mastered by Lionel Perkin who would appreciate more assistance by way of updating events & other more specific roles – it would be good if we could begin to delegate some of Lionel's tasks to other computer literate would-be members so we might claim better ownership of the organisation as a whole. Both the Website and the Newsletter are vital communication networks without which the Association would function inadequately.

It's encouraging to witness the emergence of newly found groups. One such group which has recently become affiliated to APCMH is St Andrew's URC in Finchley which hosts a fortnightly mental health support group. We hope that their recent endeavour will encourage others to follow suit & enthuse other faith communities into providing safe havens for those with MH difficulties & to consider affiliation with APCMH once suitable premises become secured & the appropriate organisation for such a group to operate safely is established. (Affiliation is a simple process by which an agreement is signed stating that the applicant will abide by the ethics and values of APCMH - membership £25 yearly requested donation that will cover the cost of receiving 5 copies of the newsletter bi-monthly).

suicide. She writes from painful experience and you sense her compassion for the pain of her readers too.

So for whom has she written? Jo knows that depression is a widespread problem. She writes for those who are or have been depressed and for those who love them. She has in mind people who have friends struggling in the darkness. And I believe too that what she writes will be valuable to those people of faith who long to help but do not know how. We might echo the words of the Bishop of Liverpool in his foreword:

" My God, why have you abandoned me?...feelings of lonely forsakenness, so often the lot of the depressed, go right to the heart of God because they come right out of the heart of God!the Son of God...cried out of the depths of his own being as he made his own journey through the dark woods. That's why he is such a sympathetic companion. As, indeed, is Jo."

Maureen Wilkinson

"Schizo"

I live within a crystal cage
Of toughened glass and hidden rage;
And all outside the cage I view,
And wish that I were outside too.

I talk in words, unmeaning babble,
Communicate with faceless rabble,
And love to me means something crass,
Or far beyond my frozen glass.

And I, the prisoner, aloof,
Crystalline, yet shatterproof,
Long to break the rigid seal
And live within a world that's real.

Yet sometimes, like the touch of wings
I touch the real, and my soul sings!

Anne Barry

to her first baby. To all intents and purposes she is a normal and happy person who enjoys life and is great fun to be with.

So it might come as a surprise that Jo's first book, published in the summer of 2006, is called "*Through the Dark Woods: A young woman's journey out of depression*". Some of the stories that Jo has to tell are indeed about darkness, unhappiness and despair.

Yet this is in no sense an unhappy or difficult book to read. On the contrary it is immensely readable, in easy bite-sized chunks. It is full of sparkling humour and down to earth common sense. Jo writes with compassion and painful honesty, and although you might feel like weeping at some of the dark places, elsewhere you will be laughing with great enjoyment.

Jo understands depression from the inside. She has been through the most difficult of dark places where it seems impossible to get up and face the day, when the sheer weight of misery is unbearable. She knows how it is to believe you are unattractive and unlovable, and to feel isolated from others. She knows absolutely the impact of the physical, psychological and personal impact of this illness.

Yet Jo has found ways through this particular dark wood. Alongside any number of practical strategies to help you cope, she points the way to a dependence upon God who is our rock and our strength, and encourages us to remember words from the Scriptures that can help us even when we have no energy or faith to pray.

Jo stresses the importance of finding "safe" people to be with, good friends who have the ability to help you feel better rather than worse. She emphasises the equal importance of talk therapy and medication. Amongst Jo's strategies for dealing with difficult days are exercise, good books, treats, animal friends, creativity and good food. Laughter is a great healer and Jo provides many opportunities to laugh throughout her book.

Although easy to read, this is by no means a superficial approach to depression. Jo is not afraid to tackle difficult aspects such as stigma and

visit: www.pastoral.org.uk

Equally encouraging, the links being forged between other faith communities. The combined efforts of APCMH with St Marylebone Healing & Counselling Centre was instrumental in providing the November conference 'Hard To Believe' specifically geared towards those with mental health needs. The conference provided an ideal opportunity to address the mental/spiritual needs of an individual, opening such dialogue as 'What keeps your spirits up?' 'What would we like from a chaplaincy service?' 'What expertise do we have to offer one another?' In the words of Marion Dixon '*We have found that God doesn't ask for our ability but for our availability*' what was considered important was our shared experience from the university of life, our time & the willingness to listen. The Westminster Christian Mental Health Forum recently addressed the issue of increasingly declining mental health of those within local communities – a situation that seems to be endemic within society as family networks become increasingly fragmented & cultures clash. How can we reach out to such communities to provide hope in the midst of such potential despair?

Thank you to Lionel and to Steve for all your valuable work. Thanks are also due to Stephan for so carefully recording the minutes, to Pam Freeman for being a rock, quietly holding us all together and ensuring that we all receive the newsletter so promptly & to Sister Theresa for her endurance throughout some very trying times & to John Vallat for his longstanding role as Company Secretary, to Flore our Treasurer and to all our Committee members & users especially to Solomon who is greatly respected for his loyalty & devotion especially to Forest Hill – (Happy 20th Birthday Forest Hill) as well as to the National Committee, also thanks to Joan who we all so appreciate in many ways, not just for the plentiful supply of tea & large triangles. Also, a very special thanks to Mandy Lelliot who has stayed alongside us and has devoted so much time to giving to others in her unique & creative way – we wish you well with your sharing support group.

Finally the time has come for me to stand down as Chairman and I pray that my successor will be filled with God's discernment, a sense of humour & the wisdom to know the difference!

If you would like to be on the national committee or/and be available to help with the website do call the message taking service leaving your details (0844 800 9744 calls 5p per min). As a National Committee we meet 4 times a year in central London. Or contact Lionel our web master via the newsletter or the website.

Suzanne Heneghan

Hearing Voices: God's Word or Mental Illness?

I'm sure that most of you will know the story in 1 Samuel 3:10-15, where the young boy Samuel wakes from his sleep hearing what he thinks is the voice of his mentor, Eli, calling him. It is only later, after three goes, that the penny drops and Eli realises that it is God who is calling his protégé, with a message that neither of them want to hear.

But listen also to the voice of Hywel Davies as he talks about two voices, with whom he lives:

My nice voice calls me "Jesus", "the most significant spiritual thinker since Mohammed", "a saint"..... The nasty voice calls me "a liar"..... and "an evil man" amongst other things. Originally, I used to think that voices were thoughts. But I was wrong.

Usually, we interpret Samuel's experience as one of obedience to God who is angered about the behaviour of Eli's sons. Samuel does not appear to suffer at all by this experience, since he grows up to be the last of the Israel's great judges and appointer of Saul and David as kings. But, some 3000 years later, Hywel Davies' experience of hearing voices led him to be "labelled by psychiatry as a 'schizophrenic' in 1983."

For Christians, these two stories raise awkward questions which are I think are frequently avoided. For instance, to those who acknowledge that God 'speaks' in every age, why is Samuel's encounter acceptable, yet Hywel Davies is not? If science cannot prove it, does that make it invalid? And what should we do as Christians to help affirm the lives and experiences of those who hear voices?

May I start by considering the language that we use and the effect it has on those about whom it is used? Mr Davies referred to himself as 'schizophrenic' and he is entitled to do so, because he is speaking about himself. But we should not refer to him in this way. We no longer talk about 'the elderly' (or at least I hope we don't!); still less do we talk about those who live with dementia as 'demented'. For these words are labels. Consult any newspaper, even the BBC, and you will find such labelling, almost always used in a derogatory sense. Whenever we label someone, we make them an object and take away their humanity. When we remove a person's humanity, where is the hope of redemption? Labels cannot be healed; only

Winston Churchill described the hellish bouts of depression he experienced for most of his life as his Black Dog.

This book with its varied pictures of a black dog involved with the owner illustrates the state of depression but it also carries a positive uplifting message. It consists solely of pictures and captions ending with a delightful picture of the black dog on a lead looking up subdued at its master.

Closing the book Johnstone's wish is that the reader shares it with partners, parents, siblings, friends, even doctors and therapists.

Everyone's path to recovery is different. If you do have a Black Dog in your life, never, ever give up. Black Dog can be beaten. Churchill said "If you are going through hell, keep going."

Fenella Denning

And if you're not moved by a high profile APCMH Member, try this review pinched from the Amazon website:

This is a beautiful book, worth owning for the author's illustrations alone. In 48 pages (which ends with 'The Beginning') Matthew condenses insight, advice and inspiration.

Those of us who suffer with depression will understand exactly what Matthew Johnstone is talking about, both in words and pictures. Those who do not will see a glimpse of the world through the eyes of those who live with depression.

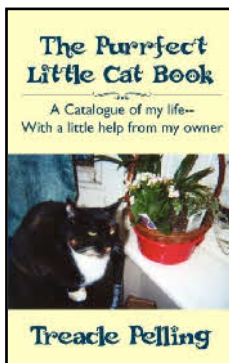
I'm seriously considering having a copy in my office to use the illustrations as flash cards when it is just too hard to explain mood. Highly recommended.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Through the Dark Woods
by Joanna Swinney
Published by Monarch Books
Price £6.99
ISBN 978-1-85424-768-1

Joanna Swinney is a bright, funny, intelligent young woman with a fascinating background and some wonderful stories to tell. Happily married to Shawn, a youth worker in the Church of England, she recently gave birth

Book Reviews: Cats and Dogs!



The Purrfect Little Cat Book
(a Catalogue of My Life with a Little Help From My Owner)
by Treacle Pelling.

Paperback: 80 pages
Publisher: AuthorHouse UK DS
January 31, 2007
ISBN-10: 1425963722
ISBN-13: 978-1425963729

I was pleased to have the opportunity to read this book written by one of our members. I thought it was delightful and an unusual approach to tell the story from the cat's perspective instead of the obvious one of the owner's.

The story is told in a fascinating way and makes the reader appreciate the importance of the bond between a pet and its owner.

It is also worth commenting that *Bridget's* the cat's insight into relationships has points for us all to learn.

I recommend this book very highly.

Pam Freeman,



I Had a Black Dog
(alternative title = Living with a Black Dog: His Name is Depression)
by Matthew Johnstone
Paperback 48pp
Published by Constable
Price £6.99
ISBN 978 1 84529 589 9

people can. So we need to talk of Hywel Davies, and those with similar experiences, first and foremost as persons with schizophrenia.

Now that we have begun to recover the individual, what are we to make of their experiences of hearing 'voices'? Are they an expression of madness or might they be part of an inner conversation with the depths of our being? Joseph Campbell, the 20th century American writer on comparative religion and mythology, observed that "the schizophrenic (sic) is drowning in the same waters in which the mystic swims with delight."

Those of us who have entered St Cross' Dark Julian of Revelations of Avila's Interior something of

Such is the pre-eminence of scientific reason today that almost any form of mysticism is pathologised.

us who have John of the *Night of the Soul*, meditated on Norwich's *Divine Love* or into Teresa of *Castle* will know the nature of

such oceans. Their tides speak to us of the ebb and flow of the human condition; their swells take us into the dark depths of our souls and lead us to the gates of heaven. Human experience and divine inspiration meet in the holy ground of the writer's being, in his or her humanity. So when Hywel Davies writes "I believe profoundly in God." and "I love God very much and I try to speak to Him every day" where does he essentially differ from the others?

With the growth of secular psychology as a way of understanding the mind, we are in danger of losing touch with the capacity within each of us for mystical experience. Such is the pre-eminence of scientific reason today that almost any form of mysticism is pathologised. If people see visions or hear voices that are external to themselves, they are labelled as 'psychotic', diagnosed as being ill and heavily medicated to reduce the visions and quieten the 'voices'.

But the psychotic state, where the subjective experience of life is not the same as objective reality, can also be a place of great inventiveness. Such creativity found no more telling expression than in the person of John Forbes Nash, who has lived with schizophrenia for much of his life. His bold decision not to take any anti-psychotic medication after 1970 allowed his God-given creative mind to flourish and provide humanity with unique

insights into aspects of human behaviour, through his the Nobel Prize winning work in the area of game theory.

Yet despite both this positive example, just one of many, behaviour that lies outside society's norms continues to challenge us. Mark writes of one such man in chapter 5 of his gospel:

He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

An outcast from society if ever there was - ritually unclean, self-harming and probably very scary: but Jesus comes to this tortured man, shows him compassion and quietens him down. The locals are afraid, no doubt being forced to confront their own prejudices, as Jesus always challenges us to do. And when Mark concludes that those who had witnessed the healing "began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood", he might as well have been talking about our own society and attitudes.

Mental illness scares us, for we are invariably anxious about what we do not understand. We want to push it away, shackle it like those villagers wanted shackled the person in Mark's story. For if mental illness is securely chained up, we can safely avoid it. We can talk about 'them' and 'us'. They hear the 'voices'. It is they who are mad. We don't behave in a strange way; we're well. And once we've created this divide, back come the labels and out go the human beings.

But let us be realistic. Despite my plea to see some apparently strange experiences as the good soil of creativity, mental illness in general, and schizophrenia in particular, can be experienced as debilitating, fracturing and isolating. Psychotic episodes in human lives can be terribly painful. In the account of his emotional breakdown, Jim Cotter talks of his experiences as a roundabout that 'was spinning faster and faster.'

'Voices' heard by those living with schizophrenia, can be very insistent, destructive and tragic. Yet sometimes, perhaps in this very pain, God can be found. The man in Mark's story found God in human form when Jesus came and sat next to him, utterly defying the cultural and societal norms of the day. In so many of the healing stories that involve Jesus, it was in the encounter that the process of healing started. Labels are discarded and divides crossed, so the process of recovering the essential humanity, which

was loved into us at the inception of our creation, can begin. That is the place of healing and the origin of redemption.

As Jim Cotter puts it 'Neurotics build castles in the air; psychotics live in them; psychiatrists charge the rent.' Perhaps Christians, who care about the health of the inhabitants, might also come over to visit from time to time and say a prayer each day – at no charge!

Richard Allen

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Note: The quotes from Hywel Davies are taken from his contribution Religion and Spirituality in Mental Health in The Courage to Bare Our Souls published by The Mental Health Foundation in 1999. The quotes from Jim Cotter come from

Read All About It?!

This piece of 'spam' is quite intriguing. It is practical proof that incorrect spelling need not necessarily prevent written communication. Try it - you'll be amazed! However, I guess that before one can cope with this level of inaccuracy, one needs to be a fairly good speller in the first place! But it might relieve poor spellers who perhaps need no longer worry so intently about 'getting it right'.

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdgnieg.

The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit plcae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm.

Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.