

Religion and the mentally ill

People joke that somebody is touched in the head or mad but nobody jokes that somebody has cancer. There are many nasty names for people with mental problems. Nutter, nutjob, looney sicko, and so on. There are no derogatory terms for people with physical illnesses.

Why the antagonism towards people with mental illness? People say it is because they fear what a person with mental illness might do. But we know that mental illness relatively rarely causes its victims to do harm.

Others say it is because people fear mental illness for they have no idea of what it is like. They do not fear physically sick people because they have a little idea of what they are going through. But this is hard to accept because people do get depressed and think they are going mad. It's a universal thing. We do have some idea of what it is like.

Religion, especially Christianity, has traditionally loathed mentally ill people. It has suggested they may be demonically possessed. And when they are not they were suspected of being demonically obsessed. That means that demons are not possessing them but meddling with their minds and causing their illness or they are just taking advantage of an existing disorder. The doctrine that a demonic presence in a person can be undetected or unnoticed does not help.

The fear of demons was then projected onto the victims of mental illness. The victims were seen as pawns of evil.

Accordingly they were feared and inevitably hated. The belief in demons has waned but centuries of hatred for the mentally ill has still left its mark. As long as the Church promotes the gospels it automatically seeks to revive that hatred. People still fear demons even though they don't deeply believe in them and the fear of demons still produces prejudice against people with mental illness.

The Church cannot rule out demonic obsession in any case of mental illness. Clearly out of respect for the victims of mental illness, the concept of demons and Jesus the exorcist need to go. This evil faith of Christendom teaches that the sin of Judas and the Pharisees Jesus said were destined for Hell for their sin was unforgivable was the sin of despair. That is a helpful doctrine for depressed people I must say! It is bad enough to suggest to people with psychotic tendencies that demons exist and can afflict people but that shows that psychiatry should oppose religion. Despair is listed as a sin against the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Catechism of Christian Doctrine.