



## SIBYLS NEWS

**Issue no.82**

**December 2017**

Dear Sibyls

I will begin my editorship by giving myself the pleasure of wishing you and your loved ones a very merry and blessed Christmas.

I must also acknowledge the help and encouragement I have been given by my splendid predecessor Carol. I have not even tried to match the standards she set in her highly professional presentation – I will try to improve this in the future but for this edition I have concentrated on the content. I assumed this role with some diffidence, recognising that as someone who transitioned later in life than many do I am by no means as well versed in trans issues including the complex religious context as many of you who read this will be. I have had some catching up to do. However, one problem that the Newsletter editor does not face is shortage of material as the media continues its seeming current obsession with trans-related stories. Sadly, many of these stories reflect a grave lack of understanding and in some cases are the outpouring of mere venom and bigotry towards trans people. It feels as though, having made substantial progress in recent years, we are now going through a period of reaction and backlash. As I write this, the Transgender Day of Remembrance is still fresh in my mind, a sombre reminder of the dangers and hostility faced by trans people. Rachel Mann's reflections on TDOR, included below, will I'm sure reflect the views of most of us.

Two particularly controversial and divisive issues have emerged during the year: the treatment of gender-variant children; and the possibility of changes to the gender recognition act to provide for self-identification. I have given some space to both these issues. There is room for disagreement on both questions but the latter in particular has provoked different responses from within the trans community itself. Carol, who as editor felt herself constrained from offering her own views, has contributed an interesting piece on this and Debbie, our Chair, has also made public her views. Some will disagree.

This being the season of joy and goodwill, I have tried not to focus too much on the negative side of current events and trends and have tried to include some material of a more hopeful kind. There is very little of this coming from the Catholic Church, or at least from the Vatican on this issue, but other parts of the Catholic Church are more understanding and informed. I have benefited greatly this year from the spiritual teaching of the American Franciscan Fr Richard Rohr and have included a reflection from him on gender and sexuality.

A major and rather hopeful event for Sibyls this year was of course the weekend at Hilfield Friary in September. Yvonne has written about this, below, and Tina has written about her role on the coordinating group overseeing the new CofE teaching document on marriage and sexuality.

I'm afraid all this makes for rather a long newsletter. I must ask for your forbearance and that you treat this as a bumper Christmas edition, skipping over whatever does not interest you.

I must also apologise that the content is heavily weighted towards items of interest to trans women. I will try to reflect issues affecting trans men and non-binary people in future.

Pauline [pauline.fleck@btinternet.com](mailto:pauline.fleck@btinternet.com)

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## THE SIBYLS

### *Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People*

c/o 10, Ffordd Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

[www.sibyls.co.uk](http://www.sibyls.co.uk) E-mail: [enquiries@sibyls.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@sibyls.co.uk)

The Sibyls is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, their partners and their supporters. It offers companionship along the journey, and information/advocacy to churches.

Sibyls seek to fulfil the two great commandments of Jesus: To love God and love one another. To achieve this we provide opportunities to meet in safe and friendly establishments. We promote the freedom to talk, to learn, to pray and to seek God's will.

If you are having difficulties reconciling your faith with being transgendered or are concerned about acceptance in your church then maybe Sibyls is what you have been looking for. It could be that you just need to talk with fellow Christians who understand what it is to be transgendered, or simply wish to be yourself as you worship in fellowship and in a safe environment.

If you are looking for an accepting church, it may be useful to visit our website, where there is a resource for this. Go to the Resources page on <http://www.gndr.org.uk/sibyls5/indexmain.htm> Click on the "Pastoral" and then on the "Churches" tab. This is being updated, but has useful links. Especially supportive are the MCC Churches.

We like to know of churches which welcome transgender people. Also if you would like more information to give to your church please do contact us.

We welcome new members, young and old. There is no membership fee or annual subscription, and no commitment, except confidentiality. Your details are held in total confidence and will not be given to any other members without your permission.

## **Sibyls' Website** - [www.sibyls.co.uk](http://www.sibyls.co.uk)

Dates and information on future events are posted on the website

A full range of resources is also available. Click on the "Resources" tab on the right of the top banner on the website to access these.

Please note that the members' section of the website is no longer password protected.

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## **Facebook Groups**

Two Facebook Groups are available to enable Sibyls and other trans Christians to communicate and express and exchange views and news. They are the Sibyls Members Group and TranschristianUK. Do join up if you are not already members.

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## **Forthcoming Sibyls' Events**

- 8 February London Evening Meeting at St Anne's Soho
- 18 March 2018 Sibyls' 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebration and dinner
- 15-17 June Weekend at Holy Rood House in Thirsk to launch Tina and Chris Dowd's book on pastoral care of trans people – do put this in your diaries. Booking form in next issue
- 21-23 September Weekend at Hilfield Priory, Dorset

## **Other Events**

- 10 March 2018 OneBodyOneFaith Conference on gender diversity, Didsbury, Manchester

## **SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS**

### **FIRST MEETING IN 2018: 8 February**

**6:00 p.m. at St Anne's Church, Dean Street, Soho.**

*Meet on the Second Thursday of every second month for a Service at St Anne's Church, followed by a meal together*

**THESE EVENTS ARE OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE,  
TO THEIR FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS**

**Come in whatever role is convenient at the time**

During the intercessions we normally pray for those we know and also on behalf of others who would like our prayers. If you would like your name, or the name of someone you know to be included on the prayer list, please email me. Include any details you think appropriate. You can email me privately at [sibylslink@gmail.com](mailto:sibylslink@gmail.com). (If you would like your request for prayers to be made available to the whole group, the Sibyls members can of course email the Sibyls email group instead)

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing, followed by a good meal in congenial surroundings. Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.30 a gathering at a Soho restaurant.

You can just turn up on the evening; however it would also be helpful to get some idea of numbers in advance. If you do know you are coming, please email me at [sibylslink@gmail.com](mailto:sibylslink@gmail.com). We normally decide on the restaurant to go to at the end of the service. If you are late please ring 07596 197 665.

**London Meetings for 2018**

**8 February, 12 April, 14 June, 9 August, 11 October, 13 December**

**All Meetings start at 18:00**

**Susan Gilchrist**

# **OneBodyOneFaith**

## **Announces its first conference on gender diversity**

**'Extending the table: trans, intersex, gender queer and non-binary people in the Body of Christ'**

**Saturday 10 March 2018**

**St James & Emmanuel Church, Didsbury, Manchester**

Following [the adoption of new charitable objects incorporating gender diversity](#), OneBodyOneFaith is delighted to announce a major day conference focusing on the identities and gifts of trans, intersex, non-binary and genderqueer people. The extension of our vision to include this important new area of work had the overwhelming support of our members – and for many, has been a long time coming!

But what does this mean? It has to be about more than just 'adding the T - or indeed any of the other letters - to LGBT' if it's going to be meaningful and authentic, and to reflect our conviction that *'expressing our gender and sexuality with integrity is important as a way to grow in love and discipleship'*, and our longing for *'the day when Christians fully accept, welcome, affirm and offer equality to everyone in their diversity'*.

This day is for our members and supporters to explore together what it means to identify as trans, intersex, non-binary or gender queer.

- what do these identities mean?
- how do these experiences help us speak of God?
- how have our understandings changed over time...
- ...or for different individuals with different stories?
- how do we need to change our thinking, speaking and behaviour – as individuals and faith communities?
- how can we be helped and enabled to do that together?

The day will focus on experience and reflection, not academic arguments – although we'll have resources on offer if you do want to go deeper. It's for anyone who wants to explore and reflect – wherever they are on their journey.

Full details and bookings open in January, but save the date.

You can [download a flyer for the day by clicking here](#).

Susan Gilchrist

## ***The Sibyls 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner 18 March 2018***

### ***Royal Foundation of St Katharine***

#### ***2 Butcher Row London E14 8DS***

It was Malcolm Johnson, then Master of the Royal Foundation of St Katherine who gave support and encouragement to Jay Walmsley when she founded the Sibyls, a Christian Spirituality Group for Transgender People in 1996. The first meeting was held on the 3rd August 1996 in Jay's house, and the second meeting was held at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine in October 1996. The Sibyls prospered for many years under Jay's leadership and it is a delight to return to the Sibyls' original home to celebrate its 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary. The Dinner will be held on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, and this invitation to attend is extended to all members of the Sibyls, all former members, and everyone who has helped or supported the Sibyls at any time during the years of its existence.



The Programme is as follows:

Afternoon pot of tea and cake 3 pm

Chapel service 5 pm

Dinner 6 pm

The cost of the dinner will be £40.00 per person (Three Course Dinner including 2 glasses of wine). If you also join us for the afternoon tea and cake, the cost will be £45.00 per person.

Dress code: Smart or as formal as you wish

The timing is chosen to make it easier for those travelling some distance to come. However if you wish you can stay overnight at the Royal Foundation on the Saturday and/or Sunday night. Please book independently if you wish to do this via the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine's website <http://rfsk.org.uk/>.

Please book your accommodation early since places do fill up

Contact: [sibylslink@gmail.com](mailto:sibylslink@gmail.com)

A booking form follows:

***The Sibyls 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner 18 March 2018***

***Royal Foundation of St Katharine***

***2 Butcher Row London E14 8DS***

*Please reserve me ..... Places at this dinner*

*I enclose a cheque for .....*

The cost of the dinner will be £40.00 per person or £45 per person if you join us for the afternoon tea and cake.

*Please make cheques payable to Mr P.A. Raftery - The Sibyls*

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Dietary Requirements: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form with your payment to:

**Sibyls 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner**

**8 Greenways Drive Maidenhead**

**Berks SL6 5DU**

Contact [sibylslink@gmail.com](mailto:sibylslink@gmail.com)



## **When two or three are gathered in my name....**

Sibyls is a network for fellowship and support, for Christians to share personal journeys of gender identity, which may not be understood or embraced by our worship groups.

We organize weekends and occasional one-off meetings for worship and socializing. But we cannot always travel easily, or afford the outing, or make the date. So it may be that some of us do not feel a part of our community as much as they would like.

Quite a few of us have made friends as a result of Sibyls and make our own arrangements to meet to enjoy each other's company. And some of us are doing great work in our local areas, meeting and supporting individuals who are making tentative steps in expressing their gender-truth.

This is a suggestion for Sibyls that might enable members to benefit from a meaningful and supportive fellowship, wherever we live.

- One member says that they would like to meet for fellowship near where they live.
- Two (or more) other Sibyls travel there.
- A room in a safe space is booked.
- The small group share simple worship of silent prayer, spoken prayer, readings, and personal ministry.
- Coffee to start and a shared lunch with conversation and listening.

It would work simply by emailing me.

As a Quaker, I would suggest a small room booked in a Quaker meeting house would always be a safe and easy place to meet, without any nervousness about reaction and as a place to worship, eat and have a laugh.

I also love the Quaker worship-sharing practice, where we listen to each other in a prayerful spirit, giving each person the opportunity to share deeply.

'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them' *Matthew 18:20*

If this appeals, to get together with a couple of other Sibyls, do let me know. Yvonne Wood - [softcircle@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:softcircle@hotmail.co.uk)

## **Focussing on the next transgender pastoral care book**

### ***A new transgender practical guide for churches***

Little did I think when I joined Michelle O'Brien in co-editing 'the Sibyls' book', *This is my body: hearing the theology of transgender Christians*, that it would be Volume 1 of a trilogy. But that's what's happened!

Chris Dowd generously invited me to share in the writing of *Transfaith: a transgender pastoral resource*, due out soon, which is 'Volume 2'.

'Volume 3, which I've invited Chris to write with me, will be a very practical, 'how to do it' book for churches about making Christian communities safe and welcoming for trans people and their loved ones. It will be published by Jessica Kingsley.

### ***The Focus Groups – February 2018***

Chris and I would like you to help us ensure that the new book's advice and guidance is thoroughly grounded in the reality of trans people's lives and the experience of their significant others.

We plan to hold focus group sessions in the north and south of England next February where we can hear your views. We will also be 'launching' *Transfaith: a transgender pastoral resource* straight after the York event. Here are the details:

**Saturday 3rd February 2018 Allen Room, St Anne's Church, 55, Dean Street, Soho, London, WD1 6AF <http://stannes-soho.org.uk/contact/>**

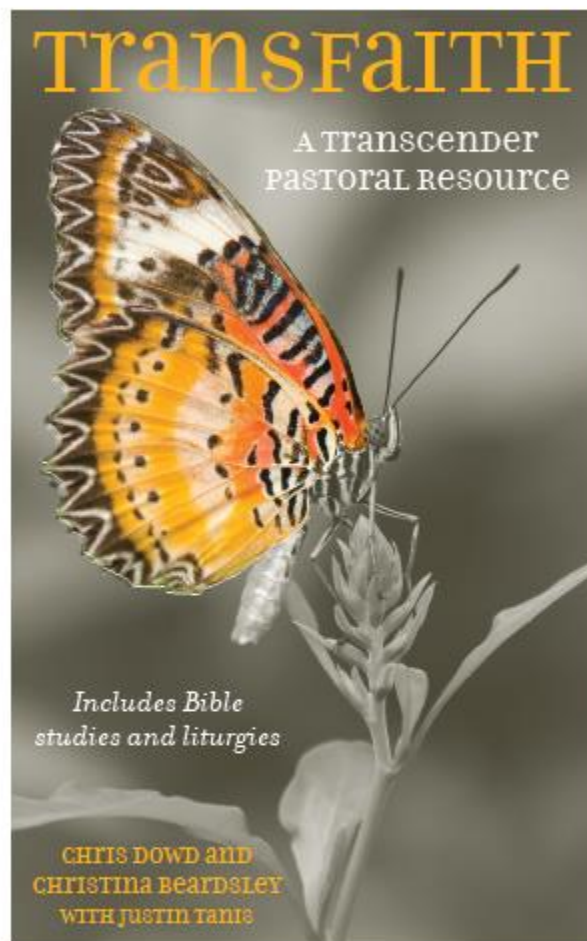
10:00am-11:00am	Focus Group for trans people
11:30am-12:30pm	Focus group for the partners and families of trans people
12:40pm	Launch of <i>Transfaith</i> with light refreshments

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2018 St Columba's URC, York, Priory Street, York, YO1 6EX <http://stcolumbaswithnewlendl.yolasite.com/find-us.php>**

10:00am-11:00am	Focus Group for trans people
11:30am-12:30pm	Focus group for the partners and families of trans people
12:40pm	Launch of <i>Transfaith</i> with light refreshments

For further information or to book a place, please contact me on [belgravetina@gmail.com](mailto:belgravetina@gmail.com)

Tina Beardsley



*Transfaith: a transgender pastoral resource* will be published by DLT in February 2018. Just like 'the Sibyls' book' *This is my body: hearing the theology of transgender Christians*, which has sold well, the royalties from the sales of *Transfaith* will go to the Sibyls. So the more books you buy and promote the better off the Sibyls will be!

Some of you kindly supported the crowdfunding of *Transfaith*, which Chris and Tina topped up from honoraria they earned from leading workshops. They've entered into a similar arrangement with the publisher, DLT, as for *This is my body*, 'purchasing' 250 copies of the book at half price, which means they can be sold at 'the Sibyls' price' of £10.00 per copy, which includes postage and package. (The book will retail at £14.99). Below you will find an order form to complete.

First though, you'll want to know more about the contents of the book. Based around the findings of Chris's research into twelve trans people's spirituality, it also includes:

- A chapter on trans terminology – how it’s evolved, the current surge of creativity, and the shift from medical language to the personal and the spiritual.
- A chapter about gender in the Book of Genesis, and a fascinating look at the shaky so-called Natural Law ‘objections’ to trans people
- A chapter exploring how, in the light of trans people’s spiritual narratives, the character of Job, from the Old Testament book of that name, is a possible ‘transcestor’.
- 13 ‘insights’ that will help churches to reflect and respond pastorally when they encounter trans people.
- A chapter by trans academic Justin Tanis on what it’s like for trans people in the US just now, including the religious scene
- 4 Bible studies, with discussion starters: Christ as the ‘new Adam’, Joseph from Genesis, Psalm 139 and the raising of Lazarus.
- 7 liturgies to mark the life stages of trans people and their loved ones.
- A bibliography

.....

**ORDER FORM for**

***Transfaith: a transgender pastoral resource (DLT, February 2018)***

**Please supply me with**

*please state number in numeral(s) .....*

*and in words ..... copies at £10 per copy (includes postage & package).*

**Please complete in black ink and in CAPITALS**

NAME .....

ADDRESS to which the book(s) will be sent:

.....

.....

MOBILE/PHONE in case we need to contact you. ....

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED: .....

**CHEQUES ONLY PLEASE – PAYABLE TO: ‘MR W THORNTON’**

Please enclose your completed form together with your cheque and send to:

Tina Beardsley,  
Flat 7,  
81, Belgrave Road,  
London,  
SW1V 2BG

(If you would prefer to pay by credit transfer rather than by cheque please contact Tina on [belgravetina@gmail.com](mailto:belgravetina@gmail.com) for details).

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Rachel Mann  
**Why Transgender Day of Remembrance Matters**

(UPDATE: Content Warning - references to suicide, hate crime, murder and assault, verbal & physical abuse)

It's Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) and I want to say a little about why all of us should treat it with the seriousness it deserves.

While it's true that, in broad terms, our society has made leaps and bounds in its understanding and acceptance of trans people in recent decades, recent headlines and columns indicate we've a long way to go.

Repeated trans-negative and mocking headlines and think-pieces indicate that discourse about gender is a fault-line that reaches far beyond politics and theologies into visceral bile and fear.

I've witnessed Christians (who, in faith, I still want to claim as kin), radical feminists (they are kin too), and terrified conservative-reactionaries want to make trans people and their allies the vanguard of a monstrous deconstruction of society and culture. (It would be funny to ponder what these powers of destruction look like, if only these claims weren't so damaging.)

Why does TDOR matter? Well, let's start with some startling truths.

This year looks like becoming the deadliest year for trans people on record. Around the world over three hundred trans people have been murdered (go to the GLAAD website if you wish to see the list).

Furthermore, over half of trans and gender-questioning students in UK schools have been bullied.

Many trans people around the world have been assaulted and attacked. Suicide attempt rates among the trans community in the UK are fearfully high and our identities are consistently traduced, questioned and mocked. These rates reflect a lack of support and understanding from within our society. But if you're reading this, you probably knew that already.

Perhaps you want to say, 'Well, that's all very well, but what makes you lot so special? Why have a special day of remembrance? Lots of people – non-trans women, people of colour, disabled people – are traduced, violated and murdered simply in virtue of being themselves. Are they remembered?' In response I want to say, this isn't about special pleading or victim-signalling. I stand in solidarity with those whom our prejudiced, patriarchally-ordered and violent world kills, damages and injures.

I am furious about the crap faced by anyone who does not fit religio-kyriarchal representations of 'the human' and am determined to change a world that still privileges white, patriarchal, heteronormative ways of going on.

If trans people represent a tiny percentage of the population, the murder stats worldwide are mind-blowing. Three-hundred-plus of us have been murdered this year alone *simply for being trans*. It's a horrifying statistic. Three hundred deaths among a minuscule minority is terrifying. It signals deep fault-lines of violence and terror.

I am an exceptionally privileged person in many different respects. I am able to be trans and be out about it, and (within the limits of these things) respected. I have a fine job. I have lots of shiny-sounding titles and styles. I can make myself sound 'grand'. My voice is heard.

Yet... I too have received hate and threats, including a death threat, simply because I am trans.

I have been called nasty, nasty things.

I know people who are polite to my face but have claimed – simply in virtue that I am trans – that I am unfit to be a priest or hold a bishop's licence.

I have received many professional slights, dis-invitations and exclusions simply because I will not apologise for being me. These slights add up and present challenges to the most resilient.

Why am I telling you this? Not to stir up pity for me. I don't need it. I'm doing well and am alright.

The point is this: if this is what it looks like for someone who is a so-called 'successful' or privileged trans person, what the hell is it like for trans people facing the full-on nexus of mockery, aggression and violence, without my privileges?

The fact is that trans people, young and old, simply would like to get on and live and flourish. We want to have our stories and lives cherished and respected as we define them. We want our stories to be honoured as anyone would like their story honoured.

In case you were wondering, trans people are no more engaged in self-indulgent narcissism than anyone else. We just want to live.

Our need to ask questions of gender, explore gender possibilities, transition and so on come not from capricious self-obsession, but deep, passionate wrestling. It's bone deep.

Most trans people I know have thought more deeply and carefully about the possibilities and aporia of identity than most non-trans people. We are not 'screwy', 'damaged' or 'nut-jobs' any more than non-trans people are. We'd like a little respect.

So, woe to you, woe to me, woe to us, when we seek to erase trans lives – erase their dignity, seriousness and ordinariness...woe to us when we seek to erase and control trans bodies through violent speech or gesture.

Let us remember the dead because we are them and they are us: people longing to live, people with dreams, people bewildered and foolish and loving, by turns.

Let us commit ourselves to changing the world.

For the love of God, let trans people live! Let us flourish. You might discover the world is richer and more full of grace than you thought.

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### **Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People: and its impact on the Christian Church.**

This is an abridged version of Susan Gilchrist's article. The complete text may be found at:

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/238P-SecularScapegoating.pdf>

On the 13th November 2017 the Church of England published new guidance to Church schools on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. Nigel Genders, the Church of England Education Officer said "We are equipping schools with support to ensure that they can create welcoming communities where human identity in all its forms is celebrated .... *One in ten pupils who are transgender have received death threats. Can you imagine how that can impact on a young life? More frequent is marginalizing through social exclusion, cyberbullying, verbal and physical abuse*".

The immediate response of the popular press was to ridicule and to trivialise this approach. The headline in the Sun was to say "*The skirt on the drag queen goes swish, swish, swish*". This secular scapegoating is not new. However it is important to note that this type of discrimination against gender and sexually variant people is a socially led phenomenon and it would be a mistake to identify its cause with religious belief.

In the United Kingdom, between 2016 and 2017 reports of transphobic hate crime have risen by 180 percent. There were only 19 prosecutions for transphobic hate crimes during this period, despite this huge rise to 582 incidents. Two transgender people have committed suicide while in custody in United Kingdom prisons. One transgender person is leaving for New Zealand because this is considered a safer place to live. Concern about the widespread nature of persecution and discrimination of transgender people has already been raised in the United Kingdom Parliament. These are just some of the issues that have been reported: Joanna Jamel, senior lecturer in criminology at London's Kingston University, told the Independent: "*There's a dark figure of unreported and unrecorded crimes and we'll never know what that true figure is*". The nature of this secular scapegoating and persecution is

not helped by those doctrines of the Christian Church which decree that sexuality and gender identity are God-given attributes and that any departure, for any purpose, from their divinely created male and female stereotypes is always a falling from grace, which pursues inappropriate sexual desires and is a grievous sin.

The ideas behind the Christian doctrine that transgender and sexual identities are the result of lifestyle choices which are promoted by the pursuit of inappropriate desires are rejected by a worldwide consensus of modern science. This is supported by the lived experience of transgender people. The reasons behind their overriding compulsions to seek gender reassignment are usually not to become a man or a woman, instead it is to be able to be true to their own selves in their everyday lives. Some may willingly engage in sex work, others can be forced into it because their economic circumstances give them no alternative. Because it fulfils a search for identity and not behaviour, as wide a range of moral attitudes, loyalties and commitments are found amongst the transgender community as in the population at large. Some of the people you know may be transgender, yet you could never tell from the way they live their lives. After transition many merge invisibly into society in their new roles. However that still does not stop them from being rejected, discriminated against or condemned by society for being who they are, or from being made victims of harassment and guilt by the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church.

There is still little evidence that many Churches are willing to move sufficiently on these matters. The medical methods for managing personality and identity driven conflicts are almost opposite to those which pursue rewards and desires. For as long as any Christian church continues to proclaim a doctrine which medically misdiagnoses how gender and sexual identities develop and excludes any consideration of the relationships between power, gender and sex from its remit, the abuses and discrimination against gender and sexually variant people will continue to take place. The 2017 report of the Church England "Bishop's Reflection Group on Sexuality" confined any future consideration to that of: "Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church". On the 16th February 2017 following the decision by the General Synod not to take note of the report of the Bishops Reflection Group the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote a letter to members of the Church of England which restated the same position. Pope Francis has repeatedly stated that there can be no possibility of change to the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church.

In August 2016 Pope Francis stated: "*Its 'terrible' children taught they can choose gender*". He also said there were powerful institutions which funded the spread of "gender theory" in schools. He told the Polish bishops: "*Today, children are taught this at school: that everyone can choose their own sex. And why do they teach this? Because the books come from those people and institutions who give money,*" he said. "God created man and woman; God created the world like this and we are doing the exact opposite". The same presumption that gender identity is entirely determined by biology in two letters to the "Times" newspaper published on the 15th November 2017. In all of these cases the assumption is made that gender identity



cannot be separated from the biology of sex. It is also argued that the freedom to explore gender identity is the cause of the mental distress. It is consequently argued that this mental confusion can be removed by enforcing male and female stereotypes upon children: which denies them the ability to accept the identity they possess. Science is also selectively used in a way which attempts to prove the correctness of the traditional Church teaching in ways that disregard much of the research that currently exists.

Giving children the ability to explore gender identity enables them to find it, not to choose it. This investigation has demonstrated that the core gender identity, which defines who one is, is irrevocably formed at the latest by the age of three years, and the momentum of the process can set a direction from birth. By the time children gain the ability to explore their own gender identities; the core gender identity is fixed for life. That identifies the place of the individual in society, and no behavioural implications are involved. No, Pope Francis, gender identity is not a choice. There are many gender and sexually variant people who, like you, disapprove of the activities of some in these groups and what the newspapers present. These results only ask that the same moral standards that are applied to the rest of the population are also applied to gender and sexually variant people, and that the moral range and identity driven nature of these conditions is respected. There is no tolerance of inappropriate or abusive cross-gender or sexual behaviour. Enormous guilt, self-loathing and hurt has been imposed on gender and sexually variant people by a traditional Church doctrine which condemns every expression of their identity as being a disordered lifestyle choice in pursuit of immoral sex.

Each year on the 20th November, which is designated the Transgender Day of Remembrance we commemorate all transgender people who have been murdered by others for being who they are, or who have taken their own lives because of the persecution they have endured. If this remembering is to be genuine we must also accept and recognise our own contributions to their harassment, and that must include a reassessment of the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church. In the role of Jesus as the suffering servant the true message of the Gospel is revealed. As we reflect on these and as we hear the list of names of those transgender people who have been murdered or who have taken their own lives because of the harassment of others, as Jesus died on the cross for us, he also died for these people too.

Yvonne Wood

### **Threat or promise**

Several of us were fortunate to attend the Sibyls weekend at Hilfield Priory in late September, in the tranquillity of the Dorset countryside, amongst the turning leaves and in the company of the Franciscan community.

The focus was marriage, looking at the particular challenges that gender identity poses: personally, theologically, socially. Through Susan's diligent preparation we were pleased to welcome Jonathan from St Martins to offer personal and spiritual support, should we need it. And we were privileged to meet the Bishop of Salisbury, Nick Holtam who joined us for Sunday communion, lunch with the community and a discussion in the afternoon.

Strange then, in this company of friends and in our consideration of sustaining love, that I found myself dwelling on transgender as a threat.

Christian marriage, relationships and sex were simple once. Same-sex relationship is plenty enough to deal with right now. The cis-gendered church scratches its gothic head when confronted by gender identity amongst its flock – is identity given or chosen? An individual pursuing a different identity, and a group ministering the spiritual truth of gender identity, is seen as threatening. It was a surprise to hear a fleeting reference to the idea that trans is a threat to the church and I found myself reflecting on this afterwards.

We possibly know but forget that transgender is seen to be threatening. It goes against the most fundamental 'given' of human life, that we are divided into men and women, and we have expectations built into life at home, work, worship and theology based on that. Gender may well be a social and religious construct, built on sand, but our culture is framed by it.

Threat here of course represents 'supposed' threat – the fear that comes from ignorance, assumptions, conventions, that in turn leads to prejudice and discrimination. This is the way of thinking that regards trans as misguided, perverse, sexually motivated, and which confronts polite society with the personal. 'Threat' really means embarrassment.

The most pervasive misapprehension perceived as a threat to relationships and family structures is that transgender is about sex, not recognizing that it is about deep personal and spiritual identity.

Actually we want to be a threat, but for the right reasons – to have a church that accepts us all, to pose a threat of uncomfortable truths. For the church to, as Stonewall puts it, ‘get over it’. To pose a positive promise of gifts of the spirit, love and ministry.

The threat is felt now because currently our voices are being heard, along with media coverage, both fair or inflammatory.

We will continue to work to educate others about transgender and to show how important faith and family is to someone realizing their gender truth. We will continue to share our stories. This is why the Sibyls’ book *This is My Body*’ is so important and why pastoral guidance is needed.

While we do these things, we must also recognize how we come over, how we are seen by others and be prepared to move forward with gentleness and sensitivity to the beliefs people have grown up with. We have to separate the fact from the fictions presented by detractors who misrepresent and scare people, even within church communities.

We have to portray our relationships truly. It is so important that gender identity is not mixed up with sexual orientation – a consequence of being within LGBT, but that, as fulfilled people confirmed in our identity, we have loving relationships.

Please also see Susan’s reflections on marriage and gender which informed her presentation to us at Hilfield:

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/030B-MarriageAndGenderArticle.pdf>

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## **The Church of England’s Episcopal Teaching Document (ETD) on Marriage & Human Sexuality**

*Sibyls’ member Tina Beardsley was recently appointed a Core Consultant Member of the Coordinating Group preparing the ETD. Here she describes the genesis and initial steps of the project.*

### **Synod says ‘no’:**

At the beginning of 2017 the Church of England’s General Synod debated GS 2055 ‘Marriage and Same Sex Relations after the Shared

Conversations'. It proposed no change to the Church's doctrinal position on marriage and sexual relationships, but advised that existing law and guidance should be interpreted to permit 'maximum freedom'. It also recommended (a) a fresh tone and welcome for lesbian and gay people (b) the production of a substantial new Teaching Document on marriage and relationships (c) guidance for clergy about appropriate pastoral provision for same sex couples (d) new guidance about the questions put to ordinands and clergy about their lifestyle.

Many LGBTI+ people, however, weren't that keen on 'the tone' of GS 2055, others considered it overly liberal and when General Synod debated it, the majority voted not 'to take note' of it. A frequently made point was: 'what's all this about welcoming LGBTI+ people? We're not talking about people "out there", who're a problem or an issue: 'these people' are members of our churches and our families; they're our colleagues, our friends, our clergy and their partners.' More dramatically, there was a walk-out. Members of the General Synod Human Sexuality Group refused to participate in the small groups, which were to discuss 'case studies' about lesbian and gay clergy or parishioners. Archbishop Justin spent time with those who'd opted out.

***No problem:***

Presumably that experience influenced the statement that he and Archbishop Sentamu issued after the debate which stated categorically that 'no one is an issue, no one is a problem...' They also promised was a 'radical new Christian inclusion ... founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it.' In the following weeks two of the aims of GS 2055 – pastoral advice and the teaching document – were recast, the proposals being outlined in GS Misc 1158.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/gs-misc-1158-next-steps-on-human-sexuality.pdf>

This document sets out the aims, responsibilities, tasks and membership of the Pastoral Advisory Group, chaired by the Bishop of Newcastle. It then outlines the aim, structure, process and membership of the Episcopal Teaching Document Coordinating Group, chaired by the Bishop of Coventry, of which I'm now a Core Consultant Member, as announced later at the July General Synod. Another Core Consultant Member, Dr Elaine Storkey, was announced more recently.

The proposals for the Episcopal Teaching document anticipate a three year process – some have criticised this as a delaying tactic – and four Thematic Working Groups to review the social and biological sciences, biblical, theological and historical considerations. A thorough exploration seems necessary due to an assumption (apparent in the July General Synod debate on conversion therapy) that scientific disagreement denotes lack of therapeutic consensus, but could also suggest that this is a matter for ‘experts’.

This will be especially awkward if it turns out – but this is not yet clear – that the lives of LGBTI+ people are under scrutiny again; for in that case ‘the real experts’ are the people concerned. Amongst the Consultant members is Canon Giles Goddard who is gay, and me who am trans, so we’re unrepresentative of the range of gender and sexual diversity in our communities, but trans people are represented this time. Hitherto we haven’t been, so we can’t complain about our omission on this occasion!

### ***What next?***

There’ve been two meetings of the Core Group. The first one, held in Coventry, was at the end of August, on the commemoration of John Bunyan: praying together being central to the pattern of the group. By the end of this meeting I was still unclear – and did keep asking – as to the subject of our conversation: is it marriage, sexuality, homosexuality, or all three?

Our second meeting in October was ably led by the newly appointed Project Manager, Dr Eeva John, who is based at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. We met in Lambeth Palace and again the Eucharist formed the centre of our day. We didn’t discuss substantives, though that is bound to happen soon. At this stage there is openness to an adventure in which something new might emerge. Please keep us all in your prayers, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts about this project and discussing it with you in the coming months and years.

Robyn Golden-Hann

## **The Pilgrim's Progress**

Adventures of a Trans-Christian in Wonderland

Greenbelt Festival 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> August 2017, Boughton House,  
Northamptonshire

Greenbelt Festival has been running, in one form or another and in various locations, for over forty years making it a very well established Christian arts and music festival with well-developed credentials for being on the liberal side of creative in its approach to ministry and worship.

With many respected speakers talking about human rights, economy, environment and sexual/gender politics; lots of live bands, world music, children's activities and arts & crafts, there really is something for everyone! The programme for the weekend is absolutely packed and needs careful studying to ensure you don't miss a band, speaker or performance you really want to see.

Set within acres of beautiful parkland around Boughton House Nr. Kettering, the site was large, well-managed and squeaky clean. Disability access was excellent and the army of enthusiastic volunteers ensured everything ran smoothly. With about 11,000 visitors across the weekend there was certainly a lively atmosphere and we were blessed with incredible weather. It was actually hot and sunny; on a bank-holiday weekend!

**Outerspace** exists only at Greenbelt as an umbrella organisation allowing other LGBT+ Christian groups a place to promote their events/websites and gatherings. We had a small stall which was set out with plenty of leaflets and a regular rota of volunteers which provided a valuable place to meet, exchange contacts and share ideas; the Sibyls being well represented there by Fran & Richard and myself.

Almost as soon as I turned up at the Outerspace stand on Friday eve, the value and need of this safe-space became apparent. During the course of the long weekend I was privileged to be engaged in many conversations with visitors who were concerned about their own future within the church or, commonly, how a loved one in the family may be treated by their church as they come out and started to express their gender-identity/sexuality. To be there as a positive witness to how one

can be LGBT+ and fully part of the church, to patiently listen and offer support (or further information if required) was a great honour and a very powerful ministry.

I had some incredible conversations across the whole weekend, and though the atmosphere of Greenbelt is very liberal yet some people waited for several days before finally finding the courage to talk to us volunteers at the Outerspace stand.

Indeed, the conversations continued across the weekend everywhere I went. It seemed I couldn't sit down for a cuppa or meal anywhere on the site without someone wanting to open up and tell me their story. Greenbelt seems to encourage such an openness and honesty that is somehow lacking in much of our regular church life. Several people told me that Greenbelt was the spiritual highlight of their year; for some it was the ONLY place they did church.

"Why isn't church like this every Sunday?" many people asked...

Why indeed...?

On the Saturday evening we held an Outerspace LGBT+ Eucharist in one of the dedicated marquees. This service has steadily grown over the years and even old hands could scarcely believe the turnout for this year, estimated at around 250

Again, I became so aware of the need (still) for dedicated safe-spaces where LGBT+ people can come together in freedom and authenticity to worship without fear. The worship was powerful, heartfelt, and probably the highlight of my Greenbelt weekend as hearts were lifted high and spirits soared in solidarity and communion with each other and our God.

This was my first ever experience of Greenbelt and I have a feeling it won't be my last as it gave such a positive vision of what church can be when it lets go and embraces everyone in truth and allows the creativity of the individual to flourish. Furthermore, it was tremendous fun! I met so many old friends and made lots of new ones, laughed, sang and danced and ate loads of festival food. Big thanks must go to the volunteers at the Christian Aid tent for producing lots of healthy and nutritious non-profit meals.

With grateful thanks to all the organisers, performers, volunteers and supporters who make Greenbelt happen each year and for the hope it brings to many.

## EUROPEAN FORUM NEWS Elaine Sommers

As has been mentioned in a previous newsletter, Sibyls became a member group of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups last May. The Forum is keen to have more involvement from trans people; at present the numbers are small. So the inclusion of The Sibyls will help in the task of attracting trans people from all over Europe, so that we have a greater voice in the coming years.

I have been co-president of the Forum for 18 months, which means that I will have to stand again at our conference next May if I wish to continue in this role. I have decided that I will stand for re-election, as I feel I have something to offer the organisation, particularly from a trans point of view.

This brings me on to next year's conference, which takes place from 10 - 13 May in Albano, near Rome. Now that we are a member group, it would be really good to have Sibyls representation at the event. I have now been to three conferences, and each one has been a great experience, meeting with delegates from all over Europe, sharing stories and encouraging each other as we all work toward full acceptance of LGBT people in our various church communities. So, I would like to ask you to consider joining me at the gathering in Italy next year. You can also support me in my proposal to stand again for co-president.

Look at the EF website to find out more. There should be information about the conference in the New

Year. [www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu/european-forum](http://www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu/european-forum)

You can also write to me if you have any specific questions: [elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk)

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the annual conference in 2019 will take place on our own doorstep, in London. The Sibyls has agreed to assist the host team as much as possible. So, to get us more involved, I suggest that coming to Rome next May would be an excellent way to get to know about the Forum first hand, so that we can fully prepared for joining in the London conference the year after.



## **A Funny Thing Happened On My Way To The Forum**

by Elaine Sommers

I have for many years longed to experience air travel as Elaine, but I was aware of the potential problems of travelling female with a male-named passport, including of course the clearly male passport photograph. Such problems are unique to trans people who haven't transitioned; those who have, along with gay, lesbian or bisexual people should sail through checkpoints without difficulty.

Anxiety around those issues, plus a lack of travel opportunities, meant that my hope of female air travel remained a dream.

However, all that changed a year ago when I was, somewhat unexpectedly, elected to the board of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. Not only did I have to take on quite a responsible role, but I would also be required to attend regular board meetings in a variety of European countries - necessitating air travel. So, at last, my desire to take wings was going to be fulfilled. But in spite of being aware of the potential difficulties, I had no idea of the number of strange happenings I would encounter during my travels, just because I was presenting as female.

Quite the weirdest of these occurred on my way to a Forum board meeting in Rome in October. I had arranged to meet an airline pilot friend at my local airport, as I discovered that we would be flying out around the same time. He had never met my female side, so I was anxious that I would be well presented, since he might have been wondering if I was going to turn up looking like a drag queen!

So, there I was, waiting nervously for my friend at our rendezvous point, tidying up my hair, straightening my skirt and so on. I happened to glance down and saw, to my horror, that I was completely flat-chested. Where were my boobs? They seemed to have just vanished into thin air. I couldn't believe it.

Immediately my brain went into overdrive as I tried to work out where they might be. They must have slipped out somewhere in the airport. I felt around in my clothes to see if they had come out of my bra - no, nothing there. I looked for them under my seat, trying not to draw attention to myself. Nothing there either. What a disaster! Where else could my two squeezey companions have gone? The only place I could

think of was in the Ladies. Could they have somehow slipped out and landed on the floor of a cubicle? I hurried back to check, but as I did so I started to wonder what would happen if someone had found them and handed them in. Now these breast forms are made of pink wobbly silicone, sometimes called 'chicken fillets'. Rumours abound that they could be mistaken for explosives when going through Security, although I think this notion is quite groundless. So what would have resulted if Security had heard about it? Would the entire toilet area now be cordoned off with security tape? Would there be armed soldiers on guard, and would I see a bomb disposal robot disappearing into the loos? And would there be a policeman telling me: "Sorry, Madam, you can't go any further; there are two suspected bombs inside"? To which I might reply: "That's alright Officer, they're mine!"

Of course, none of it was true. But when I went inside the loos and searched for my precious 'bosom pals', they were nowhere to be found. I started panicking again. Maybe they had dropped out in another part of the airport and been picked up and handed in to Security. It could put the entire airport into lockdown - and all because of me. I could see the news headlines: "Bomb scare at Bristol Airport turns out to be a pair of false boobs!" Oh the shame of it...

I decided I had to take action, and fast. I looked round for someone to help me, but the only person I could see was a man sitting at the information desk. Rather sheepishly I approached him and told him that I had lost a pair of silicone breasts and had no idea where they might be. He looked me up and down with a slightly quizzical expression, and I imagined him thinking 'Just another daft old bat to deal with; I suppose it relieves the boredom!' He handed me a slip of paper with a number on it, and said: "Phone Lost Property in the next seven days; they might be able to help you." I shook my head, and explained that my main concern was that my missing objects might give rise to a bomb scare. He didn't seem to be in the slightest bit interested, so I said thank you and took my leave.

It was then back to the toilets to redesign my bosom area to restore things into some semblance of order, after which I returned to my seat, only just in time to greet my pilot friend, and trying not to show that anything untoward had happened in the frantic minutes before his arrival.

Before long, my flight was called and I said my goodbyes, before proceeding to the boarding gate. It was just as I lined up to get my passport checked that the thought suddenly came to me, the realisation of where my boobs were. What an idiot I had been! Of course - they weren't in the airport at all; In all the rush and flap to get to the airport on time, I must have left home without them. I burst out laughing, and was still chuckling on and off for the rest of the journey.

Of course, I couldn't be totally sure that my conclusion was correct. For the entire weekend I was itching to get back home and find out if I was right. When I did get back, I rushed straight up to my room to check. I looked round and saw nothing. Oh dear, would this mystery never be resolved? In disappointment I started to unpack, and as I opened my undies drawer, what should I see, nesting cosily amongst my assorted lingerie, but my two beloved companions, safe and unharmed, but perhaps looking a trifle smug.

The whole saga proved how important it is to be fully prepared, if I want to continue with this jet-setting life. It hasn't put me off, but I do wonder, with some trepidation, what I'll leave behind next time. Memo to self: must have a check list!

*To find out more about The European Forum, go to:*

<https://www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu/european-forum/the-board-and-board-documents/141-the-board>

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## **Identity and Desire**

**Thursday, November 9, 2017**

Another beautiful metaphor in the Bible used for God is that of a lover. The allure of a beloved pulls us out of self, into *ekstasis* (Greek for ecstasy).

Unfortunately, the Church's shaming of body and sex has shut down many people's longing for and experience of intimacy with each other and God.

Sexuality and gender identity elicit so many strong feelings and even irrational opinions because they touch upon something foundational. If you don't recognize the sacred at this deep level of identity and desire, I don't know if

you will be able to see it anywhere else. When Christians label LGBTQIA [1] individuals as “other,” sinful, or “disordered,” we hurt these precious people and the larger community, and we actually limit ourselves. Fear of difference creates a very constricted, exclusive, and small religion and life, the very opposite of what God invites us into.

Binary genders (male and female) are more an imposition of our dualistic minds than the nature of reality. The Bible often refers to “eunuchs” (see Isaiah 56:4-5, and Matthew 19:12, for instance) which may or may not have included people that today we might know as transgender, bisexual, hermaphrodite, gay, or lesbian. Many cultures identify a third or even fourth gender. Not everyone identifies internally with their external biology. And not everyone mirrors the cultural “norms” of gender roles or attractions. It is amazing that it has taken us this long to admit what is hidden in plain sight, and it must have caused immense suffering to so many throughout history.

While this non-dual awareness is growing, we have a long way to go. There is a great deal of contention, fear, shame, and hurt still to be healed. Whenever consciousness moves to a higher level, we can anticipate push-back, an equal and opposite reaction. Thankfully, it seems that religion and culture continue to mature. We see the Episcopal Church now welcoming and blessing same-gender relationships. Many countries like the United States, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Brazil, and South Africa legally recognize same-sex marriage.

Even as we acknowledge the sacredness of gender and sex, we also need to realize that there’s something deeper than our gender, anatomy, or physical passion: our ontological self, who we are forever in Christ. You are beyond the metaphor of male and female; you are a child of the Resurrection, a creature of Eternal Life. As Paul courageously puts it, “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Those who have already begun to experience their divine union will usually find it very easy to be compassionate toward all “Two Spirit” people because they know they share the same ontological, essential self that is “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

For all of the beauty and power of sexuality, it is still under the rubric of the floating or passing self, rather than the Self eternally anchored in God. I believe our gender is going to pass away when we do. I think that’s exactly what Jesus is referring to when he says, “the children of this world take wives and

husbands . . . but in heaven there will be no marriage or giving in marriage” (see all of Luke 20:34-37). In the end, there is only universal love where “God will be God in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *God as Us! The Sacred Feminine and the Sacred Masculine*, discs 2 and 6 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2011), [CD](#), [DVD](#), [MP3 download](#).

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### **Greek Orthodox Prayer**

All-good and greatly compassionate Lord, above [all conceptions of] being and divinity, Who alone exists eternally and without change: “He who is” unto the ages; Whose glory is incomprehensible and Whose mercy is immeasurable; Who created the entire human race to dwell over the entire face of the earth; and Who honored the human being with Your image, newly shaped in form and beauty from a rational soul and dignified body; Who made male and female and gave to each its own appearance and substance; Who knows the weakness of our nature and knows the name and age of each; Who gives each a name to be distinct, distinguished in their own appropriate gender, personality and worth.

Master, Yourself acquiring our infirm and impoverished blend [of soul and body] in Your saving dispensation, accept at this time Your servant (new name, if applicable) as You accepted Peter the first Chief [of the Apostles], formerly Cephas, son of Iona, to whom You gave the keys to the Kingdom of the Heavens; [as You accepted] Paul the Renown, formerly Saul, whom You showed to be the Herald of the Gospel by a revelation and a chosen vessel. Likewise, send down upon [Your servant] Your heavenly grace upon undergoing the organic modification of gender, for the biological alteration of nature is a wondrous work of Your all-powerful right hand and Your inscrutable will, and amazed by this new and astounding work, we confess Your grace, we herald Your mercy and, declaring Your magnificence, we glorify Your indescribable love for humanity.

Grace Your servant (name) in Your sanctification and make HIM (or “HER”) worthy to keep HIS (or “HER”) own vessel without stain and blameless, likewise guarding the pledge of baptism inviolate and undefiled, and as a child of light,

advancing in Your precepts and completing HIS (or “HER”) remaining years, ascribing glory to You all the days of HIS (or HER) life.

By the intercessions of Your All-pure Mother, the radiant Archangels, the Honorable Forerunner and Baptist John; the holy glorious and all-famed Apostles, and all Your saints. Amen.

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### **We Have a Problem** by Carol Nixon

This is backlash time. And I can hardly blame some of the critics. While the Gender Recognition Act 2004 was a major achievement, both in its liberal-minded ethos and in its legal protections for trans people, Parliament was even then in danger of running ahead of public opinion, in much the same way that the abolition of capital punishment decades ago received far more support in the House of Commons than it did in the country as a whole.

But that was not the end of the story. In July 2017 there were moves towards allowing self-identification. Under plans considered by ministers, adults would be able to change their birth certificates at will without a doctor’s diagnosis, while non-binary gender people would be able to record their gender as “X”. Jeremy Corbyn also supported the need for an overhaul of the Gender Recognition Act, to make self-identification possible.

As far as I have been able to discover, the only person from within the trans community to voice any doubts about the wisdom of this policy has been Debbie Hayton. (See her excellent piece in the Sibyls Newsletter Issue 78 December 2016, when the matter was before Parliament).

I agree with Debbie that it is a thoroughly bad idea, but have other worries than the dangers for trans people which she so eloquently expresses. My concerns are:

- Women will be harmed
- Society will be damaged.

The former point is fundamental. Are we to accept that no matter what body type you have, no matter how you dress or present yourself to others, no matter [how long](#) you may have lived in one role or what you may have done and achieved during that time – *the moment you declare* what you feel your

real, innate gender is, that is how you should be legally and socially recognised?

The implications of this are particularly troubling for cis women, who continue to face discrimination on the basis of their sex, and who are in need of protection from male violence and harassment. Women-only spaces, such as changing facilities, toilets, refuges and prisons, would become open to anyone who claims a female identity. Affirmative action measures such as scholarships for girls or women-only shortlists would be accessible to anyone on the basis of self-declaration. Making gender entirely a matter of self-definition effectively eradicates current legislation designed to protect women from discrimination and invasion of privacy.

It is claimed that transwomen would pose no threat to cis-women. But that entirely misses the point. (a) A man could *pose* as trans, and exploit the freedom to self-identify to prey on women. It has already happened in a Scottish Youth Hostel, where a female guest was raped in the women's dormitory by a so-called transwoman (b) the history of entitlement and the physical strength inherited in so many instances from the male part of the transwoman puts cis women at a general disadvantage.

If one thinks that women should be provided with legal protections, with women-only spaces, or resources put aside just for women, then allowing the category of "woman" to be a matter of self-definition is pernicious.

I say that society will be damaged because of the twin streams of reaction which will be provoked. The tolerant and rational, with no axe to grind, will worry about the foregoing considerations. The irrational, the haters, the prejudiced and the religious right will find sufficient to provoke them in these ideas to multiply their hysterical, abusive opposition to trans rights. This will gain more traction because there are indeed quite reasonable grounds for concern. The polarisation of society is not caused alone by trans issues, but it certainly looks as if it will be exacerbated by them.

Hovering on the edge of this area of thought is the dreaded bathroom issue. At one time I think transwomen accepted that it was right and decent to use the female facilities only if one was visually and vocally unchallenging. That transwomen should claim that it is their sacred *right* to enter these women-only spaces, no matter how the other women in there feel, is an arrogance born of the inherent male prerogatives which they have not totally disowned.

Let us exercise humility and grace; be prepared to acknowledge that we can be the cause of discomfort and unease, without blaming it on those who are uncomfortable; and be very, very grateful that so many people continue (so far) to show such loving tolerance, despite their incomprehension.

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### **-Deirdre's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination**

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my having been formally inducted to my first ministerial post. It was also the Sunday of our Sibyls' weekend at Hilfield Friary. I want to express my enormous gratitude to you, my Sibylline brothers and sisters, for the way in which this was acknowledged. It was a great privilege for me to be invited to preach at the morning Eucharist on the anniversary day. Let me also express my very sincere thanks for the gifts I received - representing the extreme ends of the cultural world I inhabit! It was a lovely weekend in which the fellowship we share was deepened, and I am so grateful. Deirdre

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### **Book Reviews**

**Trans consciousness in the Welsh language community** report by Carol Nixon

'Am Newid' ("Wanting Change/ For a Change") by Dana Edwards

Dana Edwards, a Welsh writer friend of mine in Aberystwyth, has just had her third novel published, for the launch of which she asked me to speak on 27<sup>th</sup> November. This took place during the Builth Wells 'Winter Fair' – (a Christmas version of the Royal Welsh Show), at the stand of *Merched y Wawr*.

(We've been debating how best to translate that name, *Merched y Wawr*. The organisation, 50 years old this year, is a lively Welsh version of the Women's Institute, with a strong ethos of campaigning for women and for the Welsh language, amongst much else. The name means literally 'Daughters of the Dawn', a beautiful image, but misleading. There's nothing fey about these women. My friend suggested 'Doing Women', i.e. 'Women who do stuff'. Very effective they are.)

Why were *Merched y Wawr* involved in the launch? The novel tells the story of someone who leaves their rural village at 18 as a boy, and returns in their



forties as a confident and striking woman, who has made enough money in the London property market to settle back home and concentrate on painting. She has not been back in the meantime. How will the villagers accept her, especially those who were once her school-mates? How can she avoid having to answer the same questions time after time? She decides to go straight into a meeting of Merched y Wawr and apply to join; and then allow the tongues of others to spread the news. The women have a variety of responses, some very hostile, but through the force of her personality and the depth of her humanity, Ceri achieves an important place at the heart of the community. Nobody is untouched by her return, and much of the initial hostility, doubt and fear is transformed.

Dana has such a sensitive understanding of people that she was able to give a voice to the central character's fears and dreams which to me felt immediately true. She knows instinctively how important details can be to a trans person. When an old man comments that Ceri is the spitting image of her late mother, Ceri longs to tell him she has been waiting to hear those words for forty years.

Lest you should misunderstand – Dana did not discuss this story with me at all. I knew nothing about it until, out of the blue, she asked me if I would be willing to speak at the launch, as a trans woman who might be able to stutter a few words of Welsh to a crowd. I was, I could, and I did. What an experience! With women from all over Wales gathered there to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I felt such a wave of support and goodwill that it was like surfing. With the background of the story being so familiar to them, and the foreground so contemporary, the book seemed to meet a need, and began to sell at once. I am told to expect requests for interviews from the press as part of their coverage of this ground-breaking book, the very first publication, as far as we know, to treat this subject in Welsh. (There have been numerous short stories which mention transvestism, but no genuinely empathic coverage of the transsexual experience.)

I am deeply grateful to Dana for the insightful way she has approached this subject, and for making the transsexual condition less frightening, and even perhaps less puzzling, to a whole new group of people. In the current climate of arrant Trumpery, it is uplifting to realise the power of the intelligent, enquiring, tolerant sympathy which so many people continue to regard as a self-evident part of being a proper human.

## **Conclave – Robert Harris**

If you have not read this book and I do urge you to as it is highly enjoyable look away now as it contains an extraordinary surprise at the end which I am now going to give away.

Robert Harris as many will know is the very successful author of a number of books including the trilogy on Cicero and his most recent about Neville Chamberlain. I recently stood at the gates of his house in Kintbury in Berkshire, a beautiful ex-vicarage next to a mediaeval church and by the Kennet and Avon canal. It is a lovely home which apparently he describes as the “house that Hitler bought” – referring to his first success with an alternative history in which Germany won the war.

*Conclave* describes the election of a new Pope following the death of a Pope bearing a considerable resemblance to Pope Francis. The leading contenders to become Pope inevitably are divided between, broadly, the more progressive and conservative factions within the church. The chief protagonist, through whose eyes the events are mainly seen, is a senior Italian Cardinal with liberal sympathies but who is feeling distant from God and who was told by the late Pope that he is a “manager” not a “pastor”. A huge amount of intrigue and skulduggery unfolds as ballot succeeds ballot without white smoke. Cardinal Lomeli is told that in one of his final acts the late Pope had dismissed one of the leading contenders from all his offices but the reasons are not clear and it was not made public and denied by the Cardinal in question. It seems that the late Pope had become a little paranoid and Lomeli discovers, having broken into the Pope’s sealed bedchamber, that he had obtained records of the bank accounts of all the leading cardinals, revealing in some cases considerable wealth.

Lomeli also discovers that the Cardinal seemingly dismissed by the Pope had arranged for an African nun to be brought to Rome to discredit the leading African contender as many years ago he had had an affair with her and a son. So one by one the favourites to become Pope drop out and eventually Lomeli himself appears to be in pole position. However, a rank outsider has steadily been gaining support. This is Cardinal Benitez, Archbishop of Baghdad, who, uninvited, joined the conclave at the last minute having been secretly (“in pectore”) appointed by the Pope. Much mystery surrounds Benitez, including suspected health issues, but he gradually emerges as a figure of integrity,

courage and humility. Visiting him in his bedroom, Lomeli notices an unused razor, still in its wrapping...hmmmm.

While the conclave is in progress there is a coordinated Islamist terrorist attack in Rome and other Catholic centres with great loss of life. This leads to the remaining conservative self-destructing with a rant about holy war between Islam and Christianity. So the final ballot is between Lomeli and Benitez. Lomeli expects to win and to have to embrace the martyrdom that goes with being Pope and even chooses his name (John). But the Holy Spirit has other ideas and it is Benitez who is elected Pope. However, Lomeli is told that the mystery of Benitez's health has been uncovered: he has recently visited a gender reassignment clinic. Benitez is actually a trans man, genetically female with fused labia. So there we have it – a trans Pope.

*Conclave* is a terrific read, taut, exciting and well researched. It is written by a man describing himself as “not quite an atheist”. He certainly shows great perception about the current sorry state of the Church but offers, at the end, a startling conclusion and ray of hope.

PF.

### **Dazzling Darkness – Rachel Mann**

I expect many Sibyls will already have read this book. If you have not, I urge you to do so as it is a searingly honest account showing as clearly as I have ever seen it that transitioning is a profoundly spiritual journey. It also tackles with great courage how a person can keep going and cling on to faith in a loving God when stricken by chronic and severe illness which threatens their most cherished hopes and dreams and very sense of self. There is humour too – I particularly liked her rather difficult confession that there was nothing she liked better as a child than to play with toy guns....

PF.

### **Poems and Reflections by Susan Gilchrist**

May I also recommend to those who have not read them Susan's remarkable insights into her trans experience in verse and prose at:

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/poetry/poetry.htm>

## News and Snippets

Here is a selection from the flood of trans-related stories appearing in the last few months.

**Theresa May** kindly affirms that “Being trans is not an illness and should not be treated as such. Trans people still face indignities when they deserve understanding and respect.”

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/10/19/british-prime-minister-theresa-may-being-trans-is-not-an-illness/>

[But Norman Tebbit thinks being trans is caused by air pollution.]

### Traumas of a trans cleaner:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/28/i-started-dry-retching-the-compassion-of-a-trauma-cleaner>

Excellent article about transitioning in TLS by **Stephanie Burt**:

<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/trans-101-stephanie-burt/>

### Ruth Hunt: Britain not safe for trans people:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ruth-hunt/britain-is-no-longer-cons\\_b\\_18321060.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ruth-hunt/britain-is-no-longer-cons_b_18321060.html)

### Ruth Hunt: Don't scapegoat trans women for male violence

[https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/24/trans-people-scapegoats-male-violence?utm\\_source=esp&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=GU+Today+main+NEW+H+categories&utm\\_term=249358&subid=21660031&CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/24/trans-people-scapegoats-male-violence?utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GU+Today+main+NEW+H+categories&utm_term=249358&subid=21660031&CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2)

### Scott Cowdell: Gender and Identity: Freeing the Bible from Modern Western Anxieties

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/09/14/4734308.htm>

### Professor Marc Zvi Brettler: The Gender of God

<http://thetorah.com/the-gender-of-god/>

### Podcast from St Martin in the Fields Debate on Same Sex Marriage with Nicholas Holtam, David Monteith and Sally Hitchener

<http://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/podcasts/reforming-marriage-with-nicholas-holtam-david-monteith-and-sally-hitchiner/>

### Peta Evans – Non-Binary Pastor in Brighton

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Brighton-church-names-new-gender-non-binary-pastor>

It's not all bad news from the U.S.A. - **8 trans people elected:**

[https://thinkprogress.org/transgender-election-victories-56c7b9ad06de/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=tp-letters](https://thinkprogress.org/transgender-election-victories-56c7b9ad06de/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=tp-letters)

But Americans think society has gone too far in accepting trans people – over half think gender is determined at birth. And 2017 was the deadliest year on record in the US – 24 trans murders.

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/11/09/a-third-of-americans-think-society-has-gone-too-far-in-accepting-transgender-people/>

**Quentin Crisp comes out as trans:**

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/11/21/quentin-crisp-reflects-on-trans-identity-in-exclusive-final-autobiography/>

**Methodist church appoints first trans minister:**

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/methodist-church-appoints-first-transgender-minister/ar-BBF50S7?li=BBBoPRmx&ocid=TSHDHP>

May I recommend also **Jo Inkpin's** inspiring website:

<http://www.transspirit.org/>

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